

FROM THE RABBI

Esther Hugenholtz

It might sound strange to admit but my family and I just had a lovely Hanukkah. Knowing that things would be very different this year, we decided to make the best of it and we were fortunate enough to be able to do so. Spending quality time together is one unexpected gift of the pandemic that I will treasure for years to come. I attempted to make my first gingerbread house (well, Temple, actually, with a little gingerbread Maccabee and another little gingerbread High Priest), we drank lots of hot cocoa, played games and ate fried foods of dubious healthful status.

Lighting the hanukkiyah felt particularly meaningful this year, as we were leaning into the message of banishing the darkness through our light. During my 'staycation', I binge-(re)watched the Lord of the Rings trilogy by Peter Jackson and must say that its message rang truer with me than ever before. Are we not all on a strange hero's journey, of both great

complaint and with a grave sense of duty, he carries the ring-bearer Frodo (quite literally at one point) and is the unspoken savior of the story. Without Sam, Tolkien's mythical 'Middle Earth' could not have been saved from the clutches of darkness. Each of us is called to be, to the best of our abilities, a 'Sam'.

The hero's archetype is nothing new in our tradition. Like Tolkien, our Hebrew Bible complicates and nuances the hero's archetype. Heroes in our Jewish tradition aren't just brawny, bold and brave. They are complex, thoughtful and often unexpected. They start off with personality flaws or troubled pasts. They have humble or lowly origins. Rahab was a prostitute, yet it is through her that the Israelites could enter the Holy Land. Ruth was a poor widow of a despised nation, yet would be the predecessor of King David, Moses was a baby floated down the Nile. Jacob was a trickster