

Great Miracles Happen Here: Liturgy, Poetry, and Art for Chanukkah

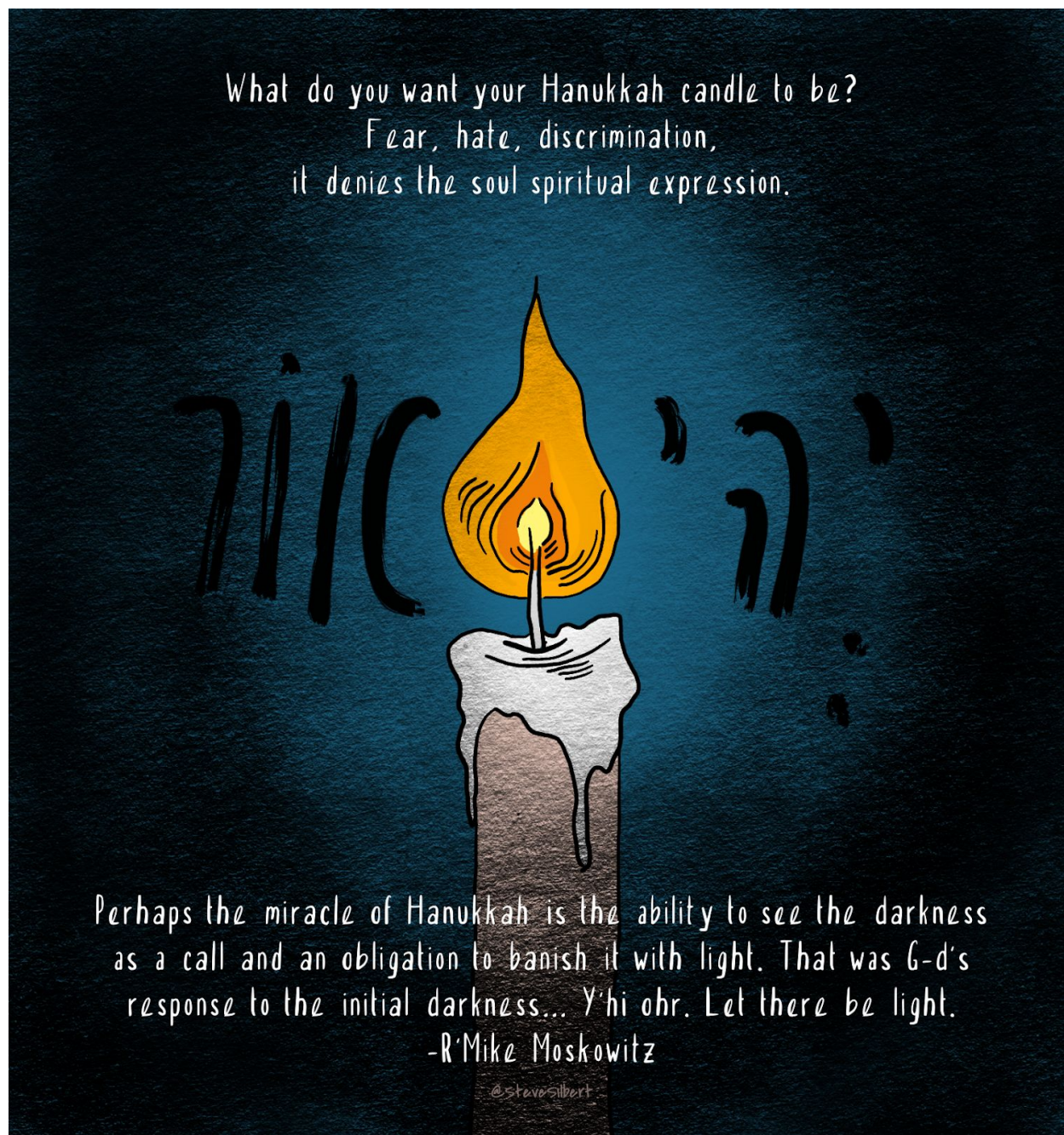


Illustration by Steve Silbert

Table of Contents

What do you want your Hanukkah candle to be, Steve Silbert	1
The Day Before Hanukkah: Hanukkah poem #1, Devon Spier	3
I don't light lights, Steve Silbert	4
For Each Night of Chanukkah:	
<i>Hanerot Halalu</i> for 2020, Rabbi Dara Lithwick	5
A light shines for the upright in the darkness, Steve Silbert	7
<i>Al HaNisim</i> : Future Miracles Unfolding Now, Rabbi David Evan Markus	8
1st Night: No Party, Trisha Arlin	9
<i>Smell, Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick</i>	10
2nd Night: Rededication, Rabbi Rachel Barenblat	11
<i>Touch, Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick</i>	12
3rd Night: Second Calendar, Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD	13
<i>Taste, Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick</i>	14
4th Night: My Father's Menorah, Rabbi Jennifer Singer	15
<i>Hearing, Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick</i>	16
5th Night: Re-Dedication, Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD	17
<i>Sight, Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick</i>	18
6th Night: My Maccabees, Trisha Arlin	19
My Maccabees, my heroes, Steve Silbert	20
7th Night: Hanukkah poem #2, Devon Spier	21
Leftovers, Rabbi David Evan Markus	22
8th Night: Windows, Rabbi Rachel Barenblat	23
Windows, Then and Now, Steve Silbert	24
Remaining Sparks: The 9th Night: Chanukah of Stars, Rabbi Jennifer Singer	25
On the ninth night I stepped out, Steve Silbert	26

The Day Before Hanukkah: Hanukkah poem #1

i figure the day before Hanukkah
is the right time to begin
a new time
in inhuman history

our own human history-

i don't light lights
i watch each of you
flip the switch
in your apartments

across my balcony
and i count the growing
little theatre of box lights

there are miracles longer than eight days

there are pods greater than the sum of our immediate families

there are numbers
there is a Total other than death

there are makeshift joys to make a new mourning

turn a window into a door
suddenly the dark changes

grow your hands into the shape of a menorah
you change everything

(while you are at home waiting)

stop watching, light!
stop lighting light!

you are and will be Light.

