

Hanukkah Mindfulness

My favorite Hanukkah hymn, *Hanerot Hallelu*, or “These Lights” is traditionally chanted after we light the candles and before we sing Ma Oz Tzur. Some of the words are:

Throughout the eight days of Hanukkah
these lights are holy
and we are not permitted
to make any other use of them,
except to look at them,
that we may give thanks and praise to Your great name
for Your miracles, Your wonders and Your deliverances.

These words refer to the Jewish law that states we are not allowed to use the Hanukkah lights for any specific purpose. Unlike Shabbat candles, whose light we are allowed to read by, for example, on Hanukkah, we need to have another light on in the room during Menorah lighting so the lights serve no other purpose other than the joy of looking at them. What is the connection, however, to non-utilitarian quality of the Hanukkah candles, and the thankfulness, which are mentioned together in the hymn?

If the physical mitzvah of Hanukkah is to light the menorah, the spiritual mitzvah is to sit quietly and long enough to really enjoy them. That is not always an easy task. It is tempting to be distracted by gifts, food and other things. Yet I find that if we open ourselves to really sitting quietly and spending the time with our loved ones while looking at the tiny lights, Hanukkah provides an opportunity for spirituality and mindfulness that is unique in the course of the year. That mindfulness naturally leads to a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the miracles around us, because we are more open and alert to noticing them.

On Hanukkah we experience the joy of song, dance, celebration and the fun of gelt, dreidels and latkes. Yet the heart of Hanukkah is the lights, not just the lighting but the looking. May we be able to quiet the noisiness around us and appreciate the peace of the lights, the love of our family and friends, and the miracles both visible and invisible that surround us each day.