

Eight Meditations for the Eight Nights of Chanukah

By Chaya Kaplan-Lester

Chanukah honors the house. It is the Maccabees' renowned rededication of the House, the House of Holiness, the Beit Hamikdash. It is the lighting of the fire in the heart, the hearth, the home of a People.

Hanukat Habayit is the celebration of settling into a new home, a housewarming party of a sacred sort. It's as if with every move to a new house we celebrate a miniature Chanukah. For each home is the manifestation of the Holy Temple in our times, in our own lives. Thus our four walls call for a Chanukah—a dedication—the lighting of the fire that warms and sanctifies our space.

Each night illumines a new aspect of self. And Chanukah's lighting of the house is no less than the illumination of the inner self. For the self, with her secret stairways, her observing windows, her half-closed doors, is a many-storied home, the abode of the soul.

Our task on these eight nights is to rededicate the Temple, in our own times, in our own lives; each night illumines a new aspect of self, lighting a new alcove of our inner House of Holiness.

While the mitzvah of Chanukah is to publicize the miracle of the menorah, there is also something vital to us having a personal connection with each mitzvah that we do. The following meditations are based on my personal experiences and connections to each night of Chanukah and the unique lessons and ideas that exist in each night. I have found that through focusing in this way, each night comes alive and becomes a part of me as I grow with the increasing lights.

First Night—Dedicated to Darkness: The Cellar

[Before you light your first candle, stand quietly for a moment in complete darkness, and let the darkness indeed be complete, with no want for anything, no need for the distractions of sight; simply sense the quiet self that sits there patiently waiting for you to take notice, to turn off the television, to turn off all vision, to be quiet and sense the sanctuary that is the self.]

Standing in the cellar of my self, with an unlit candle in my hand, in the darkness I discover a deeper self than light lets in. This night I dedicate to inner darkness, to the unknown, unspeakable seclusions of the soul. It is the darkness that keeps me searching a worthy opponent, provoking my path to further reaches, my thoughts to further depths. It is the as-of-yet unilluminated, unanswered aspects of an unraveling self, the landscape of dreams and nightmares, tragic truths and fears.

I dedicate this night to every question I have quested after,
to every confusion that has humbled me,
to every challenge I have mastered,
to the thrill of secrecy.

As this candle casts a shadow, my self in dark outline,
I integrate and dedicate the darkness with the light.

The first night is for the dark cellar of winter,
that which illumines a deeper insight.

Source: http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/1348517/jewish/Eight-Meditations-for-the-Eight-Nights-of-Chanukah.htm

Keshet's adaptation of kavannah:

We dedicate this first night of Hanukkah to knowing one's identity and standing strong against external forces. As we light the first candle, we dedicate this light to each person in our community who needs support to be steadfast, to stay grounded in an inner space of calm and courage.

LIGHT CANDLE HERE

Our tradition teaches us that each good act gives forth another, one spark makes others, and a string of candles awaits us this week. We hope you will join us this Hanukkah in spreading the light of hope and strength to everyone in our community.