Devon A. Spier

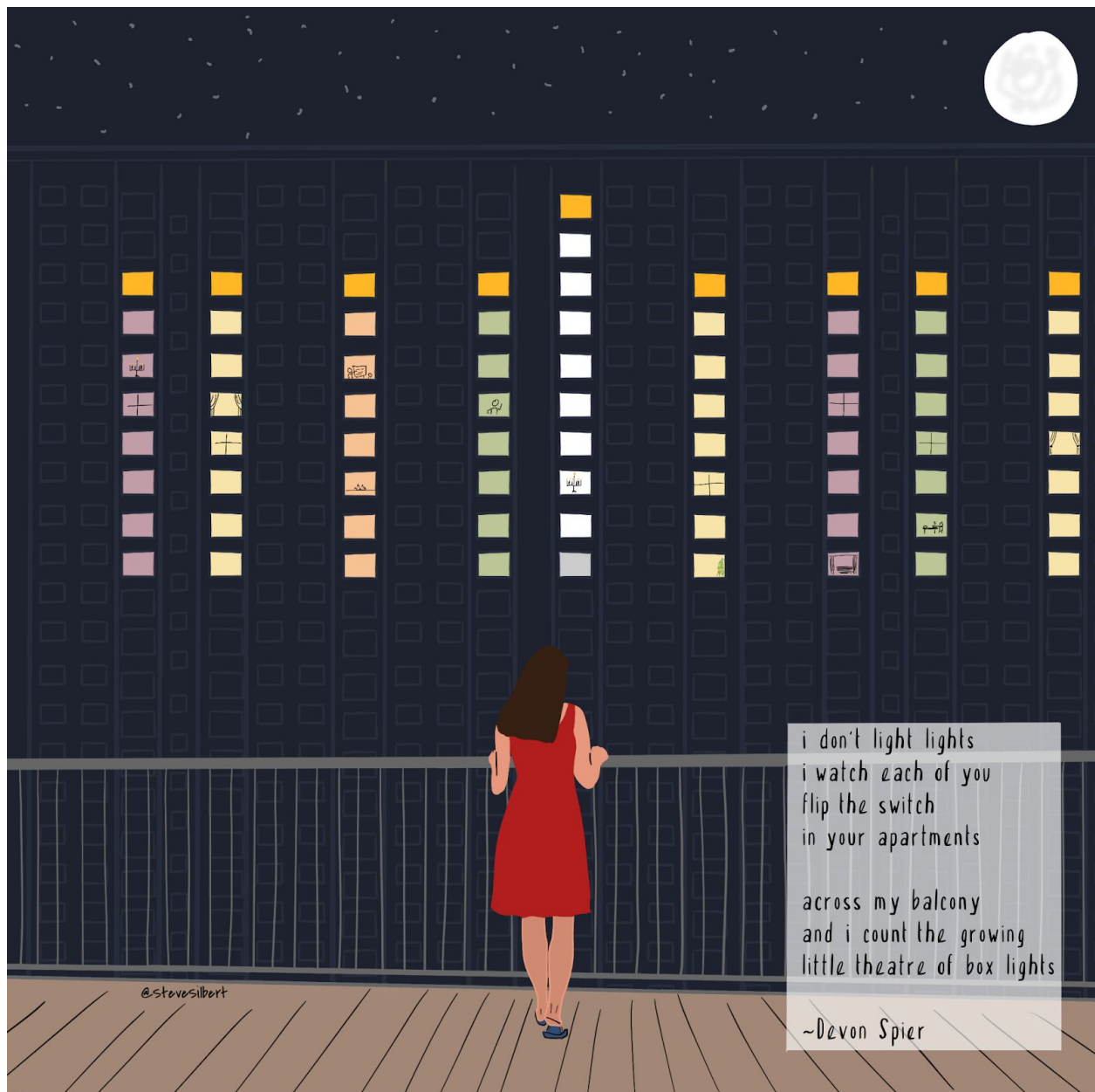


Illustration by Steve Silbert

For Each Night of Chanukah: Lighting the Candles

***Hanerot Halalu* for 2020: The Divine Lights Keeping us Going**

In the beginning, for thirty six hours of *bereishit*, the Divine light of creation shone from one end of the universe to the other¹ before it was hidden away, encased, protected in the natural order of things, for its own good (or for ours?). Our Sages of blessed memory teach that the thirty six candles of Chanukah² parallel these 36 hours of holy illumination, enabling us to experience the Divine through revealed sparks of this *or haganuz* (hidden light).³

It wasn't oil that enabled the miracle of the eight days of Chanukah. Rather, our Sages taught that the righteous souls who cared for Torah, community, and tzedakah during a period of intolerance and persecution enabled the supernal light of Creation to shine through, as it is written, "A light shines for the upright in the darkness..." (Psalms 112:4), and as we are taught, "The one occupied with the needs of the community is like one who is occupied with matters of Torah" (Talmud Yerushalmi, Brakhot 5:1)

This Chanukah we honour those whose light has shone throughout the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the helpers⁴ who despite the *tohu and bohu*, the chaos and confusion, trauma, fear and disinformation have served and continue to serve, illuminating our communities by their commitment and caring.

A Blessing for Everyday Heroes, Embodied Miracles, Divine Light:

*Hanerot halalu anu madlikim
Al hanisim ve'al hanifla'ot
Sheh asita lanu bayamim hahem bazman hazeh.
Al yedei giborei yomyomi'im.
Vechol shmonat yemei Chanukah
Hanerot halalu kodesh hem,*

These Chanukah lights we light
In honour of the miracles and the wonders
That You brought, In those days, in our time.
By the hands of Your everyday heroes.
And throughout Chanukah's eight days
These lights shall be sacred:

¹ Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 12a.

² $36 = 1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8$

³ [Sefat Emet, Genesis, For Chanukah 29:3](#)

⁴ Mr. Rogers: [When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news](#), my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." To this day, especially in times of "disaster," I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers - so many caring people in this world.

May the One who blessed our ancestors before us bless all who give of their time and their hearts, essential holy workers on the front lines and on the homefront, keeping us safe and fed and cared for and taught, treating us and healing us and guiding us, who work and volunteer and serve our communities in ways seen and unseen. May the work of their/our hands be blessed and may their/our light continue to shine through the *tohu* and *bohu*, the chaos and confusion wrought by COVID-19.

May we all be protected under Your wings of Holy presence, and may the time come speedily when we can all gather together again to walk the paths of peace in holy community. Amen.

