



## Eight Lights – Eight Writes



### Background for the Teacher

This collection of eight poems for use on Hanukkah is for teens and adults. None of these, save one, were written with Hanukkah in mind; however, all use images of light. Additionally, some embrace themes included in the Hanukkah story and holiday observance, such as war, sacrificing one's life for a cause, miracles, God's power, and sharing one's light.

Guiding questions accompany each poem. Though one could use the poems solely with these questions, a number of options for using this resource are outlined below.

### Ways to Use these Poems

- Split the class into small groups, giving each a poem. Provide each group with the Hanukkah liturgy and songs used in your synagogue. Ask each group to find themes in the poems similar to those found in liturgy.
- Read the poems and ask participants how they think Jewish people of different time periods might have viewed these words. Some examples might include: those enslaved in Egypt before the Exodus, the Maccabees or other Jews under Hellenism, those living under Nazi rule, 19th century Eastern European immigrants.
- Have students or prayer leaders read them as part of *tefillah* during Hanukkah.
- Send the poems home with students (or parents) and encourage them to read one each night of Hanukkah as they light candles. Or, include one in a Hanukkah email each day of the holiday.



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### 1<sup>st</sup> Candle: Psalms

#### Psalm 97

#### תהלים צז

<sup>1</sup>YHVH reigns; let the earth be glad. Let many islands rejoice.

א' יְיָ מֶלֶךְ הָאֲדָמָה יִשְׂמְחוּ אֲיִלֵּים רַבִּים יָם:

<sup>2</sup>Cloud and darkness are around Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

ב' עָנָן וְעֹרְפֹל סָבִיבוֹ צִדִּיקוֹ מִשְׁפָּט מִכֹּחַ יְיָ כִּסְאוֹ:

<sup>3</sup>Fire will go before Him and burn His enemies all around.

ג' אֵשׁ לְפָנָיו תִּלְכּוּ וְתִלְהַטֵּם בִּיב צָרָיו:

<sup>4</sup>His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.

ד' אֵיּוֹ בְּרָקִיּוֹת בְּלֹא תִתֵּחַלֵּה אֶרֶץ:

<sup>5</sup>Mountains like wax melt before YHVH; before the Lord of all the earth.

ה' הָרִים כַּדּוֹנָג וַמָּסוּ מִלִּפְנֵי יְיָ מִלִּפְנֵי אֲדוֹן כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:

<sup>6</sup>The skies proclaim His justice; all the nations see His glory.

ו' הַגִּידוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם צִדִּיקוֹ וְרָאוּ כְלִיהֶם מִכְבוֹדוֹ:

<sup>7</sup>All who worship idols, who praise their deities, are shamed; all gods bow down to Him.

ז' יִבְשׁוּכְלִיעַ בְּיָדֵי פָסֶלֶה מִתַּה לְלִים בָּאָ לִי לִים הַשִּׁתְחַוּוּ לֹא־לֵאלֹהִים:

<sup>8</sup>Zion heard and rejoiced, and the daughters of Yehudah were glad; on account of Your judgements, YHVH.

ח' יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׂמַח צִיּוֹן וְגִלְיָה בְּנוֹת יְהוּדָה לְמַעַן מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ יְיָ:

<sup>9</sup>Because You, YHVH, are highest over all the earth; You are exalted over all gods.

ט' כִּי־אַתָּה יְיָ עֲלִיוֹן עֹלְכָל־הָאָרֶץ מֵאֵד וְעֲלִיתָ עַל־כָּל־אֱלֹהִים:

<sup>10</sup>Lovers of YHVH hate evil [He] guards the souls of those loyal to Him; He saves them from the hands of the wicked.

י' אֱהָבֵי יְיָ נֹאֲרַעְשֵׁמֶר בַּפְּשׁוּתֶיךָ סִידֶךָ מִיָּד רָשָׁעִים יִצִּילֵם:

<sup>11</sup>Light is sown for the just; and joy for the upright of heart.

יא' אֵאָדָר זָרַע לְצַדִּיק לִישׁוּר־לֵבָשׁ מְקֵה:

<sup>12</sup>Rejoice righteous ones in YHVH; and praise His holy name.

