

Kol THE VOICE OF Barrack

Kislev: Spreading Light

The month of Kislev falls during November-December, when the sun and moon are their darkest and the days are shorter and colder. As the leaves fall and the air crisps, I enjoy the opportunity to use our fireplace. I carefully select and place the logs, light a match and sit back to enjoy as the fire burns. For me, this is both a physical and spiritual activity. I listen to the wood crack. I smell the smokey air. I watch the flames grow, change colors and weave patterns. The room warms and brightens and I give thanks for the miracle of light.

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, is the only holiday in the Jewish calendar that falls on two months, Kislev and Tevet. The first day of Chanukah is the 25th of Kislev and continues for eight days as we commemorate the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt of the 2nd century BCE.

On each of the eight nights of Chanukah, we light candles using a *shammash* - which comes from the same *shoresh* or root as *shemesh* or sun. This servant candle lights the others and by doing so, is not diminished. We learn that by sharing our light, we multiply the brightness and do not lose anything in the process.

I think about this as it relates to our school and our world. We are blessed to be part of a community that is committed to helping each student find his or her unique and divine spark. It is our goal to help nurture these flames so they can grow to illuminate our world.

In today's American culture, Chanukah is often thought of as a time of gift giving. What if we committed to giving generously, but differently? What if we committed to brightening things up and creating positive ripples of light?

Try these 8 Chanukah gifts:

1. **Smile.** Spend the day smiling more than usual. See how it warms you and the person receiving your gift.
2. **Give thanks.** Say thank you to your children, to your teachers, to your parents, to your friends and to strangers. Acknowledge the kindness that comes your way and tap in to appreciate blessings more fully.
3. **Praise.** Let people know that you see their goodness. Encourage them by applauding their efforts and successes.
4. **Reach out.** Maybe it's been a long time since you spoke to a dear friend or loved one. This is a great time of year to be in touch and let people know you are thinking about them. The holidays can be lonely times for people, invite friends over or for coffee or make someone's day.
5. **Volunteer.** This season brings many opportunities to do tzedakah. Collect and sort winter clothes for people. Make and deliver meals for those suffering from food insecurity. Organize a toy drive for children to enhance their holidays. There are so many ways to get involved and help out.

Kol Barrack (The Voice of Barrack) is a periodic publication that recognizes the new month in the Jewish calendar. In this edition, Jennifer Groen '91, Assistant Head of School for Strategy, shares her thoughts with our school community.



Jennifer Groen '91

ASSISTANT HEAD OF SCHOOL
FOR STRATEGY

A Barrack alumna and Day School Leadership Training Institute graduate, Jen is proud to serve our school community and help it thrive. Jen was previously Director of Education and Program at Moving Traditions and Assistant Director and Master Teacher at the Jewish Community High School of Gratz College. Jen continues to bring her passion and expertise to the field of Jewish education.

jgroen@jbha.org

6. **Indulge.** If you find yourself with a little extra time this winter break, pamper yourself. As you think about what others may want, be sure to add yourself to the list. Wear fuzzy socks, make extra rich hot chocolate, sit by the fire, cozy up with a warm blanket. Stay in bed longer. Do something for yourself that feeds and nourishes you.
7. **Laugh.** The positive effects of laughter are great. Have you ever listened to babies giggle? The joy is contagious. Laughter is good for our health and just feels good.
8. **Listen.** The benefits of listening well are multifold. Listen with your ears, hearts, guts. Slow down to hear the thoughts and feelings of others. In this way, you learn about yourself and each other.

As we enter winter, a time for ritual, reflection, and renewal, we celebrate the end of shorter days and the victory of light over darkness. Edith Wharton says, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." This season, let's pledge to do our part to shine brighter. *Hodesh Tov!* Have a wonderful Kislev.