

Hanukkah Candle Lighting Dedications for 2018/5779: Shining Light on the Darkness, Committing to Be the Light

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Night 1: Let us light the first candle for the Jewish community of Pittsburgh, which is still reeling from the horrific tragedy of just one month ago. As our tradition asks us to “publicize the miracle” of Hanukkah (*pirsum ha-nes*), we commit to continuing the chain of our tradition publicly and proudly, even and especially in the face of growing and increasingly manifested anti-Semitism. We are here to stay. May the community of Pittsburgh, along with Jews around the world, know *nekhamah* (comfort), *refuah* (healing) and *gevurah* (strength).

Night 2: Let us light a candle for the immigrant asylum seekers on the Caravan. These human beings—including mothers and babies and toddlers—are exercising their legal right to seek asylum only to be met by tear gas and violence perpetrated by our government and military. Let us recall the Jewish ancestors who were persecuted and who sought refuge through migration. May their courage and determination inspire us toward compassion and justice for those who seek a better life.

Night 3: Let us light a candle for the people of Puerto Rico. The news cycle has stopped reminding us that 3,000 Puerto Ricans—American citizens—died at the hands of Hurricane Maria, yet we promise not to forget. May the citizens of Puerto Rico rebuild their homes and their lives. May those in power, who could have spared many lives had they willed it, be held accountable, and may our hearts and minds continue to be with Puerto Rico.

Night 4: Let us light a candle for the victims of gun violence. Let us recall those lives lost in “random” acts of violence and remember that for many, gun violence is not “random,” rather a way of life, those whose playgrounds are war zones filled with the bullet shells. May we stay awake and vigilant until our country responds to this national crisis.

Night 5: Let us light a candle for the African-American men killed by police. This Hanukkah, we mourn the recent deaths of Jemel Roberson, a security guard who detained a shooting suspect who was then mistaken for the suspect and killed on the spot, and Emantic Bradford, a 21-year-old mistakenly shot by police in a mall in Alabama. We also remember Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Philando Castile and too many others to name. May we work toward a day when people of color do not fear for their lives or the lives of their children.

Night 6: Let us light a candle for the Rohingya people of Burma. We light this candle with AJWS, the Jewish Rohingya Justice Network and concerned Jews across the U.S. to unite in solidarity against the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people. May we share their stories, raise awareness and act for their sake.

Night 7: Let us light a candle for the members of the transgender community whose lives have been lost or are at risk because of their gender identity. May we honor the legacy of the (at least) 29 killed in 2018 based on their gender identity. May we teach our children to be who they were meant to be and that all God's children are deserving of love and dignity.

Night 8: Let us light a candle for those in our local community who go without food, must to choose between medication or housing, lack health insurance or do not have access to affordable housing. As Rabbi Israel Salanter taught, may the material needs of my neighbor become my spiritual responsibility.