

Thoughts on Chanukah 2023 | Kislev 5784 by Cantor Harriet Dunkerley
– Based on a writing by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

There is a law about Chanukah I find moving and profound. Our great Sage, Rambam, writes that “the command of Chanukah lights is very precious. One who lacks the money to buy lights should sell something, or if necessary, borrow money, so you can fulfil the mitzvah.” The question then arises: What if, on a Friday afternoon, you find yourself with only one candle? Should you light it as a Shabbat candle or a Chanukah candle? It cannot be both. Logic suggests that you should light it as a Chanukah candle. After all, there is no command that you must sell or borrow to light lights for Shabbat. Yet the answer is, surprisingly, that when faced with such a choice, you light your only candle as a Shabbat light. Why? Listen to what Rambam says: “The Shabbat light takes priority because it symbolizes *shalom bayit*, (which means) peace in the home. And great is peace because the entire Torah was given in order to make peace in the world.” Consider: Chanukah commemorates one of the greatest military victories in Jewish history. Yet Jewish law rules that if we can only light one candle – the Shabbat light takes precedence, because in Judaism the greatest military victory takes second place to peace in the home. Why did Judaism, alone among the civilizations of the ancient world, survive? Because it valued the home more than

the battlefield, family more than military grandeur, and children more than generals. Peace in the home mattered to our ancestors much more than the greatest military victory. So, as we celebrate Chanukah, spare a thought for the real victory, which was not military but spiritual. Jews were the people who valued marriage, the home, and peace in the family above the highest glory on the battlefield. In Judaism, the light of peace takes precedence over the light of war. May this light of peace prevail – here at home and also in Israel. May the hostages still held in captivity be freed. May those who wish us dead see the light of God in their perceived enemy, and may we view that same light in their eyes. May the thirst for revenge be drowned by an insatiable hunger for peace. May we see in our lifetime – speedily and in our days – swords beaten into plowshares and spears crafted into pruning hooks. May the safety of our people be ensured so the bombing stops. May all this be carried into the world with the kindling of the first Chanukah lights – Tikvah – Hope....