

# Humanising Lights. A Hanukkah perspective on the season

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*Baruh ha Or Ba Olam  
Baruh Ha Or Ba Adam*

*Blessed be the light in the World  
Blessed be the light inside a Person*

## Reflection in Jewish Liberal and Jewish Humanist Communities

Who ever examines how Christmas is celebrated by most people these days soon discovers many contradictions and anomalies. The tree's origins for example, or the pre-Christian Roman Saturnalia festival are well known as having been precursors of the festival of Christmas as we know it today. To the outsider it may seem that Christmas is of most fundamental importance to the Christian calendar, even though it is secondary to Easter and Lent. Many, likewise, may conclude that for Jewish people, Hanukkah carries similar importance. Yet Hanukkah, strictly speaking, is only a minor festival, and cannot be compared in significance to the Jewish High Holy Days or Passover, not even to the weekly rhythmic celebration of Sabbath. But these days it is celebrated in all glory, during the entire length of its eight-day duration.

What do we really want to give our children at this time? What do I want my Jewish-raised daughter to get out of Hanukkah in relation to life in a wider Christian society and alongside Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs Atheists, Jays, Buddhists and others?

The celebration of Hanukkah by Jewish people throughout two millennia of diaspora, with host communities not always amicably spirited, is testimony to Jewish attempts to live on. Here the public lighting of the candles, whether it occurs outdoors or at one's home window, is an affirmation of Jewish continuity against the pressures to conform. On the other hand Hanukkah parallels so many habits of the non- Jewish world(s) surrounding it, that it inadvertently indicates that Jewish people, nor the festival of Hanukkah can be understood outside their context. Jewish Hanukkah celebrations in their contemporary form consciously or unconsciously connect these days to others in the happiness of lighting up the dark, the joy of coming together and singing happy songs, the giving of presents, special meals and the affirmation of "our Jewish traditions". In doing so they offer a deeper look at human existence and the history of human civilisations as a whole. The fear of the dark, the fear of oppression, for Jews often not just during long dark nights, but dark times too, the victory of freedom and liberation through the miracle of light, all these are possibly shared in equal measure by most human communities. The light of a candle, reflects our own inner lights and strengths. Strong and warming, life sustaining in these cold days in the Northern hemisphere, and with the potential to spread for better or worse, and yet so vulnerable to but a blow of air.

Our candle holding lantern made at ~~our~~ nursery will hold one of our candles on our home crafted hanukkiah..

*Nerli nerli, nerli dakik  
ba hanukkah neri adlik  
ba hanukkah neri yair  
ba hanukkah shirim ashir*

*My little candle, my little petite candle,  
during Hanukkah my candle will alight,  
during Hanukkah my candle will (en)lighten,  
during Hanukkah we shall sing songs*

(Popular Hanukkah Song)