

First Night The Light of Olives

Hanukkah and olives are connected by more than the pure oil which burned for eight days in the rededicated Temple. At the time of *Hanukkah*, olive-picking season is coming to an end in Israel. Although it is often difficult for us to feel it in *Golah*, there exists a clear and tangible connection between our Jewish holidays and the Land of Israel. Is it any wonder that at a time when our people is watching the olives slowly disappear from the landscape that we should be concerned about olive oil slowly disappearing from our *nerot*?

Midrash Rabbah (Exodus 31a) asks, “Why did the prophet Jeremiah (11:16) compare the Jewish people to the olive?” The olive represents the universal nature of Judaism, shining light on the entire world. This is part of the reason we display our *Hanukkiot* each night— to share the light of our passions and values with those around us.

But perhaps olives suggest another reason why we put our *Hanukkiot* in the window. It is to remind ourselves to look outside, for that is where the miracle grows. By shedding some light on the land, even when that land is not *Ha'aretz*, we reconnect ourselves to a heritage that is not only based on values and freedom, but one that is based on cycles and seasons and earth.

Tonight, as we kindle the first flame of *Hanukkah*, may we allow ourselves an extra moment to reflect on the source and meaning of our olive oil.

-Mark Miller

Second Night The Light to Ignite the World

The spark of divinity exists within each of us.
The secret is to find that spark, that flash,
that burning ember,
and nurture it so
that it becomes
a flame.

As a community, we need to feed each ember
with knowledge and passion and
wisdom and desire and
love and caring and
kindness and
and
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The difficulty is in figuring out what the fuel
for the fire in each of us is ...
what keeps the flame burning when the days are long
and when the days are hard
and when the days start to drift into one another
and when the days and weeks are marked
without fanfare and without change and
without motivation and without ...

But perhaps –
does the search itself become the fuel for that
spark of divinity hidden deep within us, that
spark which can become an ember that
can ignite our entire world?

Remember, a candle's flame is not diminished when it lights another candle.
How are you feeding your spark? How are you igniting the world?

-Cookie Lea Olshein

Third Night The Light of Action

In a year that has been filled with so much darkness, a year when light often seemed as far as the stars in the heavens, Chanukah presents a time when we can bring light into our lives and into our community. Each one of us has the ability to bring light into a place of darkness. We can help others to find light by encouraging them to recognize the miracles that surround them. Each miracle creates a single flame. When combined with other flames, these individual lights glow brighter to represent all of the miracles in our lives.

As we light this third candle, let us be inspired by the flame. We are given a gift as future Jewish leaders to help others create and recognize their own miracles. By bringing together others' flames, we will help to make the light shine even brighter.

Blessed are you Adonai, creator of light, who has enabled us to recognize your miracles and bring light to the world.

-Amanda Abrams, Ronnel Conn, Shoshana Kogan, Aaron Pratt

Fourth Night The Light of Courage

Tonight, as we light our Chanukah candles, may we be inspired to acts of courage.

Chanukah is a story of courage, and it calls upon us to develop and grow the courage within us– the courage not to do what is easy but to do what is right. As Allison Wissot taught us a few weeks ago, courage is not the absence of fear -- courage is one of the choices we have when we are afraid.

This Chanukah,

Let us have the courage to ask questions – questions that reveal what we do not know, big questions, questions about the essence of things, questions about the why.

Let us have the courage to hear and honor the still, small voice that is always speaking its steady wisdom whether or not we open our ears and hearts to listen.

Let us have the courage to name injustice, to stand up for what we know to be right even when it is unpopular, embarrassing, or difficult.

And let us have the courage to speak truth – to one another, to our families, to our world.

Though we know that the light of our Chanukah candles will not eliminate the dark of night, we light them anyway. And in so doing we transform the darkness: we create a beacon within it for all who pass by our window.

Though our acts of courage will not eliminate our fear, we act anyway. And in so doing, we transform our world: we create a beacon of truth for all who hear and see what we have done.

