

Chanukah

CELEBRATING THE WORLD'S FIRST RECORDED NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE
evening of December 3 through December 10, 1999

• The Ritual •

Each night of Chanukah we light candles, starting with the shamash (used to light the others) and one candle, and then adding one additional candle each night for a total of eight nights. The tradition is to sing, dance, and rejoice in our liberation and our freedom.

THE TRADITIONAL BLESSINGS OVER THE CANDLES:

• All nights: •

1. Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu, lehadeek ner, shel chanukah.

(Blessed are you, the Force that rules all of existence, who sanctifies us by giving us a way of life directed by holy commandments and commanded us to light the lights of Chanukah.)

2. Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, she'asah nisim la'avoteynu, bayamim hahem, bazman hazeh.

(Blessed are you, the Force that rules the universe, who made possible miracles for our ancestors, in those days, and also makes the same possible for us in our own times.)

• Add on the first night: •

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, she-hechyanu, vekee-imanu, veheeg-iyanu, lazman hazeh.

(Blessed are you, the Force that rules the universe, who has kept us in life, made us flourish, and made it possible for us to reach this happy occasion.)

• The Story •

(The non-mythologized version you may never have heard)

When King Cyrus of Persia allowed the remnants of the ancient tribes of Judah and Benjamin to return from the exile imposed upon them by Babylonian conquerors in the seventh century before the common era (BCE), they formed the kingdom of Judea. As part of the Persian Empire, and later as part of the empire of Alexander the Great, Judea had relative autonomy to shape its own internal religious life.

When Alexander died at the end of the fourth century BCE, his empire split into three rival factions, and Judea was caught between two of them: the Seleucids, centered in Syria, and the Ptolemies, centered in Egypt. For the next hundred-fifty years, these two kingdoms warred and each sought to incorporate Judea as part of its empire.

Although the battle was largely military, there was an important ideological dimension. Alexander had introduced the Jews to Hellenistic Greek culture—its philosophy, its literature, and its impressive technology and power. Forcibly dragged into the larger Mediterranean world, many Jews

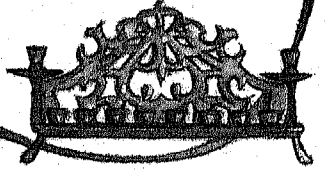
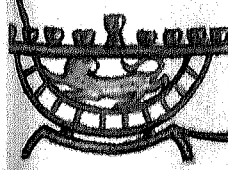
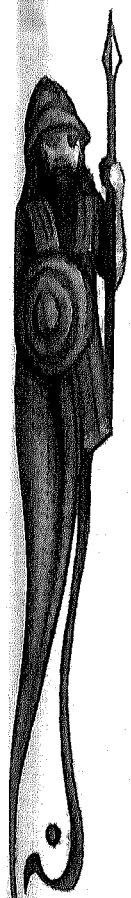
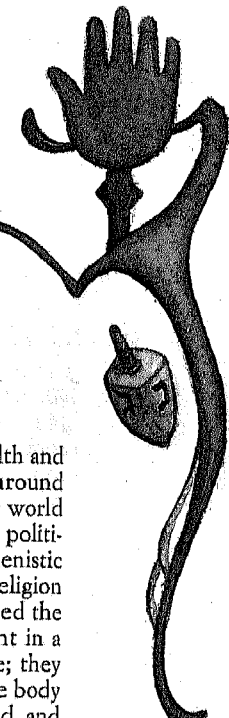
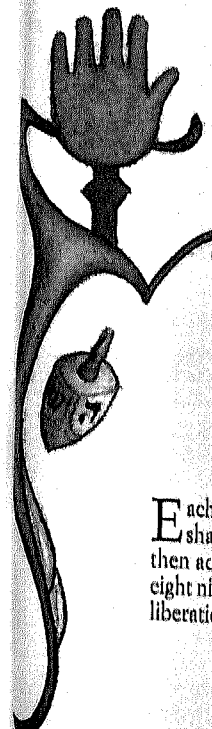
could see that "the real world" was dominated by wealth and power. Some Jews, primarily those who lived in and around the larger cities, saw an opportunity to join this larger world by becoming merchants and traders, or by establishing political and economic relationships with others in the Hellenistic empire. It was apparent to these Jews that their tribal religion would have little meaning to those who had conquered the world. The religion of their fathers seemed irrelevant in a world reshaped by the "modern" realities of science; they were drawn by the allure of a society that worshiped the body and saw reality in terms of what could be tasted, touched, and directly experienced by the senses.

