

Shine a Light of Hope for Children's Health Care

This Chanukah resource is offered as a way, during the eight days of Chanukah, to deepen your reflection on the needs of our nation's more than 8 million children without health coverage and to shine a light on the ways that you can make a difference to brighten the lives of children by working for health care that is affordable, accessible, and comprehensive. In addition to the traditional prayers (immediately below) that are said each night as you light the chanukiyot, for each day of Chanukah we offer an additional prayer, a question to discuss with your family or on which to reflect, and a suggestion for a mitzvah. May this celebration be a time of looking anew for God's wondrous deeds in our lives and of working with the determination of the Maccabees to resist against daunting odds to ensure that the promises made from generation to generation are faithfully kept, so that every child may have the gift of life, be sustained, and enjoy the fullness of this season and many more to come.

Every night:

Light the *Shamash*—the helper candle—first, using it to kindle the rest of the Chanukah lights from left to right. (Candles are placed in the chanukiyot from right to left.) Say or sing:

ברוך אתה ייִהוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם קָדוֹשׁ בָּמְצֻתָּיו וְצַדָּקוֹתָיו לְהַדְלִיק
נֵר שֶׂל חֲנֹכָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the Chanukah lights.

ברוך אתה ייִהוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבּוֹתֵינוּ וְאַמּוֹתֵינוּ
בִּימִים הָמִם בָּזְמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, she-asah nisim laavoteinu v'imoteinu bayamim hahaeim baz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who performed wondrous deeds for our ancestors in days of old at this season.

Day 1:

(Sung the first night only)

ברוך אתה ייִהוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁהַחִינָנוּ וּקְיַמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזַמָּן הַזֶּה.

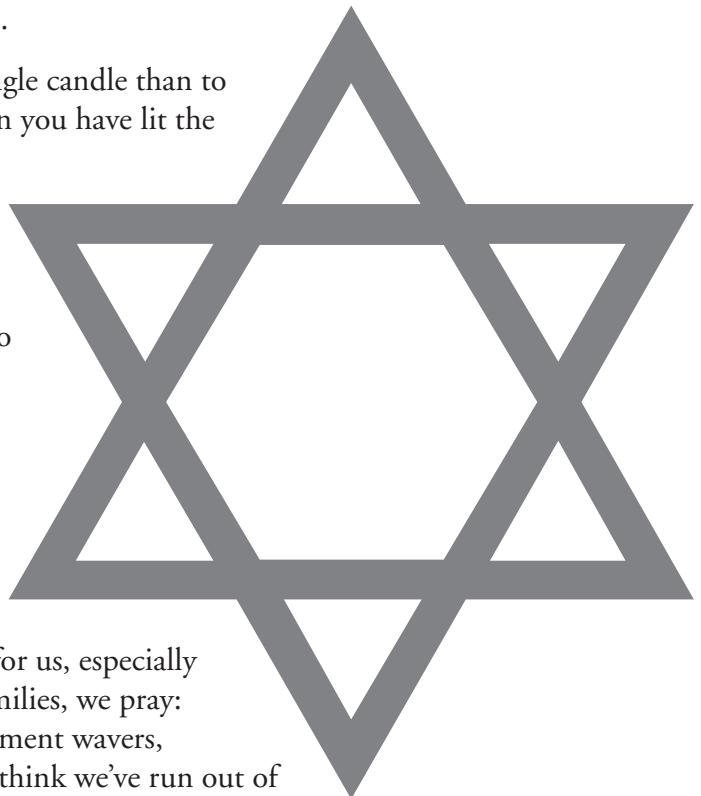
Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

Pray: On this first night of Chanukah, we remember our nation's more than 8 million children without health coverage for whom life is a tenuous gift, who don't have the health care they need to sustain strong and healthy bodies, whose families wonder how they will make it through this season. Bless us that we may in turn be a blessing to them.

