

MEDITATIONS

FOR LIGHTING HANUKKAH CANDLES 2023

Celebrating Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, feels particularly hard in these dark days as we mourn with those who have lost loved ones and cry over the horrifying violence of recent weeks. It is hard to breathe, and it will remain hard to breathe until all the hostages and soldiers are safely home.

Coming together to light the Hanukkah candles reminds us that even in the darkest times, our forebearers believed in the power of one little light, and then another, lit alongside many others, to change the world. Perhaps in this way, we can succeed in making the world a brighter place and in uplifting the good within it.

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INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן**

Recite the following each night before the meditation for the new candle. Find the prayers for Hanukkah candle lighting at the end.

Let the candle we light illuminate these dark days, drawing from deep within our hearts, to reach all Jews and beyond them, the whole world—bestowing inspiration, courage, and hope.

The First Candle Heroism

We light the first candle to honor the heroism that shone brightly in the actions of so many, in their quick thinking and readiness to sacrifice, leaping into the breach, protecting children in shelters, and in their ability to endure pain and their willingness to be shattered. The heroes of today—mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, boys and girls, citizens and soldiers—carry forward the heroism of the Maccabees, of Hannah and her seven sons, and of all the generations since. Our heritage is one of heroism in spirit, body, and heart.

The candle of heroism celebrates the heroism of the Maccabees and the countless stories of those who showed themselves to be heroes—and those who continue to do so, inspiring us even today.

The Second Candle Mutual Responsibility

We light the second candle to celebrate mutual responsibility, our deep commitment to one another. As the poet Zelda wrote, “My peace is connected to yours by a thread.” Judah Maccabee is similarly recorded as saying, “We would rather die in battle than see the downfall of our people and our temple” (1 Mac. 3:59). A sense of mutual responsibility is what leads soldiers to risk their lives for the sake of their people and their state, and thousands of Israeli citizens from every background to reach out and support one another—Jews, Druze, Muslims, men and women, secular and Ultra-Orthodox, young and old—each and every person doing their part and giving without seeking compensation, just as one candle can light another without losing any of its flame.

The candle of mutual responsibility reminds us of our shared and ongoing historic responsibility for one another and the need to support each other even in tough times and in periods of deep internal division.



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The Third Candle

Belonging

We light the third candle in honor of our sense of belonging to our land, to our state, to our people, to our common past, and to our children's shared future that will grow out of the here and now. On his deathbed, Matityahu said to his children, "Remember the deeds of your forefathers in days gone by, which granted them eternal glory and fame" (1 Mac. 2:53). We, too, are a link in that very chain, looking back to the heroic deeds of our ancestors, and forward to a shared future in this land, for all those who belong to it. "I have no other land, even if my soil is burning," wrote Ehud Manor. This is our place, even as the body aches and the heart roils.

The candle of belonging celebrates our connection, after 2,000 years of exile, to this land and to this state.

The Fourth Candle

Jewish Peoplehood

We light the fourth candle in honor of the Jewish people, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. Though the Jewish people may be scattered across the face of the globe, we remain one big family, connected to one another in both happy and sad times, as described in the book of Maccabees (1 Mac. 4:56): "And there was great joy for the whole people." The poet Yehuda Amichai wrote: "You don't know me, and I don't know you, but we are the Jewish people." In these days of sorrow and struggle, diaspora Jews are called to aid and support the residents of Israel as best they can. At the same time, Israel sends its support and encouragement to diaspora Jews as they grapple with an increase in antisemitism, both in the public square and in private spaces.

The candle of peoplehood celebrates the many varieties of Jews who together make up the Jewish people—their different languages, customs, traditions, and the different ways they enact their Jewish identities. The bonds of affection between us bind us together both in joy and in sorrow.

The Fifth Candle

Hope

We light the fifth candle in honor of hope. Theodor Herzl wrote: "First one candle—it is still dark, and the solitary light looks gloomy. Then it finds a companion, then another, and yet another. The darkness must retreat" ("The Menorah"). Just as the Maccabees believed that the little jug of oil would suffice for eight days, we must also believe that even within our imperfect world, we will find a thin light of hope that will allow us to act and create change, our own little jug. During these dark days, we recall the words that encouraged our people throughout the generations: "There is hope for the future...children will return to their borders" (Jer. 31:16).

