**Eight Lights of Hanukkah**

**by Rabbi John Friedman & Aliza Becker**

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Hanukkah -- the holiday of miraculous lights and courageous deeds -- will soon be upon us.

The Hanukkah miracle of the single cruse of oil that burned for eight days reminds us that anything is possible; we can surmount even the most difficult challenges we face in working toward peace. Each night, as we watch the candles spread light, we are reminded that every one of our efforts bring us closer to achieving our dreams.

This year we highlight the work of Americans who have acted courageously for peace, plus eight additional advocates. May their leadership and the lights of Hanukkah rekindle the audacity to continue our pursuit of peace for Israelis, for Palestinians, and for all humanity.

**Light one candle for Jeremy Ben-Ami**, executive director of J Street. Jeremy's decision to found J Street -- now with 115,000 supporters -- and do battle with the status quo has placed him on the leading edge of American Jewish political discourse. His courage and foresight created a political home for the 75% of American Jews that believe in the notion of a two-state resolution but who, despite their numbers, feel marginalized. The integration of Brit Tzedek and J Street just after Hanukkah will provide Jewish grassroots peace activists with a clear and more powerful political voice.

**Light one candle for Diane Balser and Aliza Becker**, the women who have occupied the top two staff positions of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom since the beginning. Under their leadership, we became the leading Jewish grassroots peace organization in the United States. On their watch, tens of thousands of activists have been brought into the center of the Jewish community's conversation on what it means to be pro-Israel. Aliza's leadership in organizing 1000 Rabbis into a strong and powerful voice for peace is unprecedented, and Diane's vision of a grassroots advocacy dedicated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now a reality.

**Light one candle for M.J. Rosenberg**, formerly with the Israel Policy Forum and long-time advocate for a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Long before a two-state resolution became conventional wisdom, Rosenberg's voice served as an important touchstone for the many American Jews who backed peace efforts but saw too little of their own opinions publicly expressed. His honest and forthright appraisal of the situation has earned Rosenberg enemies as well as applause. We are tremendously lucky that he continues to speak truth to power on our behalf.

**Light one candle for Debra DeLee**, President and CEO of Americans for Peace Now, a woman at the forefront of the battle for Israeli peace and security. APN provides a direct link to the Israeli peace camp through *Shalom Achshav*, thus bringing the positions and experience of those directly affected by the conflict into American political discourse. As a former Democratic Party Chair, DeLee has the ear of the Democratic leadership, and has steadfastly used her position to advocate for the Obama Administration's continued pursuit of a just Israeli-Palestinian peace.

**Light one candle for President Barack Obama.** This year marks the first in many that we can celebrate with a President in the White House truly dedicated to the pursuit of a just and negotiated peace. In President Obama, Israel has a stalwart ally, one who believes that honesty is central to any close relationship. Since his first days in office, President Obama has demonstrated his commitment to the ultimate goal of a secure Jewish State living in peace with all of its neighbors, and he has consistently called on all parties in the conflict -- Israelis, Palestinians, Arab states, and the international community alike -- to step up the plate.

**Light one candle for George Mitchell and Hillary Clinton**, serving as Special Envoy to the Middle East and Secretary of State, respectively. Former Senator George Mitchell has worked indefatigably with Israel and the Palestinians since being named Special Envoy, quietly but persistently working to settle disputes and find common ground. Secretary of State Clinton has stood firm on the principle of two states for two peoples, and in so doing significantly altered the international perception of what is possible, while gambling her personal credibility on the prospect of achieving it. Together they have sought to balance competing needs while laying the groundwork for eventual negotiations and compromise.

**Light one candle for those members of Congress who have courageously paved the way in promoting robust U.S. leadership for Israeli-Palestinian peace.** It was once anathema to speak openly of a just two-state resolution, and we owe *a special thanks* to the many Members of Congress who have helped create a sea change in official Washington rhetoric, especially those who sponsored and supported pro-peace resolutions, letters, and other legislation.

