

FOR A REMINDER OF HOW TO LIGHT THE HANUKKIAH, [CLICK HERE](#)

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Dear Friends,

When we give something that we own to someone else, by definition, we lose the object. This means there is some type of loss involved in the giving. Often, the loss we experience is offset by the joy that we experience by seeing this object in the hands of its new owner. When a mother gives a daughter candlesticks that were used to usher the Sabbath into her family's home each week, she is thrilled to know that the home that her daughter is building will be lit up with the same candlesticks, and that one day she may give those candlesticks to *her* child. But in many cases, the mother received the candlesticks from her mother when *she* got married and parting with them may be difficult. Despite the joy of giving such a gift, the mother will experience loss, and may even experience that loss in a profound way. This is the conundrum of giving. Even if it is time that we give, we will never have that time back, so we are careful about what we give to others and to whom we give our time.

Light is different. When you light a candle, the light of the candle fills the room; it enables us to see things that would otherwise remain unseen in the dark. Despite the giving of the candle, the light is not diminished. It is one of the few exceptions to the rule of giving. A candle gives and gives, it illuminates everything in its vicinity, but loses nothing. We stand before the candles and we are bathed in their light. There is no shame in taking that light. The more of it we take, the more we will then emit. We will be moved, in a sense, to imitate the candles and learn how to give without feeling loss, without feeling that in some way we are diminished by the act of giving. This is very difficult, but it is a path on which those who work to refine their moral character must set out.

The light of the candles can also illuminate within us things that we carry around, hidden from ourselves and others. Things like jealousy, cruelty, insensitivity, and insecurity. They are difficult to see so we prefer to keep them anonymous, in the darkness of the

deep wells of our soul, unseen and invisible. This is a way of denying their very existence. It can be terrifying to see these things because we become overwhelmed with the feeling that we will not have the power to change them, or even scarier, that we will not have the compassion to accept that they are a part of who we are. But if we keep them in the dark, they fester and grow and begin to take up too much room in our hearts and souls, pushing more and more light out. The Kabbalists speak of this internal battle as the conflict between the *yetzer ha'tov* (good inclination) and the *yetzer ha'rah* (evil inclination). It is hard work to minimize the *yetzer ha'rah*, and we can't do this alone. Hanukkah, as codified by the rabbis in second blessing we say as we light the candles, suggest that the power of Hanukkah is a reminder that through a connectedness to the divine, we can find unbelievable reserves of strength to overcome things that we believe require miracles. As we watch the candles burn, we say, "Praise are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, accomplishing miracles for our ancestors from ancient days until our time." Hanukkah reminds us that nothing is impossible, most certainly, not the refinement of our moral character.

Tonight, and for the other seven days of Hanukkah, stand in front of the candles and absorb the light. Try to be conscious of the experience of taking something that is in no way diminished by your act of taking. The more aware we are of the wondrous act of giving without feeling like we are losing something, the more skilled we will become in learning to give of ourselves without feeling that we are in some way diminished. Allow the light to illuminate the parts of who you are that are a bit unsightly, aspects that lurk around in self imposed darkness. The story of Hanukkah suggests that the weak can overcome the powerful. No matter how dominant these parts of you may be, use the light to inspire within you the strength to overcome them, and be good to yourself: learn how to accept that their very existence makes you human.

Hag Urim Sameach! Have a wonderful Hanukkah!

Rabbi David A. Schuck