Everyday Heroes/ Miracles Embodied in 2020, for each day:

Night 1: We light tonight's lights for health care and long term care workers (from personal support workers to heads of public health) at the front lines of the pandemic caring for the most ill and vulnerable members of our communities

Night 2: We light tonight's lights for grocery store, supply chain, food and retail, hospitality and service workers often working for minimum wage, showing up day in and day out to keep society functioning, store shelves full, and lights on

Night 3: We light tonight's lights for teachers feeding our students' minds and souls in ways different from any lesson plan of years past, online and in person, often counseling anxious students through the pandemic all the while sustaining the future

Night 4: We light tonight's lights for parents/ caregivers juggling and struggling work (or the lack of work) and childcare often all on top of one another, without the benefit of boundaries and support

Night 5: We light tonight's lights for volunteers delivering meals, groceries, goods to those in need, walking dogs, checking in with at-risk neighbours, counting ballots to preserve democracy while garbed in PPE

Night 6: We light tonight's lights for artists of all media and for spiritual care providers/ faith leaders, prophets and pastors both, creating anew and maintaining faith and connection across all platforms, dreaming up holidays and holiness in ways never experienced before

Night 7: We light tonight's lights for public/civil servants upholding democratic norms and institutions, developing and delivering pandemic support programs around the world at a decidedly un-bureaucratic pace

Night 8: We light tonight's lights for all of us! Surviving, caring, holding on, crying, mourning, loving, living, lighting our candles.

Rabbi Dara Lithwick



Illustration by Steve Silbert

Al HaNisim: Future Miracles Unfolding Now

From the Year 2050 looking back on this time, for the children of our children.

על הנסים ועל הפְּרָקוֹן ועל הגְּבוּרוֹת ועל
הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת ועל הַנִּפְלְאוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

בַּיָּמִי סְטִיסִי עֵיבְרָאמִז, גְּסִינְדָא אַרְדֶּערן,
וִיִּלְיָם בָּאָרְבֶּר, אַנְטוֹנִי פֶּאָוֶצִי, רוֹת בֶּעִידֶר
גִּינְזְבוּרְג, ג'וֹן לוֹאִיס, גֶּרֶטָה טוֹנְבֶּרג
וּמַאֲלָה יוֹסֶאפֶזַאי, עָמִי הָעוֹלָם הַשְּׂכִיחָם
תּוֹרַתְךָ וְהַעֲבִירָם מִחֻמֵּי צִדִּיקְךָ. הַחֲמִידְנוּת
אִיכָלָה אֶת הָאֱמֶת. הַבוּרוֹת לַעֲגָה לְמַדֵּע.
נִשְׂרָפוּ דְלָקִים מֵאוֹבְנִים בְּלִי סוֹף וְטִמְאָה
אֶת מִקְדָּשְׁךָ הַטֶּבַע שְׁלָךְ. צִמְחוּ הַקִּנְאוֹת
וְהַשְׁחִיתוּ וְטִמְאָה אֶת מִקְדָּשְׁךָ
הַדְמוּקְרַטִיָּה שְׁלָךְ.

אֲבָל גַּם כְּשֶׁהָעִידוּ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ נֶגֶד הָעַמִּים
בְּזֶמַן הַזֶּה - כְּשֶׁעָלָה מִפְּלֶס הַיָּם וְנִשְׂרָפוּ
הַיַּעֲרוֹת, חָמָס שִׁפְכָה דָמִים, נִגַּע הַבִּיאָה
עָמִים עַל בְּרָכִים, עָרִים הִחֲלוּ לְהִתְפֹּרֵר,
וְהָגוּ שִׁנְתָּה לָהֶם לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה הַחֵל
לְמוֹת - עוֹד לֹא אֶבְדָּה תְּקוּנָתָם. בְּתוֹךְ כָּאֵב
וְהַשְׁתַּקְוּוֹת, זָכְרוּ הַבְּרִית וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶת הַקוֹל
דְּמַמָּה דִּקְוָה בְּתוֹכָם, וְשָׁבוּ אֵלֶיךָ בְּאַהֲבָה.

וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים עָמַדְתָּ לָהֶם בְּעֵת
צָרָתָם, רִבֵּית אֶת רִיבָם, וַיִּנָּתֶּן אֶת דִּינָם.
מִסָּרְפָה אֶת הָעֵתִיד לַיָּדִי צַדִּיקִים, וְהִנַּחְתָּ
אוֹתָם אֶת תְּשׁוּעָה גְדוֹלָה וְנֹאזְלָה
בְּקִדּוּשְׁתְּךָ. בְּכֹחַ הַטְהוֹר שֶׁל אוֹר נָקִי
וּבְמִשְׁפַּט עַל פִּי הַחוּק, בָּאוּ בְּנֶיךָ לְדַבֵּר
בִּיתְךָ וּפָנוּ אֶת הַיִּכְלָךְ, וְטָהְרוּ אֶת מִקְדָּשְׁךָ.
הִדְלִיקוּ נֵרוֹת בְּחִצְרוֹת קִדְשְׁךָ, וְהִתְחַדְּשׁוּ
אֶת שְׁמוֹנֶת יָמֵי חֲנֻכָּה אֵלֶיךָ, לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל
לְשִׁמְךָ, לְחַנוּךְ הָעוֹלָם מִחֲדָשׁ לְאוֹר טְהוֹר
וְנָקִי וּלְחֻקֵּי הָאֱמֶת לְנֶצַח.

