

candle and each night as a complete experience of Sanctity? We often have a vision of some ideal state of complete holiness. The challenge is how to sanctify fully each moment along the way toward complete holiness.

Eighth Night

"We are not allowed to use the candles; we are only allowed to look at them, in order to thank and praise Your great Name on account of Your miracles."

[From "HaNerot Halalu," recited after the Chanukah candlelighting blessing]

The Chanukah menorah shines with the light of eight candles. We have taken an ordinary element of everyday life, light, and rather than utilizing it for seeing, we focus on what the light symbolizes. These lights, different from all other lights in Jewish tradition, remind us of the inexplicable moments of our collective history and our unity as a people. May these lights, and the miracles they represent, remind us to be thankful for the inexplicable wonders of our own lives and of *elad Yisrael*.

A Meditation/Kavannah for the Last Night of Chanukah

Eternal God, help us to take some of the power of these Chanukah lights into our lives, and enable us to find ways to bring hope to others.

*Teach us to use the strength of these flames
as we would use the strength of our own hands
to create and not to destroy, to love and not to hate.*

*Gazing at these lights, may we each recommit ourselves to fulfilling
our role as God's partner in the act of creation,
in the process of piercing the darkness with the light of our lives.*

*On this final night of the Festival of Lights,
let us look into each other's faces and see God's light
reflected in each other's eyes.*

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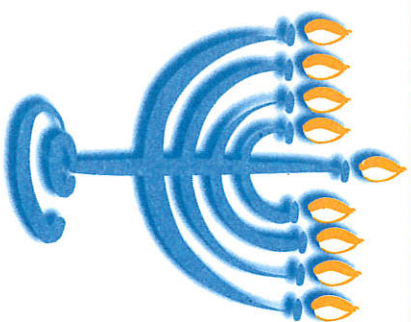
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Chanukah
New Meaning
in Bright Light



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L'Hadlik Ner

Exploring the Eight Nights of Chanukah

The Lights of Chanukah

Chanukah has been called "the Festival of Lights" for nearly two thousand years. Although no one knows where the term came from, the holiday's occurrence at the darkest moment of the darkest month suggests that it addresses a deep human anxiety over darkness. The central mitzvah of Chanukah, after all, is to light more lights each night. In the spirit of this aspect of Chanukah, we offer the following eight meditations for each of the nights of the festival. Beginning with a classical Jewish text about light, we then consider the symbolic meaning in the text. We invite you to join our "conversation" and to add your own interpretations.

A Meditation/Kavannah for the First Night of Chanukah

*On this first night of Chanukah,
a lonely shamash and a single candle are lit before our eyes.*

Their tiny lights seem enormous as they pierce the darkness of this winter.

We light them not for light itself, but to remember all the moments

when light has pierced our darkness, when there has been hope instead of despair.

*With each additional candle the light grows and with it our awareness
of the power of hope in our lives.*

First Night

"Our Rabbis taught: One must place the Chanukah lamp by the door of one's house on the outside; if one dwells in an upper floor, one places it at the window nearest the street." (Shabbat 21b)

Rashi explains: "Because we want others to see the candles in order to publicize the miracle."

It is not enough to light candles so that they can be seen only within our own homes. The miraculous survival of Jewish Peoplehood commemorated by the lights is only fulfilled when it becomes a model for others to see. When you see the brilliant lights of the candles this year, remind yourself that white light brings all the colors of the spectrum together. So, too, can the many shadings of Jewish life come together to illuminate and unite our community. May our celebration of Chanukah include renewing our commitment

Second Night

*"Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven;
and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt...
but all the Israelites had light in their homes."
(Exodus 10:22-23)*

The ninth of the ten plagues was darkness. While all of Egypt was cloaked in darkness, the Israelites' homes were filled with light. Although the tradition urges us to show the lights of Chanukah to the outside world, there are times when the world around us is not capable of seeing light. At those times, we are urged not to succumb to the darkness of the culture of the external world, but rather to create islands of light within our homes.

Third Night

*"God saw that the light was good, and God separated
the light from the Darkness." (Gen. 1:4)*

First God sees the light and affirms it as "good." Only then does God separate the light from the darkness. We are accustomed to making distinctions between light and dark. But we can't imagine seeing light and understanding its value until we can see it as separate from darkness. It is hard to see light when it is blended with darkness; this is the case with deep shadows. At the moment of creation, God is able to see and to experience the light even when it is mixed with darkness. Striving to be more and more like God requires that we try more and more to find light even when it is mixed with darkness.

Fourth Night

*"Light is sown for the Righteous."
(Psalms 87:11)*

What is suggested by the metaphor of light as a seed of righteousness? When one behaves righteously, seeds of light are sown or planted. But planting requires seeds to be covered up, concealed. Often the seedling sparks of righteous deeds are not visible, but are hidden deep inside ordinary people and ordinary needs. Yet once the seed sprouts it needs more light in order to grow. Sowing seeds is not enough; they need to be nourished. Thus light (like our righteous deeds) needs both nourishment and light to grow. May our righteous deeds be like seeds of light planted, may our deeds nourish other deeds, and increase righteousness in

Fifth Night

*"In Your Light do we see Light."
(Psalms 36:10)*

This verse proposes that light enables us to see a strange ideal! We usually assume that a light provides illumination one needs to see it, that it does another light in order to be visible. But the candles of Chanukah are illuminated by the shamash, though they enable us to see other lights. According to this verse, it is the one who illuminates our lives so that we can see God is our shamash, not a servant to us, but rather one who creates an environment in which we are able to see more light.

Sixth Night

*"Fashioner [yotzer] of Light and Creator [boray] of
Eternal, do all these things." (Isaiah 45:18)*

The Hebrew word *yotzer* means to fashion something out of what already exists, while *boray* means something out of nothing. God fashions light from darkness. But God merely creates the darkness and then fashions it. How do we fashion something out of the darkness? A radical notion of what good is out of darkness can be found in the following text: "...and the darkness was very good." (Gen. 1:31) Rabbi Nachman teaches that this refers to the human passion to lead to darkness (*yotzer harai*). Without these passions we would not succeed: a person would not be able to find a mate, or engage in business.... (Genesis 2:2) Redirecting the dark side of our inclination can act in ways that contribute positively to the world.

Seventh Night

The School of Shammai teaches: On the first day eight candles are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced; but the School of Hillel argues: On the first day one candle is lit and thereafter it is gradually increased.... Hillel's reason is that we increase the sanctity but do not decrease. (Shabbat 21b)

The School of Hillel sees the entire festival as the maximum state of holiness reached on the first night of Chanukah. Before us are seven candles. The question we see this night as an "almost complete" but not