יב' שִׂמְחוּ צַדִּיקִים בְּיְיָ וְהוֹדוּ לְזִכְרֹךְ דָּשׁוֹ:

### Guiding Questions

- The lights of Hanukkah are a symbol of faith and hope. What does light symbolize in this Psalm?
- When you think of light at this season of the year, do you see it as a creative or destructive force?
- Perhaps the Maccabees read this Psalm before going into battle. How do you think it made them feel?
- Beyond the images of fire and light, this Psalm has other themes in common with Hanukkah. What are they?





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### 2<sup>nd</sup> Candle: Two Poems by Hannah Senesh

#### Blessed is the Match

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.  
 Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret  
 fastness of the heart.  
 Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its  
 beating for honor's sake.  
 Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

#### אשריה גפרור

אשריה גפרור שגשרף וְהַ צִּית לְקִבּוּת,  
 אשריה לְהִבֵּה שֶׁבְּעֵרָה בְּסִתְרֵי לְבָבוֹת.  
 אשריה לְקִבּוּת שֶׁיִּדְעוּ לְחַזּוֹל בְּכָבוֹד...  
 אשריה גפרור שגשרף וְהַ צִּית לְקִבּוּת.

#### There are Stars

There are stars  
 whose light reaches the earth only after they  
 themselves have disintegrated and are no more.  
 And there are people  
 whose scintillating memory lights the world after  
 they have passed from it.  
 These lights –  
 which shine in the darkest night – are those  
 which illumine for us the path.

#### יש כוכבים

יש כוכבים  
 שאורם מגיע ארצה רק כאשר הם עצמם  
 אבדו ואינם  
 יש אנשים  
 שזיו זכרם מאיר כאשר הם עצמם אינם  
 יותר בתוכנו  
 אורות אלה  
 המבהיקים בחשכת הליל הם שמראים לאדם את  
 הדרך

Both Senesh poems: *Hannah Senesh: Her Life & Diary* (paperback ed.). New York: Schocken Books. 1973.

#### Guiding Questions

- Why is the match that lights the fire “blessed”?
- The author suggests that the “fire that burns in the secret fastness of the heart” is blessed as well. Why are some “flames” or passions kept secret? Why would someone want to acknowledge or bless these secret flames?
- The poet suggests that someone who is brave or “strong” enough to die for honor’s sake is to be blessed. Indeed, this is the way that Hannah Senesh died. How might the Maccabees’ actions be reflected in this line of the poem? Do you think that, in the modern world, there are causes worth dying for?
- Is there comfort in knowing that someone who has died can still “shine in the darkest night?”
- Can you think of anyone who has died whose “light” still shines in your life or in the life of your family?





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### 3<sup>rd</sup> Candle: *Psalm III* by Allen Ginsberg

To God: to illuminate all men. Beginning with Skid Road.  
Let Occidental and Washington be transformed into a higher place, the plaza of eternity.  
Illuminate the welders in shipyards with the brilliance of their torches.  
Let the crane operator lift up his arm for joy.  
Let elevators creak and speak, ascending and descending in awe.  
Let the mercy of the flower's direction beckon in the eye.  
Let the straight flower bespeak its purpose in straightness — to seek the light.  
Let the crooked flower bespeak its purpose in crookedness — to seek the light.  
Let the crookedness and straightness bespeak the light.  
Let Puget Sound be a blast of light.  
I feed on your Name like a cockroach on a crumb — this cockroach is holy.

From the collection: *Reality Sandwiches: Poems 1953-1960*. Paperback: City Lights Books, 2001.

### Guiding Questions

- What does “illuminate all men” mean to you?
- Why do you think the poet asks God to begin with the poor people and laborers?
- In the poem, both the straight and crooked flower are seeking light. How does this represent people? What connections might you draw to the people of the Hanukkah narrative?
- Ginsberg describes the cockroach, usually seen as something lowly or dirty, as holy. Was the sanctuary destroyed by the Seleucid Greeks in the story of Hanukkah holy only once it was cleaned and rededicated, or was it holy even when ransacked and covered in blood?





