

Chanukkah Is All About Increasing the Light

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On Chanukkah, our task is to bring more light into the world. Our task is to bring more light into someone's world. Think of yourself as a Chanukkah candle. Think of your light kindling the light of another candle. This is our challenge, not just at Chanukkah time, but all the time

I think it's fair to say that all of us are familiar with the materialistic side of Chanukkah. I got some nice presents and I hope you did too. But tonight, I want to focus our attention on what Chanukkah teaches us morally and spiritually.

To understand the spiritual and moral meaning of Chanukkah, all we need to do is to reflect on the traditional ritual of lighting the menorah.

In our time, all Jews everywhere follow the same practice of adding one candle each night, right? In ancient times, there was a difference of opinion between the academies of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai as to how to light the Chanukkah menorah. By the way, Rabbis Hillel and Shammai lived in the first century of the common era. They were contemporaries of Jesus.

Now Rabbi Hillel taught that the way to celebrate Chanukkah is to add a candle each night and end up with eight candles. But Rabbi Shammai taught that the way to celebrate Chanukkah is to start with eight candles and subtract a candle each night, ending up with one.

Both make sense. But which rabbi's practice do we follow? Of course, it is Rabbi Hillel. Why do you think his ritual became more favored than that of Rabbi Shammai?

Of course, it is much more satisfying and comforting to increase the light, to add to the light. On Chanukkah, our task is to bring more light into the world. Our task is to bring more light into someone's world. Think of yourself as a Chanukkah candle. Think of your light kindling the light of another candle. This is our challenge, not just at Chanukkah time, but all the time.

With that introduction, let us learn the eight principles of Chanukkah.

During Chanukkah week, we become like a glowing Chanukkah menorah itself, seeking out opportunities to dispel darkness, to bring more love, warmth, and caring into our oftentimes cold, cruel, and lonely world.

The ritual of kindling one more candle each night, of adding to the light each night, symbolizes our God-given responsibility to increase the light of the world, to bring more of God's spirit into it.

The word "*Chanukkah*" means "dedication." As we kindle the candles tonight, let us rededicate ourselves to the meaning and message that each of the eight Chanukkah candles represents.

The First Candle – This is the candle of God's love for us. The light of the menorah is a symbol of God's light. As we kindle the first candle, let us rededicate ourselves to love and serve God with joy.

The Second Candle – This is the candle of family love, of the deep love parents feel for their children and children for their parents. As we kindle the second candle, let us rededicate ourselves to loving and being good to everyone in our family.

The Third Candle – This is the candle of healing for those who are sick. At this moment, someone in our own family or in the family of a good friend, may be quite ill. As we kindle the third candle, let us rededicate ourselves to the mitzvah of visiting the sick and let us all pray for everyone's speedy recovery.

The Fourth Candle – This is the candle of *Tzedakah*, of giving generously to those in need. We can be for them a *Maoz Tzur*, a "rock of strength." As we kindle the fourth candle, let us rededicate ourselves to helping the poor, the hungry, and the homeless in our community.

The Fifth Candle – This is the candle of caring and compassion. Even more important than *Tzedakah*, charity, is the doing of *Gemilut Chasadim*, deeds of loving-kindness. As we kindle the fifth candle, let us rededicate ourselves to seek out opportunities to engage in acts of caring and compassion.

The Sixth Candle – This is the candle of political and religious freedom. At the beginning of the 21st century, there are still millions of men, women, and children who are not free. As we kindle the sixth candle, let us rededicate ourselves to work for every human being to be free.

The Seventh Candle – This is the candle of tolerance and acceptance. At the beginning of the 21st century, racism and prejudice still hold power over many hearts and minds. As we kindle the seventh candle, let us rededicate ourselves to build a world that is free of hate.

The Eighth Candle – This is the candle of Judaism. The Maccabees fought for their right to practice their religion. Let us be like Maccabees. As we kindle the

eighth candle, let us rededicate ourselves to making Judaism a priority in our lives.

A candle is a small thing. But one candle can light another. And see how its own light increases as a candle gives its flame to the other. Each of us has the power to move back the darkness –

When our heart strengthens the heart of another,
When our mind illuminates the mind of another,
When our soul restores hope to the soul of another,
Each of us is such a light.