

Light One Candle
Comments of Peretz President Ira Mintz
At Chanukah Celebration 2011

Light One Candle, a song written by Peter Yarrow of the folk group Peter, Paul and Mary, expresses for me my reason for being here, my reason for sending my children to this school, and my reason for being an active member of this community. Just as we repeat the same words each year at Passover, I like to spend a few minutes thinking about the words of this song each year before singing them.

*Light one candle for the Maccabee children
With thanks that their light didn't die*

The basis of the traditional celebration of Hanukkah is this story of the Maccabean victory. Hundreds of years later, the rabbis who wrote the Talmud added the story of the oil that lasted for eight days. And for hundreds of years since then, Jews throughout the world have celebrated the story of Hanukkah.

*Light one candle for the pain they endured
When their right to exist was denied*

The Greek king Antiochus tried to impose Greek culture and religion on the land of Judea where the Jews lived. He went too far and would no longer let the religious Jews practice their religion.

*Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice
Justice and freedom demand*

These Jews, led by Judah Maccabee fought a courageous struggle for national freedom and for religious freedom.

*But light one candle for the wisdom to know
When the peacemaker's time is at hand.*

But as with any time we fight to defend our rights, we must know when to stop. After the Maccabees took power, in a sense they continued to fight because they made rules that prevented other people from being able to practice their religions. Today is a day to remember that we must have the wisdom to know when it is time to make peace, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Israel, in Palestine.

*Light one candle for the strength that we need
To never become our own foe*

We must always have a clear vision and purpose so that the way we act doesn't defeat our goals. How we achieve our goals is often as important as whether we achieve our goals.

*Light one candle for those who are suffering
Pain we learned so long ago*

We were slaves in the land of Egypt. We were oppressed by King Antiochus. If we don't forget our pain, perhaps we will have the wisdom to always be sensitive to other peoples' pain.

*Light one candle for all we believe in
That anger not tear us apart*

Our values and our ethics point us in the direction of peace and justice. Don't let our anger at injustice and our impatience with those who may not share our view ever divide us. Let justice, not anger, be our driving force.

*Light one candle to bind us together
With peace as the song in our hearts*

We all need peace. Peace in the world, peace in our country, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts.

*What is the memory that's valued so highly
That we keep it alive in that flame?*

Why are we here today? Why do we want to instill Jewish values in our children? What is it that we think is so important?

*What's the commitment to those who have died
That we cry out they've not died in vain?*

So many Jews have died simply because they believed in freedom; or because they believed in justice; because they believed in civil rights; in human rights; or simply because they were Jews.

*We have come this far always believing
That justice would somehow prevail*

Our vision is of a shenere un bessere velt. a more beautiful and better world. A world where there is justice for all

*This is the burden, this is the promise
This is why we will not fail.*

To commit oneself to care about others, and to take on the responsibility to tikkun olam, to repair the world, to work for justice for everyone, is a tremendous burden. But I believe it is the promise our ancestors made to us and the promise we must make to each other and to our children. It is the reason why we cannot fail. So much has come before us. This holiday of religious freedom is just one part of that legacy. Our burden is great, but we can rejoice in the task. This is a community I am proud to be part of. A community that I believe won't let the light go out.