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### 4<sup>th</sup> Candle: *Know This* by Naomi Shemer

#### *Know This* (based on Nachman of Bratslav)

KNOW THIS:

each and every shepherd  
has a unique melody of their own.  
Know this:  
every blade of grass  
has a unique song of its own.  
And from the song of the grass  
comes the melody of the shepherd.  
How beautiful,  
how beautiful and pleasant it is  
when one hears their song:  
it is very good  
to pray among them,  
and in joy to serve the Ineffable.  
And from the song of the grass  
the heart becomes filled  
with longing.  
And when the heart  
is filled with song  
and with longing for Eretz Yisrael,  
a great light goes forth  
from the holiness of the land  
upon it.  
And from the song of the grass  
comes the melody of the heart.

#### שירת העשבים

וכשהלב	דע לך
מן השירה מתמלא	שכל רועה ורועה
ומשתוקק	יש לו ניגון מיוחד
אל ארץ ישראל	משלו
אור גדול	דע לך
אזי נמשך והולך	שכל עשב ועשב
מקדושתה של	יש לו שירה
הארץ	מיוחדת
עליו	משלו
ומשירת העשבים	ומשירת העשבים
נעשה ניגון	נעשה ניגון
של הלב.	של רועה

כמה יפה  
כמה יפה ונאה  
כששומעים השירה  
שלהם  
טוב מאוד  
להתפלל ביניהם  
ובשמחה לעבוד  
את השם  
ומשירת העשבים  
מתמלא הלב  
ומשתוקק

*Know This* is better known as *The Song of the Grasses* Naomi Shemer No.3 (Hebrew) – Lulav Press, Israel 1982



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### Guiding Questions

- How does the theme of uniqueness connect to the themes of Hanukkah?
- What causes the light to go forth from the land? What does that light represent? What does that light do?
- How can we – not shepherds and (mostly) not living in Israel – cause holy light to shine?



### 5<sup>th</sup> Candle: *The Coming of Light* by Mark Strand

Even this late it happens:  
the coming of love, the coming of light.  
You wake and the candles are lit as if by themselves,  
stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows,  
sending up warm bouquets of air.  
Even this late the bones of the body shine  
and tomorrow's dust flares into breath.

*The Late Hour* (New York: Atheneum, 1978)

### Guiding Questions

- What does the author mean when he suggests that light and love can come “late”?
- The poet connects love to light. Do you think these two things are connected? Why or why not?
- Would you be surprised if you found candles lit and you had not lit them? Would you find it miraculous or suspicious? What do you think the internal dialogue of the person who found the oil still burning in the Temple on the second or third or fourth day, etc., was like?





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- In the story of Hanukkah, the Temple is rededicated after being desecrated. How does this connect to the line, “tomorrow’s dust flares into breath”?
- Have you ever experienced something you thought was miraculous? How did it feel?

### 6th Candle: After the Breaking by Stacey Robinson

When the light broke,  
When it shattered into its  
infinite pieces  
that drifted  
in leisurely Spirals  
that caught the odd  
updraft,  
so that,  
just when you thought  
you had hold of one,  
it slipped -  
a half-skip -  
in that syncopated  
downbeat to  
back up  
again.

When the light broke  
in that glorious,  
inhaled  
breath  
that was -  
is -  
will be -  
Creation,  
there was darkness;  
there was light,  
There was evening  
and morning.  
There was day to follow

night.  
It was all there,  
in the breath taking  
breaking of that glorious  
first Light.

When the light broke,  
When there was Now  
and Yet to be,  
each piece,  
each jagged, holy piece  
that drifted and  
caught in the  
and held  
and drew near  
and was neither  
here  
nor There  
Was  
(will Be)

an echo  
of Worlds  
and time,  
Waiting, shivering  
in eager anticipation,  
to be Found  
and returned;  
to be tethered,  
piece by piece

Example of Robinson's website: [www.stumblingtowardmeaning.com](http://www.stumblingtowardmeaning.com)



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by jagged,  
holy  
piece,  
to the beginning,  
to the end,  
and the yet to Be;

To become,  
Again:  
completed  
and completely whole,

a single, sacred  
Light,  
to illuminate  
a kaleidoscope  
of Then and  
Was  
and endless  
Now,  
what has always  
been:  
*olam haba.*