We thank You for the miracles, redemption, the
strengths and salvations, and wonders You did for
our ancestors in those days at this season.

In the days of [Stacey Abrams](#), [Jacinda Ardern](#),
[William Barber](#), [Anthony Fauci](#), [Ruth Bader
Ginsberg](#), [John Lewis](#), [Greta Thunberg](#) and [Malala
Yousafzai](#), peoples of the Earth had forgotten
Your teachings and transgressed Your ways of
justice. Greed corroded truth. Ignorance mocked
science. Fossil fuels burned without end, defiling
Your temple of nature. Zealotry and corruption
flourished, defiling Your temple of democracy.

But even as heaven and earth testified against the
peoples of that time - when seas rose and forests
burned, violence spilled innocent blood, plague
brought nations to their knees, cities began to
crumble and the garden You gave them to till and
tend began to die - still their hope was not lost.
Amidst pain and yearning, they recalled the
Covenant, they heard the still small voice within,
and they returned to You in love.

And You, in Your great mercy, stood with them in
their time of distress. You fought their fights and
judged their cause. You delivered the future into
the hands of the righteous, and in Your holiness
You empowered their great deliverance and
redemption. With the pure power of clean light
and justice under law, Your children returned to
the oracle of Your house, cleansed Your temple
and purified Your sanctuary. They kindled lights
in Your holy courts, and renewed these eight days
of Chanukkah to give thanks and praise to Your
Name - to re-dedicate the world to pure and clean
light and to the wisdom of truth forever.

Rabbi David Evan Markus

1st Night: NO PARTY

So anyway, God,
Here I am.
Alone
On Hanukkah.
No party at shul,
No table covered in aluminum foil,
Adorned with menorahs
The families bring from home.
No cantor leading the blessing,
No tedious contest between latkes and hamantaschen
(Fried potatoes vs. dry prune pastry?
Don't waste my time.)
Speaking of, no latkes in the social hall basement,
Or at the party at my neighbors', no parties at all.
No presents, from anyone, why should there be?
I'm too old for getting presents
And there are no children to buy for.
So why bother lighting the menorah?
Who for, me?
All alone on a Jewishly insignificant minor holiday?
Feh.
Fire hazard.

But in a year of lonely death and negligence,
In a year of right wing thugs and fascists,
In a year of proud racists and anti-semites,
I buy an electric hanukiah for the window.
It has small tasteful blue LED bulbs
That are hard to see before the fifth night,
Faint light in the winter darkness
But nevertheless
They proclaim,
A JEW LIVES HERE!

And I imagine all the Jews
All over the world,
Waiting for the sickness and the evil to pass,
Doing the same.
Amen.

Trisha Arlin

Smell: I remember the first time we tried making latkes at home. That smell! The smoky oily oniony-ness all rolled together, like the smell itself took up space it was so THERE. And so, well, intense. And so comforting - with notes of home and family and warmth and heat. I think I remember that from my Bubby. But then once I got burned. That smell too.

Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick

2nd Night: Rededication

It's not like the Temple, sullied
by improper use and then washed clean
and restored to former glory.
This house is tarnished by familiarity.
Month after pandemic month I've circled
from bed to table to sofa to bed again.
I no longer see the mezuzah
on every door frame. Tonight
with one tiny candle I light another.
I want their little flames to galvanize
my hands to consecrate each room.
I sweep flour from my kitchen, affirming
here where I sing to my challah is holy.
So too the hallway where I hang coats
and newly-washed fabric masks to dry,
the bedroom with its pile of quilts
and rosemary plant in the window
struggling to make it until spring.
God, we're all struggling to make it
until spring. Help me make this house
a place where hope keeps burning bright.

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

Touch: I remember we always had to go to this one shop across town where more Jews lived to get Chanukah candles and they were always those same ones. I remember holding them in my hands and feeling the slight oiliness of the wax getting onto my hands, and rubbing the wax off the wicks so it wouldn't be in the way when I lit them. And when they wouldn't stand up straight, the feeling of melting the base of the candle, just warm enough, not too hot, so that it would stick just right in its spot, standing proud and tall.

Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick

3rd Night: Second Calendar

There is a Jewish calendar for those who came late.

Until Tuesday afternoon,
One might prolong the *shabbes*
For all those still in need
Of a second soul.

On *pessach sheni*,
All those can access freedom
Who were too preoccupied with life
And therefore missed the first ten calls.

On each *yom kippur katan*,
All those of us who didn't feel entirely
Pure and innocent
May commit themselves anew.

And then there is *chanukah*,
For all those who missed the initial party,
Who celebrate later,
Who are able to rejoice in joys postponed.

Time seems to welcome
The tired, slow, sick, and weary;
A tender, darker calendar,
For those who stayed behind. No

As if someone smuggled,
In the midst of darkness,
A spark of light into our homes:
A warm, growing glow.

Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD

Second calendar. Jewish tradition offers a variety of opportunities to “re-do” a festival. **Prolong the *shabbes*.** If havdalah is not made on Saturday night, it can still be made until the end of the day on Tuesday. **Pesach sheni.** See [Numbers 9:6](#), about one who was *tamei* due to a death and could not celebrate Pesach in its time. **Yom Kippur katan.** This “little Yom Kippur” is marked each month before new moon. **Chanukah.** One interpretation of this 8-day festival is that it was an opportunity to “re-do” the Sukkot which had not been properly observed.

Taste: There was once a war in our house. We had guests over one Chanukah night, fun, a latke tasting gathering. Homemade, well, mostly. Potato ones and zucchini ones and sweet potato ones, even broccoli ones. Splendid oily diversity. But traditional too. It was all going so well... until we brought out the dips. Debate erupted. One one side, sour cream. On the other, applesauce. There was no room for ketchup or hot sauce - not even worthy of discussion. Dinner was heading off the rails. Quiet! My children looked at us and yelled. Just eat already! Stunned, the guests stopped and looked down and grabbed food and dove in. Bliss. All was forgiven.

Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick

4th Night: My Father's Menorah

When I was small Hanukkah was small too
Except for the sawhorse menorah
my dad made.
Nine huge lightbulbs
screwed into the wood somehow
Cords hidden behind,
Standing proudly
embarrassingly
on the front lawn.

We were the only Jews
in the suburban neighborhood.
I walked the few blocks to school
where my teacher insisted
I decorate a Hanukkah bush
to stand beside the Christmas tree.

I got an F on the naked tree
but my dad gave me an A and hot chocolate.
I stood proudly beside him and his
no longer embarrassing menorah,
Eight nights in a row
Reliving my rebellion
Reveling in his love.

Rabbi Jennifer Singer

Hearing: There are so many sounds - the crackle of the latkes frying, the spark and hiss of the candles being lit and burning, the whoosh of the spinning of dreidels and the cackling of kids when they spin a gimel and eat too much gelt, the clatter of dishes and laughter of friends and family gathered together (even on Zoom this year alas), the dreidel song earworm, the prayers of thanksgiving for miracles then and now, those I love most.

Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick

5th Night: Re-Dedication

The season
Of re-dedication:
Oil onto my belly,
Cut and open.

Lips coated with sugar
After screaming and crying:
Pain and exhaustion,
Blunt overwhelm.

Walking slowly.
Regathering strength; tired muscles:
Upright, upright,
Reclaiming the mountain.

Counting money
Once the battle is over:
Healing body, only slowly,
Giving love to you.

Life is brutal.
We are bleeding:
We light some candles,
We say the *Sh'ma*.

Glowing in the darkness
The light of two lovers:
A people and Holiness,
Meeting anew.

Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD

Sight: The best part, the last night when all the candles are lit, and everybody's menorahs are lined up, an old and simple and beautiful brass passed down from my maternal grandmother, new ones that we made with clay and sticks, a silly one with the Eiffel Tower as the shamash, and we can see each other and the candles reflected in the window, the lights flickering, and we know from outside the window that people can see our dedication to our tradition and our joy in celebrating together. Or at least lovely lights and love.

