

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

In our daily morning prayer, *Yotzer Or*, which all of Temple's bar and bat mitzvah students learn and lead, we thank God for "or," which means light in Hebrew. It is clear from the words that this is a prayer of thanksgiving for physical, natural light.

Praised are You, Creator of light and darkness, Who makes peace and fashions all things. In mercy, You illumine the world and those who live upon it. In Your goodness You daily renew the work of creation.



And natural light is certainly a source of great inspiration and awe. When we examine the makeup of our universe and come to understand that our relationship to our sun is unique, that the "Goldilocks zone" we exist in is unparalleled anywhere in our galaxy, we must pause and feel gratitude. This awareness of our place in the universe is humbling, and this special daily acknowledgement of the gift of light helps us to be more present in our lives and more conscious of our role in protecting this natural world that is our unlikely inheritance.

But later in the prayer, the meaning of "light" employed by the blessing shifts. Toward the end of the words our students read, it says:

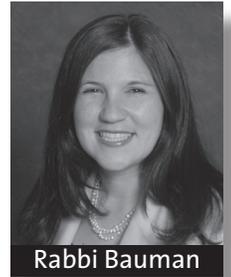
Shine a new light upon Zion, and may we all swiftly merit its radiance.

This is clearly NOT about physical, natural light. The light referred to in these words does not come from the sun, the moon, or the stars, and it does not emerge from our natural universe. Rather, the light implicit in these words is the light of providence, justice, worthiness, and righteousness in our *moral* universe. These words present the idea that we, as humanity and as a Jewish people, sometimes get lost in the darkness. Sometimes we lose our way, are blinded from the high road, or are cast into a deep and hopeless place. Just as we need the sun after a particularly rainy day, we need a little of this moral, providential light to illuminate the way forward, to remind us where the right path lies, and to give us hope in a better day.

Chanukah is our festival of light. And just like these words of *Yotzer Or*, it celebrates the physical light of the candles and the ancient lamp whose oil burned for eight days. But also, it celebrates the human capacity for lighting the way for one another, as the Maccabees did and as so many heroes of our people did, from Moses to Yitzhak Rabin. The candles not only brighten our living rooms, but hopefully they also inspire us to burn brighter in our lives, to be a light ourselves, and to use that light, which is as much a gift from God as the light of the sun, to find a better way forward.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Katie Bauman



Rabbi Bauman

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