The candle of hope celebrates both the human spirit and our unique culture, which looks toward a better future.



The Sixth Candle

Consolation

We light the sixth candle in honor of consolation, in honor of the ability to relieve someone else's pain, to reach out to one another, and to share an encouraging word. The Talmud relates that when the first person, Adam, experienced the shortening days of winter for the first time, he thought the world was ending. However, when the solstice passed, and he saw that the days began to grow long once again, he understood that darkness is not the end, took comfort in this, and celebrated Hanukkah (Avodah Zarah 8a).

Our days, too, will begin to grow long once again. Children will be born, houses will be built, trees will be planted, and flowers will bloom once again, reminding us that even nature finds consolation amidst all the pain.

The candle of consolation celebrates gestures, both large and small: a warm embrace or a silent presence, a wordless glance that says, "You are not alone." May we find consolation.

The Seventh Candle

Faith

We light the seventh candle in honor of faith. David Hartman wrote: "The Hanukkah lights encourage one to trust human beginnings...The strength to continue, and to persevere grows by virtue of the courage to initiate a process by lighting the first flame." ("The Courage to Defy Mass Culture"). The candles burning in the window remind us of the faith that resounds within us—faith in our spirit, in our strength, in our God, in our people, and in our humanity.

The candle of faith celebrates the way the spirit rises above and beyond our harsh reality to grab onto the good.

The Eighth Candle

Peace

We light the eighth candle in honor of peace. Like that little jug of oil that lit up the entire Temple, we preserve the hope for peace. This hope, symbolized by the olive branch, gives us the strength to continue to believe that peace will one day be achieved. Even during a war, forced to defend our state and citizens and justified in doing so, we will continue to hope that, as Rabbe Nahman of Bratslav said referencing Isaiah 2:4, "War and bloodshed will cease in the world, and a great, wondrous peace will reign; nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor will they learn war anymore."

The candle of peace celebrates the hope that we will one day be able to live in peace and security with each other and with our neighbors.



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Before lighting, we bless:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe who sanctified us with God's commandments and commanded us to light the Hanukkah candles.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe who made miracles for our ancestors in their days in this season.

On the first night:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

These Lights

We kindle these lights on account of the miracles, the deliverances, and the wonders which you performed for our ancestors, by means of your holy priests. During all eight days of Hanukkah these lights are sacred, neither are we permitted to make any profane use of them; but we are only to look at them, in order that we may give thanks to your name for your miracles, your deliverances, and your wonders.

Maoz Tzur

O Fortress, Rock of my salvation, unto you it is becoming to give praise: let my house of prayer be restored, and there I will offer you thanksgivings when you have slaughtered the blaspheming foe, I will complete with song and psalm the dedication of the altar.

לפני ההדלקה מברכים:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל
חֲנֻכָּה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה
נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵן הַזֶּה.

בלילה הראשון מוסיפים:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחֲיֵינוּ
וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵן הַזֶּה.

הנרות הללו

הַנֵּרוֹת הַלְלוּ שָׂאֵנוּ מִדְּלִיקוֹן, עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל
הַנִּפְלְאוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַמְּלַחְמוֹת,
שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵן הַזֶּה,
עַל יְדֵי כַּהֲנִיף הַקְּדוֹשִׁים. וְכָל שְׂמוֹנֵת יָמֵי
הַחֲנֻכָּה הַנֵּרוֹת הַלְלוּ קֹדֶשׁ הֵם וְאִין לָנוּ
רְשׁוֹת לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶם, אֲלֵא לְרֵאוֹתֶם בְּלִבָּד,
כְּדֵי לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל עַל נִסְיֶיךָ
וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְעַל יְשׁוּעָתֶךָ.

מעוז צור

מָעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי לָךְ נָאָה לְשִׁבְחָ. תִּכּוֹן בֵּית
תְּפִלָּתִי וְשֵׁם תּוֹדָה נִזְבַּח. לְעֵת תִּכְוִין מִטְבַּח
מִצָּר הַמְּנִיבָ. אֲזִ אֲגַמּוֹר בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר חֲנֻכַּת
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

