

## Darkest Before the Dawn

*Chanukah 5773 – A Response to the Shooting in Connecticut*

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There is a debate in the Talmud about when the redemption from Egypt took place. Was it during the night – or the morning after the last plague (Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 4b). Though all the sages agree that the real exodus began during the day, a strong case is made in the Talmud that a sense of the future (the “World to Come”) is possible only for one who sees the redemption even in the darkness before the dawn.

What is the reasoning? Everyone can feel hopeful when there is brightness and light in the world. The power of faith, however, is not when things are good, but when we are gripped by the darkness of the night. It is in moments of personal uncertainty or times, such as this day, of communal pain, when the vision of a better world is most needed.

That is the story, in truth, of every Jewish holiday. It is not merely the triumph over an external enemy. It is the pushing aside of doubt and chaos, of seeing a brightness even when the world outside seeks to extinguish it. At Pesach the redemption occurred when the people had faith to make their connection to God and their people by placing the blood on their doorposts – uncertain of what that affirmation would mean. At Hanukkah – this darkest time of the year, on this day of national tragedy and pain – we continue to affirm the truth of our people and faith.

Hope transcends hatred.

Delight trumps despair.

Faith outshines fear.

Our Torah – clothed in the mantle of every season – is a reminder that we carry forward that message at every time and in every age. Let us, then, take heart in the mantle our new *Etz Chaim* Torah is dressed in – the one that moves from Winter to Spring, just as the days grow brighter from this point forward.

We know that redemption has not come. We await its full flowering and dawn. But within us we light sparks of courage, flickers of faith and flames of trust in God. May we – as we dedicate this Torah - literally feel the redemption despite the darkness of the night.