

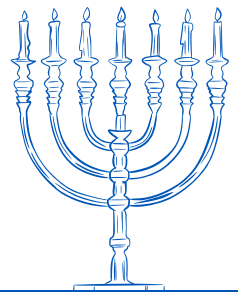


HEALING ON HANUKKAH, ONE CANDLE AT A TIME

We all know the Hanukkah story.

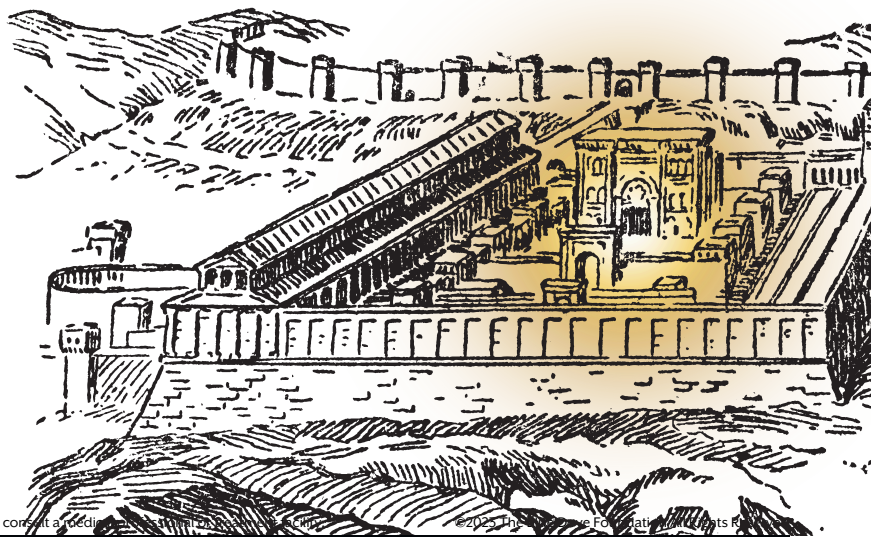
Fed up with foreign authorities stripping them of their religious freedoms, a band of Jews called the Maccabees went to war, defeating their Greek oppressors and restoring their autonomy and ability to worship freely. But when the time came to relight the menorah in the Temple, although there was only enough specially made oil to last for one day, it miraculously stayed lit for the full eight days it took to make more.

However, the Hanukkah miracle is about much more than oil. According to the Talmud, the menorah was stationed next to narrow windows that widened through the wall, acting as a projector of the menorah's light out into Jerusalem. Additionally, the Talmudic sage Rav Sheshet explained that the light of the menorah was always aflame to serve, not as physical light but as a constant sign of God's presence with the Jewish people.



And does God require its light for illumination at night?...Rather, the lighting of the candelabrum is testimony to humanity that the Divine Presence rests among Israel. (Tractate Shabbat 22b)

The menorah's light represented God's presence in the Jews' lives. But after years of war and conflict, God must have never felt further. Yet they still chose to light the menorah with whatever fuel they could find, and God kept those flames going to show them that despite the darkness they'd suffered through, the light was still there.





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The story of Hanukkah is a celebration of triumph: the triumph of good over evil, freedom over oppression and light over darkness. But it is also a recognition of **functional freezing**, the emotional experience of trauma and recovery. A newly popularized way of describing an older clinical term called immobilizing freeze response, functional freezing “refers to a state in which you find yourself unable to undertake certain tasks or make decisions due to a mental or emotional block.”*



Signs you’re experiencing functional freezing include:

Physical effects



Lowered heart rate, slowed breathing, breath holding, immobility, fainting, muscle tension, cold extremities, heavy sweating, heavy limbs, staring, hypervigilance, trembling, analgesia (numbness or lack of pain response), dilated pupils, flushed face or sudden pallor.

Cognitive effects



Slowed thinking, confusion, difficulty making decisions, reduced responsiveness, speechlessness, memory retrieval issues, sense of unreality, mind going blank or racing thoughts.

Emotional effects



Numbness, feeling tired but wired, anxiety, feelings of dread, irritability, sudden swell of sadness, detachment or blunted feelings, feeling trapped, feelings of extreme panic.

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*<https://www.bannerhealth.com/healthcareblog/teach-me/functional-freeze-mode-what-it-is-and-how-to-break-free>

** <https://www.health.com/what-is-functional-freeze-8712028>

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After fighting to stay afloat amid the stresses of life, mental illness or trauma, and beginning a path toward recovery, we can be left feeling paralyzed in the subtle space between victory and continuity. Too exhausted to move forward and unsure whether we have the strength to do so, we ask ourselves if putting up a fight was even worth it. Or we freeze because we don't know what to do next. But sometimes, like the war-torn and tired Maccabees, all we need to do is gather enough fuel for one night to illuminate a path forward, and use the warmth and light of the menorah to find the rest, one candle at a time.

Before lighting your menorah, identify one area in your life where you feel frozen, and try to determine one step forward. Then, over the course of Hanukkah, try to find a path toward recovery with each new candle. Steps can include identifying a person you need to call, booking an appointment you need to have, going for a walk, creating a morning routine and/or finding a friend you can speak to who will give you the strength and support you need to get through the night.

It may feel overwhelming to look back on our histories of things that went “wrong”, or to look at our lists of goals and changes we would like to make and feel unable to accomplish them. However, many evidence-based mental health strategies can help us to break things down and make them more manageable. Most of these share a common theme of mindfulness, which encourages us to get out of our thoughts and worries, and brings us into the here and now, where we have more control.

In our darkest moments when we struggle to find enough oil to light every candle on our menorahs, we need to remember it's OK to just light one more candle and hope the rest will follow.

“A little bit of light dispels a lot of darkness.”
- Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi





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Challenge