### 6th Candle, continued

### Guiding Questions

- What does light symbolize in this poem?
- In this poem, light reflects everything that ever was or ever will be. When you look into the lights of the Hanukkah candles, what do you see reflected back at you?
- In this poem, the author uses the Kabbalistic idea of the breaking of the vessels, which is said to have occurred when the world was created. According to this understanding of creation, humankind's purpose is to repair what has been broken. How does Hanukkah encourage us to participate in *tikkun olam* or the repair of the world?
- The poet suggests that "jagged pieces" of something holy can also be holy. Do you agree? Do you think that the Temple was holy when its altar and all its holy objects were in pieces, or only once the Maccabees repaired it?





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### 7<sup>th</sup> Candle: *Anthem* by Leonard Cohen

The birds they sang  
At the break of day  
Start again  
I heard them say  
Don't dwell on what  
Has passed away  
Or what is yet to be  
Yeah the wars they will  
Be fought again  
The holy dove  
She will be caught again  
Bought and sold  
And bought again  
The dove is never free  
Ring the bells (ring the bells) that still  
can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything (there is a  
crack in everything)  
That's how the light gets in  
We asked for signs  
The signs were sent  
The birth betrayed  
The marriage spent  
Yeah the widowhood  
Of every government  
Signs for all to see  
I can't run no more  
With that lawless crowd  
While the killers in high places

Say their prayers out loud  
But they've summoned, they've  
summoned up  
A thundercloud  
And they're going to hear from me  
Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
(there is a crack in everything)  
That's how the light gets in  
You can add up the parts  
You won't have the sum  
You can strike up the march  
There is no drum  
Every heart, every heart to love will  
come  
But like a refugee  
Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
(there is a crack in everything)  
That's how the light gets in  
Ring the bells that still can ring (ring the  
bells that still can ring)  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
(there is a crack in everything)  
That's how the light gets in  
That's how the light gets in  
That's how the light gets in

Track 5 from *The Future* (1992)

### Guiding Questions

- The poet suggests that we “don't dwell on what has passed away.” Yet, the Jewish people are said to be a people of memory. What are the pros and cons of forgetting past wars and triumphs such as the Hanukkah story?
- What does it mean that “the dove is never free? (Hint: You might want to think about the story of Noah.) Do you agree or disagree?





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### 8<sup>th</sup> Candle: Lamps Within by Alden Solovy

A lamp glows inside your heart,  
With eight ways to light it,  
Eight ways to keep it shining,  
Eight ways to keep its glow.  
Light it with your joy.  
    Light it with your tears.  
    Light it with this song.  
    Light it with the works of your hands.  
    Light it with hope.  
    Light it with service.  
    Light it with this prayer.  
    Light it with praise to G-d's Holy Name.

Bring the lamp of your soul out into  
the street  
So that all who have forgotten  
The miracles around us  
Will remember the beauty within,

So that all who have forgotten  
The miracles of old  
Will remember to rejoice.

A lamp glows inside your children.  
Keep it shining.  
Watch it glow.

Light it with your joy.  
Light it with your tears.  
Light it with song.  
Light it with the works of your hands.  
Light it with hope.  
Light it with service.  
Light it with prayer.  
Light it with praise to G-d's Holy Name.

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### Guiding Questions

- The poet alludes to eight ways to light the lamp that “glows inside your heart,” clearly an allusion to the eight nights of Hanukkah. Do you agree with his eight ways? Would you add to or subtract from them?
- In Judaism we have the concept of an eternal flame. Do you think that we are obligated to keep the lamp inside of our heart lit? Is it ok to let the flame smolder, or even die out, from time to time?
- The poet suggests that parents should help children keep their light shining. If you were able to tell your elders how to encourage you, what would you say?
- There is a tradition of putting *hanukkiyot* (Hanukkah menorahs) in windows to publicize the miracle. Do you think, as the poet says, that we should bring ‘the lamp of your soul out into the street’ or should we keep it inside? What are the pros and cons of each?
- According to your understanding of Judaism, how should a person bring “the lamp of your soul out into the street”?

