

Not Optimistic but Very Hopeful

By Rabbi David Wolpe

As we come to the darkest part of winter we light candles. Some might think this is about optimism. It is not. It is about hope.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks reminds us that "optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the faith that, together, we can make things better." The Jewish people have long since lost the easy optimism that assumes the world is constantly improving. We have seen too much, and with saddened eyes understand how tragic the world can be.

Yet through it all we have never lost hope. The candles of the *Hanukkiah* are a reminder that darkness need not prevail. Without hope, we would again and again have disappeared in the black hole of history. But Jews could never suppress the certainty that God wished us to survive, that there was more to learn from the world, and more to teach it.

On this holiday the Rabbis instruct us to place the *Hanukkiah* in the window to "publicize the miracle." It is our way of reminding all who see it, that hope is a transmissible commodity — we can catch it from one another. As the sun sets and darkness covers the earth we celebrate the festival of lights, because the continued existence of the Jewish people is a triumph of hope.

Happy Hanukkah!