

Lighting a Light From Within

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“Kindle the taper like the steadfast star
Ablaze on evening’s forehead over the earth,
And add each night a lustre till afar
An eightfold splendor shine above thy hearth”¹

Hanukkah offers us the symbolism of the light of many candles merging together to create a magnificent glow. What about this act sets it apart from other *mitzvot*?

Below is a text which explores this question and connects us with our sense of love, joy, and perseverance.

In keeping with the symbolism of joining many lights together, the text is also accompanied by a discussion guide for bringing together many voices in conversation. To use it, be sure everyone in your group has a copy or is able to see it. Use the guide with this text, or with any other material you’d like to explore in the [Hadar Hanukkah Companion](#)—and beyond.

¹ Opening lines of Emma Lazarus’ “The Feast of Lights” (1882).



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Greetings:

- 1 Everyone take a moment to introduce themselves and/or share something they enjoy about the Hanukkah holiday.
- 2 Choose one person to read the text aloud.

Zoom In:

- 3 Each person in the group should take a few minutes to re-read the text on their own and notice three details that stand out to them.
- 4 Everyone can take turns sharing a detail they noticed. After a person shares a detail, discuss its possible significance together. Then have the next person share their detail, and so on. If it is helpful, use these phrases to start off the sharing and discussion: “*I notice...*,” “*I wonder...*,” and, “*What do you think?*”

Zoom Out:

- 5 Have a new volunteer read the text aloud again in its entirety.
- 6 Discuss a big question: What does this text teach us about the *mitzvot* and what does it add to how we think about Hanukkah? Consider the details of the text that you and others raised.

Appreciation:

- 7 Everyone share one thing you appreciated about learning together in this group.



TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

Hakham Pinhas Cohen z"l (20th c., Israel) <i>Yekara d'Shakhvei</i>, pp. 112-113	חכם פנחס כהן, יקרא דשכביה, עמ' קיב-קיג, מתוך 'החכם היומי'
Since [the Maccabees] acted from their own motivation to go, clean out God's sanctuary, and light lights in God's sacred courtyards —God did love this. To what can this be compared? To a king who had young students. He loved them very much. Every now and again he would make a banquet for them and the students would attend and be happy. Once, the young ones said to him, "My master the king, perhaps one time we will make a banquet for you?" He replied to them, "Good, you should do it!" The king was already imagining to himself that the meal that he had prepared would certainly not be like that of the young ones. For behold, he had servants and beautiful utensils and so on. The students	כיוון שזה היה מצד עצמם, שהלכו ופינו את היכלך, והדליקו נרות בחצרות קודשך - זה ה' אהב. משל למה הדבר דומה? - למלך שהיו לו תלמידים תינוקות, ותמיד היה אוהב אותם מאד, ומידי פעם היה עושה להם מסיבה, והיו באים ושמחים. פעם הילדים אמרו לו: אדוני המלך, אולי פעם אנחנו נעשה לך מסיבה? אמר להם: טוב, תעשו. וכבר המלך תיאר לעצמו, שהסעודה שהוא מכין זה ודאי לא כמו של התינוקות, שהרי הוא יש לו משרתים, כלים יותר יפים וכו'.



prepared what they could and invited the king. The king attended and was joyful with a greater joy than ever before.

They said to him, “What happened?! When you do more of the preparation you are not as joyful and now that the students have prepared something so simple as this for you, you are so joyful! He said to them, “Yes, now that I see that you truly love me and act with persistent effort that is yours, whatever you are able, this is more important to me.”

And therefore, the *mitzvah* of the Hanukkah lamp, even though it is not written in the Torah, and is after the other 248 positive *mitzvot*, even so, this *mitzvah* is so very beloved.

הם הכינו לו מה שיכלו, הזמינו את המלך, ובא ושמח שמחה גדולה יותר מכל פעם.

אמרו לו: מה קרה? - כשאתה מכין יותר, אתה לא שמח ככה, ועכשיו שהם הכינו לך כזה פשוט, אתה שמח כל כך? אמר להם: כן, עכשיו שאני רואה, שאתם באמת אוהבים אותי, ועושים את ההשתדלות שלכם, מה שיכולתם, זה יותר חשוב לי.

ולכן מצוות נר חנוכה, אפילו שזה לא כתוב בתורה, וזה אחרי כל הרמ"ח מצוות, בכל זאת זו מצוה חביבה מאוד מאוד...