Rabbi Jennifer Singer and Rabbi Dara Lithwick

6th Night: My Maccabees

This year
My Maccabees
Wrote postcards
Made phone calls
Texted
Knocked on doors (safely)

This year
My Maccabees
Taught their children at home
Channeled their anger
Watched a lot of TV
Learned to use Zoom

This year
My Maccabees
Reported to work at hospitals
Saw thousands die
Helped many people live
Counseled survivors

This year
My Maccabees
Embraced their righteous anger
Held signs
Organized protests
Marched in the streets

This year
My Maccabees
Voted
Made sure everyone else could vote
Danced in the streets
Defended the outcome

This year
My Maccabees
Lost their jobs
Collected unemployment
Stood on lines
Worried

This year
My Maccabees
Wore masks
Washed their hands
Kept their distance
Stayed home

Blessed Holy Wholeness –
I give thanks for these Maccabees,
My heroes.
May they have sustenance in place of
anxiety,
Health in place of sickness,
Joy in place of grief,
Justice in place of evil.
Amen

Trisha Arlin



Illustration by Steve Silbert

7th Night: Hanukkah poem #2

for hanukkah
this year
i stayed in and
ordered the

non festive special

to inhale and recite the day after the days
end
because unfortunately
we are out of time for oil

to that not liquid courage our ancestors were
raving about-

the sun is setting!
the sun is setting!

fetch the menorah
the sun is setting

never mind about the earth
we have to be on time for the
White House Hanukkah
party

poor human
crying fasting
and mourning the light

tripping over the length of our days

of course what i mean
to say is

i have felt so many friends
Fall
over the crack of
whether to punch a Nazi

they forgot to notice
they were
(ground to)
dirt

made to idols

it is never too early
or too late
to celebrate
unless it is

Devon A. Spier

Leftovers

Even after tonight's lights go out,

Eyes still dance to the swaying beat of flickering flame,
Tiny sparks driving out what darkness cannot,

Cheeks still warmer than a few spunky candles ought to be,
Proof that both matter and soul can change with light speed.

Latke oil lingers on the lips, leftovers of salty savory crunch,
An old-world recipe to lift joy out of soiled and humble roots,

Buried in the earth, dark as the deep, awaiting their moment,
Their whole purpose in being: to make a memory and a smile.

And if for spuds, then also for souls, buried in their deep dark,
Awaiting their moment, their whole purpose in being: to shine.

Why wait? When the moon shone, we less noticed the candles,
Yet there they were, each day one more, one more, a bit brighter.

There they were, awaiting not the sun but the disappearing moon,
The year's darkest night, to begin revealing their brightest light,

If dark is what brings out your light, then maybe so too all of us.
Give people a way to make light, and we all can become the way.

What darkness cannot - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ("Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that"). **Both matter and soul** - Dr. Albert Einstein ("There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle"). **When the moon shone** - Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice* V:i ("When the moon shone we did not see the candle"). **Disappearing moon** - Chanukkah's seventh night coincides with Rosh Chodesh (New Moon) Tevet, the Northern year's darkest night. **If dark is what brings** - Robert Frost, *Choose Something Like a Star* ("Since dark is what brings out your light"). **Give light** - Ella Baker ("Give light, and people will find the way").

Rabbi David Evan Markus

8th Night: Windows

Once I compared daily prayer
to a chat window open with God
all the time. That was before.
Now the chat windows where I text,
the Zoom windows where we meet,
are as fervent as prayer:

the only way we can be together
anymore. The digital windows open
between my home (my heart) and yours --
they're what link us, together apart
like lovers with hands pressed
to far sides of thick glass.

Chanukah candles go in the window
to shine light into the world
to proclaim the miracle even
in dark times. We've all seen
[the old photo](#), chanukiyah burning
small and defiant in the foreground

and on a building across the street
the swastika's hideous slash. I put
my lights each night in my window:
tiny candles visible to anyone
driving through the condo complex.
It's not brave like the rabbi in Kiel

in 1932, though more people hate us
today than I used to imagine. Still
these little lights declare
that hatred will not destroy us.
Let's be real: no one walks past
my window in the smalltown night

so I post a photo too on Facebook
scattering holy sparks
through every browser window
proclaiming the miracle
that we're still here, that
the light of our fierce hope still shines.

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

Windows, Then and Now



Collage by Steve Silbert

Remaining Sparks

The 9th Night: Chanukah of Stars

"I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light." Wendell Berry

The year I had no hanukiah
No candles
Not even a match
Because I had let the last cigarettes crumble in a drawer

That year
I waited for dark.
On the first night I went out into the cold grass,
Chose the brightest star as the shamash
And counted, One.
The next night, Two.
Three.
Four.
Five.
The sixth night there were clouds,
and I closed my eyes
And remembered the poet's day-blind stars
that waited with their light
and counted, Six.
The clouds parted.
Seven.
Eight.