This Chanukah, may we be brave. Whatever it is that we fear, may we stand in the midst of it and do what needs to be done, like a little flame in the dark of night.

-Rachel Timoner

Fifth Night
The Light of Community

I begin this night with the lighting of the *shamash*. The *shamash* cannot stand alone for it yearns to kindle another candle. It seeks the warmth, company, and beauty of others. This sacred night of Chanukah I will gather five candles around the *shamash*, to the right, and to the left. As the glow of the *shamash* spreads its warmth to each unlit candle, they will create together a line of brilliant light.

Eternal God, in these days of Chanukah and beyond, may we be as our Chanukah candles. May we each act as a *shamash*. May the moments we stand alone be limited, and may our light kindle the lights of others. May we also act as a candle, finding warmth, comfort, and inspiration in the light of another.

-Beth Nichols

Sixth Night The Light to the Nations

As we illumine our nights with the flames of our *chanukiyah*, we remember our own calling to be a light – God’s command that we be a light to the nations.

Being a light to the nations means that in this season of non-stop Christmas music, we do not succumb to our feelings of being outsiders in a Christian country. Instead, we talk with our Christian neighbors about what this holiday season means to us.

Being a light to the nations means that in the face of violence, we do not turn our backs on our Arab neighbors. Instead, we come together to listen to one another, to talk of our fears and our hopes – we discover what we have in common, and what we may never share.

Being a light to the nations is more than living the Jewish values we believe in. It is dialoguing with others. It is sharing experiences and beliefs. It is confronting challenging issues with the knowledge that we can each be better nations by truly working together.

Chanukah is our time to rededicate ourselves to this call. With each candle that you light tonight, reflect on how you bring light to this world through your ability to listen and to be heard. May this night inspire you to engage in meaningful discussion with those outside the Jewish community. May this night inspire you to be *l’or goyim* – a light to the nations.

-Rachel Isaacson

Seventh Night The Light of Rest

Seven is an important number for us.
We mark our days, by resting every seventh day.
God rested after creating the world. Do we need less rest than God?

We light candles every seventh day.
This light reminds us to rest.
The light of each candle is connected to the light of past candles,
lit by us and our ancestors.
Each light is connected to candles we will light in the future,
with our children and our communities.
Each light forms an eternal chain of light.
With each light comes a taste of rest.

This year Hannukah comes during our break.
These lights remind us to rest.

Tonight, on the seventh night, we light eight candles.
One for each day of the week, and one more for the light of our extra soul.

Why is it, that as Jews who engage in their Judaism as a profession,
we tend to rest the least on Shabbat?

Tonight, we light another light, a twisted light.
We say goodbye to Shabbat. Have you rested?
As Shabbat ends, we need extra light.

May this light, remind us of the other lights in our life,
and guide us to the rest that we need.

Thank you, God, for creating light.
Thank you, God, for commanding us to light the lights of Hannukah, Shabbat, and
Havdalah.
Thank you, God for commanding us to rest.
Thank you, God.

-Dan Medwin

Eighth Night The Light at the End

In the beginning there was darkness

Blackness

Confusion

Chaos

Wonder

At first, a still small light grew

Shaking with hope.

Abound with possibility

Wanting to grow.

But it went out.

Second, there was a light which mirrors the first.

Two are always greater than one.

Growing bigger and brighter...

But it went out.

Then

Third

Fourth

Fifth

Each flame dancing to the rhythm of their own burning desires.

Hoping

Wanting

Yearning to grow greater and greater...

But it went out.

Sixth, a light of creation illuminating our imagination.

But it went out

Seventh, a light which grows washing the room with colors.

Reds and Yellows and Oranges

United in hope...

Almost there

But it went out

Then eight!

Burning, Burning, Burning

Together...

But then darkness...

The Great Miracle continues...

With us as we move on.

The light at the end....

And we are still going...

-Glenn Ettman