Discuss: A familiar proverb says, "It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness." On this first night of Chanukah when you have lit the first candle, reflect on what single action you can take, no matter how small it may seem to you, to help dispel the darkness that enshrouds our nation's more than 8 million uninsured children.

Mitzvah: Take the action you discussed above. Promise to support each other in making a difference for children. Share copies of this Chanukah resource with others.



Day 2:

Pray: Sovereign of all, that we may fulfill your purposes for us, especially to bring justice to our nation's uninsured children and families, we pray: When our hope diminishes, restore it. When our commitment wavers, strengthen it. When our energy flags, renew it. When we think we've run out of resources and options, show us. When we think we know how things will turn out, surprise us anew with your wondrous power to sustain this and every generation.

Discuss: The oil in the temple was only enough to last for one day—although miraculously it lasted longer. Imagine the desperation the Maccabees felt at the start of the second day when they imagined the oil was about to run out. Imagine the desperation a parent of an uninsured child feels when she has run out of resources and options. Now, imagine the feeling when you discover you will be sustained.

Mitzvah: Time is running out to make sure that health reform legislation passes that will ensure all children are better off—not worse off—as a result. Visit the Children's Defense Fund web site at www.childrensdefense.org for a sample message to send to your Senators. Please send it tonight.

Day 3:

Pray: Eternal our God, help us to do the things that you desire, especially to free those oppressed by illness and injury and insecurity because they lack health coverage, mindful of your promise to us that when we undo the yoke that others bear, "then shall your light burst through like the dawn and your healing spring up quickly." (*Is. 58:8a, JPS*)

Discuss: We are encouraged to place the *Chanukiyot* in the windows of our homes so that not only we but also others will behold their light. What can you do to make others aware of the needs of our nation's uninsured children and the opportunity to bring the light of health coverage to them? Who can you tell?

Mitzvah: Call or email a friend or member of your extended family and ask them to contact their Senators and urge them to ensure children health coverage that is affordable, accessible, and comprehensive.

Day 4:

Pray: Adonai, You, in Your great mercy, stood by our ancestors in their time of distress, You championed their cause, defended their rights, and avenged their injustice. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few.... Help us to be worthy inheritors of this tradition as we stand with children and families in their time of distress, as we defend their right to health care, and we work for justice on behalf of those considered weak, who feel so small in the face of the many arrayed against them. We give thanks and praise to Your great Name. (Based on the *Al Ha-ni-sim*)

Discuss: In The First Book of the Maccabees we read: “*But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said unto Judah: ‘What? Shall we be able, being a small company, to fight against so great and strong a multitude?....’ And Judah said: ‘It is an easy thing for many to be shut up in the hands of a few, and there is no difference in the sight of Heaven to save by many or by few; for victory in battle standeth not in the multitude of an host, but strength is from Heaven. They come unto us in fullness of insolence and lawlessness, to destroy us and our wives and our children, for to spoil us; but we fight for our lives and our laws. And He Himself will discomfit them before our face; but as for you, be yet not afraid of them.’*” How can the Maccabees' victory against overwhelming odds encourage us in the work to ensure successful health reform for our children? What message or lesson do you take from this account?

Mitzvah: Who do you know who has given up on the possibility of securing health reform for all children? Get in touch with them and encourage them not to give up hope but to keep up the effort. Direct them to the Children's Defense Fund web site for quick and simple actions they can take that will really make a difference.

Day 5:

Pray: Eternal our God, you have been our Helper in every age, faithful from generation to generation. Guide me to be a helper to those in greatest need, especially at this time when my voice and actions can make such a great difference for children without health care. Ignite my energy and imagination that I may help others to make a difference for children.

Discuss: The candles in a *chanukiyot* cannot be lit without the *shamash*, the helper candle. What can you do as a *shamash* to help ignite the passionate concern and determination to make a difference in others?

Mitzvah: Make a sign about health reform and place it in your window above the *chanukiyot*, make a sign to place in your yard, or send a “tweet” or an email to your address list, or post something on your blog, social networking page, or web site to get others involved in ensuring health coverage for children.

