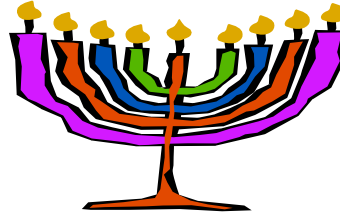


BLESSING AND EXTENDING THE LIGHT: A Ritual of Healing for the Eight Nights of Hanukkah



Hanukkah, the mid-winter Festival of Lights, celebrates the rededication of the Temple after its ritual defilement by the Greco-Syrians, and the successful resistance of the Jews to assimilation. The holiday bolsters a sense of national pride in our unbroken heritage, as well as gratitude for miracles reflected in the story of the single cruse of oil which lasted for eight full days.

Embedded in the historical and national meanings of the holiday, one may uncover deep universal and personal significance. The temple in Jerusalem represented God's dwelling with and among the Jewish people – but Jewish tradition teaches that our bodies are “temples,” each one an image of God, housing the spirit of God. Hanukkah offers us an opportunity to recognize the sacredness of our bodies, to offer thanks for the miracles of our bodily functions, and rededicate our physical selves to the service of God and humankind.

Hanukkah comes at a dark time in the calendar, close to the winter solstice with its shortest day and longest night. And, at a point in the month when the moon is obscured, it is literally the darkest time of the year. Our response is to light candles in an effort to draw light into the world and appreciate even the humblest, most limited light as with a blessing.

In the Jewish tradition, we are urged to be mindful of all those who are ill, and pray for and with them. Even if we ourselves and those near and dear to us are fortunate not to be suffering, we pray daily for physical cure and spiritual healing for those whom we do not know. Jewish healing is thus an ongoing communal enterprise, potent in its concern for anyone dealing with illness, rich in its influence on the prayer, and valuable in its ability to encourage “horizontal,” interpersonal support even if divine, “vertical” intervention seems alien or remote.

Our thoughts and prayers, of course, may be all the more effective when they are tied to the particular needs and hopes of those who are suffering. But how can this be practical, when the kinds of afflictions are numerous, the personalities, challenges, and resources of those who are ill so diverse, and the courses and prognoses of disease so shifting and unpredictable?

One way to step into the experience of people who are ill, is to empathically explore the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual passages they travel. While no two people have precisely the same experience, we offer eight commonly-shared junctures in the journey of illness. For each juncture, we have selected verses from the Book of Psalms centered around images of light – for reflection, study, prayer, chanting, and/or meditation.

We suggest that each night of Hanukkah, just before lighting the candles, we pray for those who are ill, with a particular focus on the designated juncture. Imagining what the experience might be like, recite or chant the verse from Psalms (or, if you are able/inclined, utilize the entire psalm) and offer your own prayer for those living with illness and in need of spiritual strength.

For those who themselves are struggling with illness or other serious life challenges, sitting with the dark and meditating upon the light can provide comfort, inspiration, and perspective.

The greatest “Hanukkah gift” is light. May our prayers, *tz’dakah*, and deeds of lovingkindness spark hope and strength and illuminate lives with renewed meaning and direction

***“Then shall Your light burst through like dawn,
and Your healing spring up quickly.”*** (Isaiah 58:8)

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Before lighting the candles, begin each night with the following:

“Adonai/my God, Source of healing and hope, we dedicate this night of Hanukkah to those who (complete with appropriate line below.) Give them and those who care for them rich blessings of strength and support, solace and determination. Illuminate their lives with insight and guidance, and shine peace and serenity on their path.”

Recite or chant the appropriate verse from Psalms, and then continue with the traditional ritual of lighting the candles.

The first night of Hanukkah ...are experiencing pain or symptoms

Adonai is my Light and my Salvation – whom shall I fear?
Adonai is the Strength of my life – who can make me afraid?
(Psalms 27:1)

The second night of Hanukkah ...are moving through tests and evaluations

It is You who lights my candle,
Adonai, my God, illumines the darkness.
(Psalms 18:29)

The third night of Hanukkah ...are receiving diagnosis

Leave your ways to Adonai,
Trust in Adonai, who will do it.
Adonai will cause you your vindication to shine forth like the light,
The justice of your case like noonday sun.
(Psalms 37:5-6)

The fourth night of Hanukkah ...are receiving treatments

Send forth Your light and Your truth –
They will lead me;
They will bring me to Your holy mountain,
To Your dwelling place.
(Psalms 43:3)

The fifth night of Hanukkah ...are undergoing surgery

With You is the source of life;
In Your light do we see light.
(Psalms 36:10)

The sixth night of Hanukkah ...are recovering from surgery and/or treatments

For You have saved me from death.
O yes, my foot from stumbling,
That I may walk in the presence of God,
In the light of life.
(Psalms 56:14)

The seventh night of Hanukkah ...are “re-entering” – stepping into the next phase of life

A lamp unto my feet is Your word,
A light for my path.
(Psalms 119:105)

The eighth night of Hanukkah ...are surviving – incorporating the illness into their lives and stories

Light is sown for the righteous,
Radiant joy for the upright-at-heart
O you righteous ones, rejoice in Adonai,
And offer thanks to Adonai’s holy name!
(Psalms 97:11-12)

The National Center for Jewish Healing (NCJH) helps communities better meet the spiritual needs of Jewish Living with illness and loss. Working closely with a network of Jewish healing centers and programs, both nationally and internationally, we develop Jewish healing resources and leadership and we offer consultation, publications, training and referrals to community resources.

Visit us at www.ncjh.org where you will find more resources and information on the National Center for Jewish Healing. Email us at info@njch.org or call 212 399-2320, ext. 209.

