1. Miracles

What is Chanukah? ... That [which] our Sages taught: On the 25th of Kislev - the days of Chanukah, they are eight, not to eulogize on them and not to fast on them, for when the Greeks entered the Temple, they polluted all the oils in the Temple, and when the Hasmonean dynasty overcame and defeated them, they checked and they found but one cruse of oil that was set in place with the seal of the High Priest, but there was in it only [enough] to light a single day. A miracle was done with it, and they lit from it for eight days. The following year [the Sages] fixed those [days], making them holidays for praise and thanksgiving.”

— Talmud, Shabbat 21b

What have been the miracles in your life?

2. Publicizing the Miracle

“Rava inquired: If someone only has enough money for either kindling a Chanukah light or sanctification of the Sabbath day by blessing the wine, which takes precedence? Is sanctification of the Sabbath day preferable, since it is a frequent obligation (whereas kindling the Chanukah lights is only an annual event)? Or perhaps kindling the Chanukah light is preferable, since its purpose is publicizing the miracle that God wrought for the Jewish people? After Rava asked this question, he himself resolved it: Kindling the Chanukah light is preferable, since its purpose is publicizing the miracle.”

— Talmud, Shabbat 23b

How does this time of year make you “publicize” your Jewish identity?
3. Light and Darkness

“The rabbis taught: When the first man saw the diminution of the day length (during the winter months) he said, “Woe is me, lest because of my misdeeds the world is becoming dark for me and will return to a state of null and voidness. And this is the punishment that will befall me from the heavens.” In the end he engaged in eight days of fasting and prayer. He then saw the period of the solstice (Tevet) and following that saw that the days began to grow longer. He said, “Ah, this is the natural order of the world!” and he established it as a matter of practice that these eight days (surrounding the solstice) were festival days, and he celebrated these days for the sake of Heaven.”

— Talmud, Avodah Zara 8a

How does this dark time of year affect your mood? How can celebrating light help?

4. The Few Against the Many

“In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will. But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah…”

— Al HaNissim (For the Miracles) prayer, recited on Chanukah

In what areas do you feel weak? How might you turn them into strengths?

5. Universalism and Particularism

“[Chanukah] challenges modern Jews to review their own easy acceptance of cosmopolitanism and sophisticated culture as superior to the sentiment and tribal feeling of being Jews. It asks whether, consciously or unconsciously, modern Jews are part of the Hellenizing, assimilating majority … The lesson of Chanukah is that a strong priority to being Jewish is the key to right choices in Jewish history. Sometimes one should not reason. There has to be a primordial will to Jewishness first or to Israel’s survival first. The reasoning and the willingness to negotiate some issues come second. At the same time, it is not enough to be stubborn or to ignore the surrounding culture. This tactic works only when Jews are isolated. It was not working in the big cities of Judea in the second century BCE, and it will not likely work well in the highly magnetic culture/society of today.”

— Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

How do you navigate being a Jew in a non-Jewish society?
6. Pride

“In the days of the wicked kingdom of Greece, it was decreed upon Israel that whoever had a bolt on his door should engrave upon it the words, “I have neither portion nor heritage in the God of Israel.” At once, Israel went and pulled out the bolts from their doors. It was also decreed that whoever had an ox should write on its horn, “I have neither portion nor heritage in the God of Israel.” At once, Israel went and sold their oxen.”

— Pesikta Rabbati 2:1

For what are you willing to make sacrifices?

7. Courage

“The miracle wasn’t that the oil lasted an additional seven days, but rather that those ancestors lit the first wick at all, without being certain that the light would last long enough to complete the rededication of the Temple. The miracle was that they took the chance, a risk, a leap of faith. They took the first step even though they were not sure they had enough resources to succeed. What is the real miracle of Chanukah? It is the miracle of human courage that empowers us to take risks for the future even in our imperfect, uncertain world. It is the courage, even in the darkest of times, to create our own light.”

— Rabbi Laura Geller

How have you found the courage to create your own light?

8. Conspicuous Consumption

“We kindle these lights for the miracles and the wonders, for the redemption and the battles that you made for our forefathers, in those days at this season, through your holy priests. During all eight days of Chanukah these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make ordinary use of them except for to look at them, in order to express thanks and praise to Your great Name for Your miracles, Your wonders and Your salvations.”

— Haneirot Halalu, prayer recited after lighting the candles

When do you consume things just to show off?  
How might you make that consumption serve a higher purpose?
9. Generosity

“When you use one candle to light another, the original candle remains bright. Its light is not diminished by being shared; on the contrary, the two candles together enhance each other’s brightness and increase light. We sometimes worry that we may stretch ourselves too thin. In matters of spirit, this is never the case. The more goodness we spread, the more goodness we have. By making a new friend, you become a better friend to your old friends. By having another child, you open a new corridor of love in your heart that your other children benefit from, too. By teaching more students, you become wiser. Keep lighting your candles. There is an endless supply of light in your soul. You will never run out of goodness.”

— Rabbi Aron Moss

What “light” have you shared with others?

10. Ascending in Holiness

“Beit Shammai say: The first day he lights eight candles, from then on he decreases the number of candles, and Beit Hillel say: The first day he lights one, from then onward, he increases the number of candles... One rabbi explained: the reasoning of Beit Shammai is to correspond to the days which are entering, and the reasoning of Beit Hillel is: to correspond to the days which are going out. Another rabbi explained: the reasoning of Beit Shammai is: to correspond to the increasing number of bulls offered on Sukkot, and the reasoning of Beit Hillel is that [we] ascend in holiness and [we] do not lower.”

— Talmud, Shabbat 21b

How can Chanukah inspire you to ascend in holiness?

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