

There's a light at the end of the darkest tunnel

Thought for the Day

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Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 11 December 2020

The message of Chanukah, which began last night, is that there's light at the end of the darkest tunnel. We light lamps in our homes and in our windows in the darkest days of winter, not only to remember the victory of the Maccabees in Judea two thousand years ago, but also as a sign of hope – of warmer days ahead, of freedom from oppression, freedom to practice our own religion in our own way.

Children will tell you it's about the story of the single jar of oil that survived the desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem and miraculously burned for eight days. But that itself is symbolic of the victory, as one of the Chanukah prayers says, of the weak over the strong, of freedom over oppression, of light over darkness.

It symbolises too that the smallest light can overcome the deepest darkness. That has personal resonance for us in Scotland – the late Rev Ernest Levy, who found a welcome in Glasgow after being rescued from the very brink of death in the Nazi death camp of Bergen-Belsen, and became a widely respected leader of my synagogue, called his memoir *The Single Light*. In it, he recalls picking up a sardine tin dropped by a Nazi guard, and using the last drop of oil to light a Chanukah lamp in that place of total physical and spiritual darkness. He kept that tin and used it in his many talks to illustrate his message of hope, of inclusiveness, of friendship overcoming hatred.

For almost a year, our lives have been restricted, and in some cases tragically changed for ever, and everyone's festivals and special occasions have been curtailed. Now as we approach the secular new year, our prayer from the Jewish new year remains appropriate: "May the old year and its plagues end, and the new year bring only blessings".

Chanukah is the festival of light, and may it bring light and blessings to us all.