

# This Chanukah

will you celebrate  
the fire  
or the light?

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**O**UR RESPONSE to  
that ancient question  
will shape the future of both  
our people and our planet.

Here's how...

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CIAI

**S**INCE THE TIME of Hillel and Shammai, through Adam Sandler's Chanukah Song, we have asked: What is this holiday all about? And it always returns to the question of fire and light. Is this a time to celebrate our ability to defeat our enemies and overcome evil, or is it more about our ability to demonstrate how even a little bit of light can chase away a great deal of darkness?

**S**HOULD WE RETURN to the practice of Shammai's students and light the menorah with eight candles on the first night and one less on each succeeding night, indicating our celebration of fire and its capacity to burn powerfully as it consumes that which fuels it until there is nothing left? Or should we follow Hillel's students and light one candle the first night and one additional candle on each of the following nights, demonstrating the power of light to grow and expand? Although this halakhic debate was presumably settled long ago in favor of Hillel, that question continues to shape both our community and our country.

Do we find ourselves more animated by the problems that confront us and our struggles to address them, or by the growing opportunities that we have to celebrate who we are and how we want to be? Each is sometimes needed, as was the case for the Macabees who had to win the firefight before they had the freedom to light the menorah. But we must always ask: Has what starts out, in the words of Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, as an ad hoc necessity become a long-term goal?

**T**HIS CHANUKAH, we each have the chance to continue this tradition of debating fire and light, a debate which determines elections, shapes communal policy, and even affects how we view ourselves and the relationships which fill our lives.

This Chanukah, take a moment to ask one simple question of as many people as you can. Remind them that there is no way to get it wrong, but that their answer is so important that we have been asking the question in different ways for two thousand years.

*Ask them: Do they find themselves more concerned about the future of the world in which they live, or more excited about the opportunities the future holds for them as individuals, as Americans, and as Jews?*

**B**Y THE END OF CHANUKAH, consider how your own convictions have either deepened or changed in light of the answers you have heard. Remember that even though we decided as a people to follow the practice of Hillel, we always preserved the teaching of Shammai, even claiming that his ruling would be followed in the world to come. Asking this question will help us to take our own measure of the world in which we live and celebrate our ability to make it better.



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*"...Don't let the light  
go out. It's lasted for  
so many years..."*

*Light One Candle*  
by Peter Yarrow

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## CLAL- The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership

CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership was founded in 1974. A leadership training institute, think tank and resource center, CLAL is dedicated to enhancing Jewish life to ensure that it is spiritually vibrant and engaged with the intellectual and ethical challenges of the wider world. CLAL's diverse faculty links Jewish texts and intellectual traditions with cutting-edge contemporary scholarship, and provides the innovative tools, materials, and resources to help meet the needs of the next generation. As a partner in leadership and community development, CLAL's unique approach, connecting Jewish tradition with modern experience, addresses the challenges individuals, families and institutions face. Working with established and emerging leaders, rabbis and professionals, CLAL has earned a reputation for compelling programs that embody the principles of pluralism and build vital North American Jewish communities.

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Strong Communities.  
One People.*