

A LITTLE BIT OF LIGHT...

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My son is afraid of the dark.

I don't blame him.

Darkness, in addition to making us vulnerable and confused, is paralyzing.

We have no shortage of darkness in our world today. Suffering. Conflict. Injustice. The headlines, images, and videos flood our consciousnesses. Though statistics show that globally, these forms of suffering are less prevalent than they have ever been, in our interconnected world we see, hear, and feel them more than ever. Events halfway across the world unfold in our living rooms and on our cell phones.

Yet as close as they feel, they are also so distant. The problems feel so big and complex. Solutions, and our role in them, can often feel so far away. This reality, of both closeness and distance to very real pain and trauma in the world, can leave even the most well intentioned person feeling overwhelmed and afraid. Worse, it can leave us feeling disempowered—like there is nothing we can do to improve our world. Paralyzed.

Not so, says the Jewish tradition.

In the winter time, the darkest time of the year, we light lights, growing in number until we reach eight, the number of possibility, of breaking out of what seems possible, breaking out of what is “natural” and what should be, into the realm where the weak overcome the mighty, where the unimaginable happens, where good triumphs over evil. The realm of the good that no one thought could happen, the realm of miracles.

All it takes is a little light.

Darkness can feel all consuming, infinite. Yet the littlest light can chase so much darkness away.

Each of us has light inside of us that can chase away some darkness. Each of us can change the world.

The great sage Maimonides in the *Mishne Torah* teaches us to picture the world as a balance, teetering on the edge between good and evil. Through each deed we do, we tilt it towards either direction. Sometimes we do this in ways that we can know—feeding the hungry or visiting a sick person. Sometimes it happens in ways we will never know—educating a grandchild who will change her world or planting a tree that won't yield fruits for 70 years.

Darkness and light fill the world. Each of us can add or subtract to the light every day, through every interaction with another person, with the environment around us, with our selves. The question is not whether or not we can change the world—we are whether we like it or not. The question is not if, but how. How will we change the world?

What seeds will we plant? What lights will we light?

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