Day 6:

Pray:

**ברוך אתה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְשָׁנוּ
בְּמַצּוֹתֵינוּ וּלְמִדְינֵנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל צְדָקָה.**

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Haolam, Asher Kidshanu B'mitzvotav, V'lamdeinu L'Hadlik Ner Shel Tzedakah.

Blessed are You, Eternal, our God, who makes us holy through the performance of Mitzvot and inspires us to light the Candle of Righteousness.

“As we light this ‘Ner Shel Tzedakah’ tonight, we pray that its light will shine into the dark corners of our world, bringing relief to those suffering from the indignity and pain that accompany poverty. May our act of giving inspire others to join with us in the fight against the scourge of hunger, homelessness, need and want. Together, let us raise our voices to cry out for justice, and may that clarion call burst through the night’s silence and declare that change must come.” (From The Union of Reform Judaism, www.urj.org/socialaction/issues/poverty/ner_shel_tzedakah)

Discuss: *Ner Shel Tzedakah* (“Candle of Righteousness”) is a project during which some Jewish families are devoting the sixth night of Chanukah to learning about people in poverty. Medical debt is a leading cause of personal bankruptcy.

Mitzvah: Uninsured families may be paying off so much debt that there is little or nothing left for holiday gifts, making a difficult time even sadder. Through your synagogue or a community agency, donate a gift to a child in an impoverished family. Or, donate to an organization advocating on behalf of children in poverty the amount that you would have spent on gifts for this sixth night of Chanukah.

Day 7:

Pray: Eternal our God, you have told us what you require of us, only this: to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. Help us to fulfill your requirements as we seek justice for uninsured children, have hearts of compassion for their suffering, and seek to respond as you would have us.

Discuss: One out of every ten children is uninsured. Look at the candles you have lit with your shamash. Imagine the light of one of every ten children being dimmed or snuffed out by illness, injury or death because they lack health coverage. Name ten children who you know. Imagine one of them lacking health care. How does that make you feel?

Mitzvah: Call or email someone you know whose child is having a difficult time because of poor health. Ask what you can do to help. Draw on your feelings of connection and concern to that child and family to keep you going as you work on behalf of our nation’s one in ten children without health coverage. Or, write a letter to the editor of your local paper about the urgent need for child health reform that is affordable, accessible, and comprehensive.

 **DAY 8:**

Pray: At this start of Shabbat, offer the traditional blessing for children. In addition to blessing your own children (if you have them) as you place your hands upon their heads, offer this blessing on behalf of all children, especially those who lack health care or have other urgent needs:

Blessing for Boys

ישמך אלהים
בכפירים וכמנשה.

*Y'simcha Elohim
k'Efrayim v'che-Menasheh*

May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe.

Blessing for Girls

ישמך אלהים
בשרה, רבקה, רחל ולאה.

*Y'simeich Elohim
k'Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, v'Leah.*

May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

Blessing for All Children:

יברכך יהוה וישמרך.
יאר יהוה פניו אליך ויחנך.
ישא יהוה פניו אליך ונישם לך שלום.

*Y'varechecha Adonai V'yish'm'recha.
Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka.
Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem l'cha shalom.*

May God bless you and guard you.

May the light of God shine upon you, and may God be gracious to you.

May the presence of God be with you and give you peace.

Discuss: More than 8 million children are uninsured. Imagine each candle representing one million children. What are the ways that good health care helps children shine?

Mitzvah: As you gather with others, at the Shabbat table or at shul, share your concern for children without health coverage and your determination to ensure children health coverage that is accessible, affordable, and comprehensive. Find others who will join you in working for this over the coming days, so that all children may know the life-giving miracle of health coverage. Talk to your Rabbi, synagogue president, and social action committee leadership about what your synagogue can do. Call for a meeting with your member of Congress over the holiday recess.

Prepared by Shannon Daley-Harris