

The Hanukkah lights are fundamentally useless. Not in the sense of pointless, but in the sense that, explicitly, we are instructed that part of the mitzvah of Hanukkah is that we not derive any utilitarian benefit from them, whether using them to light other flames, or melt the bottoms of other candles, heat anything or see by them. That is what we affirm when we say the Hanerot hallelu prayer, the lines immediately after what we sang earlier this evening: “*Hanerot halalu kodesh heim*” – “These candles are holy” and continues, “and we are not free to use them, but only to see them...”

This suggests an interesting definition of holy: As Rabbi David Seidenberg has written: “It is not the light from the flames, but our way of seeing them, that needs to be pure. Seeing becomes an act of grace and a gift we give, instead of a step towards what we can take.” We treat something as holy when we are able to resist the temptation to put it to our use.

So why is it okay that we see by the light of the Hanukkiyah? Because we have the shamash, the helper candle, that is not one of the holy lights, set apart from the others.

Keeping the candles holy is why we have the *shamash*. Reading *Hanerot Halalu*, or *Maoz Tzur*, or spinning a dreidl by the light of the menorah is using the light to see something. So we imagine we are using the light from the *shamash* to read by, not the light of the other flames. The holy lights, the lights of the Hanukkiyah, are supposed to be essentially superfluous, at least in a utilitarian sense.

Hanukkah reminds us that to see without needing to classify and plan use is the holiest kind of seeing. Hanukkah reminds us that we must take time for what is beautiful, not only what is useful. Hanukkah reminds us to try to slow down and see each other as we see the candles – in the wholeness of our beauty, not for what we might do for each other, what we might give, but in the wholeness of our light.

In the spirit of basking in the beauty, we turn to the song sheet to continue to be in a space of superfluous, beautiful joy together.