

# MAJESTY RESIDES WITHIN!

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

"What's Chanukah?" asks the Talmud and it proceeds to tell of the historical events of Chanukah. This comes curiously after many of the practical laws of observance have already been explained in great detail. The more organized approach would be to first introduce the subject and later tell of its laws. It has been pointed out that this is in keeping with Jewish practice. For some mystical reason, Jews keep this "Rabbinic" holiday with a tenacious loyalty. The 1991 JNF Jewish Population Survey found that of 5.5 million Jews in America more than 3.5 million have no synagogue affiliation. Yet, more than 74% celebrate Chanukah. Only later they may ask, "What's Chanukah?"

One reason for this phenomenon may be that the Mitzvah of Chanukah is for "each person and his household". There are no grand social contrivances or central authority, no dues, fees, or bureaucracies to surmount. One only needs to have lived in a Jewish home and there is likely a happy Chanukah memory planted there.

For a "Chanukah present", right before the first marking period, I received a beautiful Sierra Club calendar, from a student. It featured some awe inspiring scenes of nature atop each month. Even after the year had passed, for some reason, not even known to me, I had trouble parting with a few of the photos, so I decoratively affixed them to the wall of what I would call my study/closet.

Years later I was there in that room talking privately with a couple of young men we had over for Shabbos. I noticed that they were surveying my odd collection of stuff on the walls and so I decided to play a spontaneous little game. I covered this one particular picture and asked them to take a two second quick peak and tell me what they thought it was. I covered it again and waited for them to register their responses. "It looks like a snowy mountain range or a cloud cluster taken from a plane high above." "Take a closer and longer look." I invited them. "Wow! What's this black dot?" Then it hit them. "This is a bird- a swan...All the other white bumps are presumably swans too!" It took some time but they got it. On the back of the picture was a description of what was depicted in the photo. A flock of swans on a frozen lake in Japan became covered in a thin dusting of snow.

Two of the swans stretched forth their parallel half-heart necks while all the others huddled beneath the layering of snow. The whole picture is white on white and it makes it hard to tell what's going on. If it wouldn't be for the two black dots of each eye and the splash of orange from the two beaks it would be difficult to discern.

It occurred to me, and I shared with my two young guests, that this accurately depicts state of the

Jewish People. Sometimes you see this group or that like the Rocky Mountains tough and unapproachable. Others seem so high and hard to reach like lofty clouds. Because a few have lifted heads it reveals that all those white bumps are soft swans protecting themselves from the cold. The covering is only a slight disguise though. Underneath is a beautiful bird. Eventually the spring thaw will arrive and they will be seen in their full majesty.

King Solomon, the wisest of all men, writes in "Song of Songs" about the Jewish People, "I am asleep but my heart is awake." This describes our existence during exile. We fall into a deep slumber but we are never entirely unconscious. At some unrehearsed moment, and simultaneously, a growing vital sign is miraculously manifest across the globe. A wink, like a light in the window, opens and shuts, nightly, whispering, "Majesty resides within!" Text Copyright &copy 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.