On the ninth night I stepped out,
bare toes in the icy grass
Looked up
To see the sky crowded with tiny flames.

Rabbi Jennifer Singer

On the ninth night I stepped out,
bare toes in the icy grass
Looked up
To see the sky crowded with tiny flames.
~Rabbi Jennifer Singer

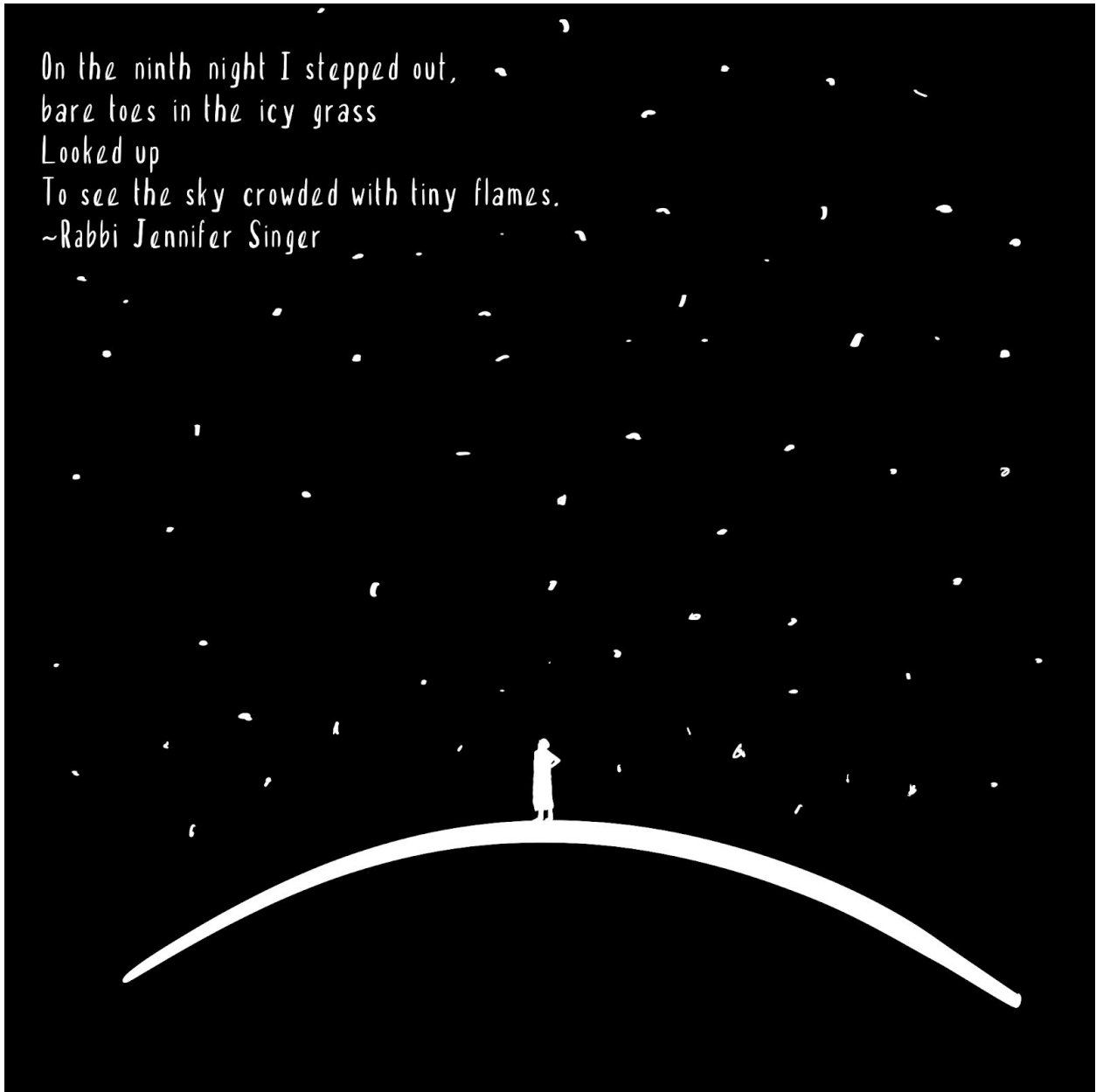


Illustration by Steve Silbert