**Light one candle for the activists of Brit Tzedek -- you.**Brit Tzedek began as a small grouping of broken-hearted, yet hopeful, people. Every single one of the tens of thousands of activists who have since joined our movement has acted to change the world. A movement, after all, is nothing but a group of people, moving. This Hanukkah, as we light our candles, let us honor our own efforts, and all the members and supporters of Brit Tzedek who have brought us this far.

 Following are eight -- among the many -- advocates deserving of special mention: one additional suggestion for each night!

**Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish** -- Gazan physician, academic and peace advocate, Dr. Abuelaish's family was shattered in the course of last winter's war in Gaza when 3 of his four daughters were killed by Israeli rocket fire. After this tragedy, he has continued to work for peace, speaking before audiences in the US and Canada. Immediately after his children were killed, Dr. Abuelaish told the *New York Times* that peace "is the path I believed in and what I raised and educated my children to believe.... I hope that my children will be the last price."

**Ronit Avni and Rabbi Melissa Weintraub**, two women committed to expanding the conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ronit, Director of the acclaimed film [*Encounter Point*](http://encounterprograms.org/home.html), directs [Just Vision](http://www.justvision.org/), an initiative that uses video, classroom materials, and internet resources to bring the stories of Israeli and Palestinian grassroots peace efforts to light, thus expanding our understanding of who is fighting for peace. Melissa directs Encounter, an educational organization that brings American Jewish leaders from across the religious and political spectrum to the Middle East for direct conversation with Palestinians and each other, thus broadening their sense of the conflict and the possibilities for resolution.

**Mikhael Manekin and Yehuda Shaul** are co-founders and co-directors of [*Shovrim Shtika*/ Breaking the Silence](http://www.shovrimshtika.org/index_e.asp), an organization of former combat soldiers who served during the Second Intifada and beyond. Starting in 2004, they have collected testimony from hundreds of soldiers as a way to force Israeli society to confront the true situation of Israeli military policy and its effect on soldiers and civilians alike. Their tours of Hebron and the surrounding area have brought thousands face to face with daily Palestinian life and earned them verbal abuse and physical threats from settlers living there.

**Hagit Ofran** directs the [Settlement Watch project](http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=61) of *Shalom Achshav* (Peace Now). As Israel's foremost expert on West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements, she monitors and analyzes the expansion of the settlement project week by week. Her data, used by government and diplomatic officials as well as peace activists and legal advocates, is considered the most up to date in Israel. Her goal is to "present an acute moral dilemma to the decent people" who live on what she argues is stolen property.

**Amjad Atallah and Daniel Levy** -- Together and as individuals, Amjad (co-director of the Middle East task force at the New America Foundation and advisor to the Palestinian negotiating team on borders, security & constitutional issues) and Daniel (lead Israeli drafter of the unofficial Geneva Initiative peace plan and senior fellow at the New America and Century Foundations), consistently and eloquently push for the essential necessity of a two-state solution. Their often bold and unwavering stands have influenced the thinking of many who strive for peace.

**Dalit Baum**, a long-time Israeli social activist, is the founder of [*Who Profits?*](http://www.whoprofits.org/)*,* a project of the Women's Coalition for Peace. *Who Profits?* tracks Israeli and international corporations directly involved in the construction of Israeli infrastructure (such as walls and checkpoints) in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as other businesses that make a profit as a result of Israel's occupation. By exposing these links, Baum & other activists hope to change corporate policy and spur public debate.

**Gershon Baskin and Hannan Siniora**, co-founders and co-directors of the [Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information](http://www.ipcri.org/). IPCRI is a think-tank and "do-tank," developing new ideas that enrich the political and public discourse and practical solutions to end the conflict. Both men have long and distinguished careers of serving their peoples, and are dedicated to serving the cause of peace through this Israeli-Palestinian collaboration.

**Nadav Tamir**, the Israeli Consul-General in Boston. In August, Tamir sent a diplomatic cable to the Israeli Foreign Ministry warning that the Netanyahu government's open opposition to President Obama's policies was damaging support among Americans for Israel. The internal memo was leaked to the press and Tamir faced a firestorm of controversy, but refused to back down from the truth of his position.