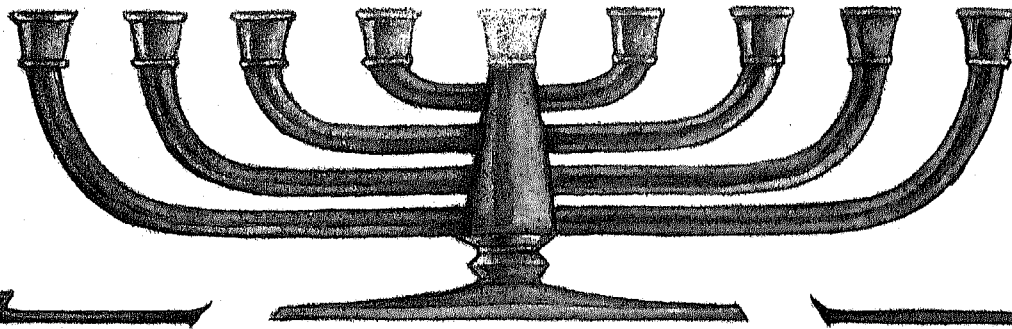
These Jewish Hellenizers saw no point in resisting Greek rule. Their goal was to live in peace with the powers that ran the world. They could benefit from the connection to the expanding trade of the Hellenistic world. On the other hand, the vast majority of the Jewish people were small, independent farmers, who lived on the land and brought its produce to Jerusalem three times each year to celebrate their hard-won freedom from slavery. They bore the brunt of the oppressive taxes imposed first by the Greeks, and then, alternately, by Seleucids and Ptolemies. These Jews resented foreign rule and detested the city-dwelling elites who seemed to be culling favor with the Hellenistic conquerors, imitating their ways, abandoning the religion of the past, and becoming worshippers at the shrine of political and cultural "reality."

Judea's plight worsened considerably in the early part of the second century with the ascendance to the throne of the Seleucid Antiochus IV. Claiming that he wanted to "protect" Judea from the Ptolemies, Antiochus invaded Judea and marched toward Egypt, where his armies were defeated. He turned back to Judea and attempted to impose Hellenistic culture by force. He ordered the Temple in Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Greek gods and forbade the practice of circumcision, kashrut, and observance of the Sabbath.

To the already assimilated elites of the city, the new rules were insensitive, but did not constitute a major crisis. Perhaps Antiochus was a boor, but the culture he represented was "happening," while the Jewish religion he forbade was a remnant of the past.

Yet many of the people in the countryside, burdened by Seleucid taxes that expropriated more of their wealth, found the Hellenists' narcissistic fascination with their own power repugnant. The essence of their now-banned religion was its insistence that there was a single God governing the universe who made possible freedom from oppression. It was in the name of that God that they joined a rebellion against the Seleucids under the leadership of a country priest named Mattathias and his five sons (of whom Judah became the most famous, known as "the hammer" or Maccabee).





These Maccabees, as they came to be known, rejected the notion, shared by their contemporary Jewish establishment, that it would be pointless to fight, that one would do best by appeasing the ruling class, learning their language and ways, and accepting their system of oppression. The Maccabees understood Judaism as teaching that "the spirit of the people was greater than the man's technology," or, in traditional Jewish terms, "not by power, and not by might, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

To fight against superior military force was totally illogical and unrealistic from the Hellenizers' standpoint. But the Maccabees rejected assessments of "realism" that derived from the framework imposed by the imperialists, and drew instead upon the Jewish religion and the stubborn spirit of a people who had come to believe that every human being was created in the divine image, hence had a right to be treated with respect and decency. These were people who could not submit to the rule of the imperialist, and whose religion taught them that they need not, because the central Power of the universe was a power that rejected the reality of oppression. Their Torah told the tale of their origins in a slave rebellion against another imperialist power thought to be invincible—Egypt of the Pharaohs.

Armed with these stories, the Maccabees and their followers used guerrilla tactics to win the first national liberation struggle in recorded history. In 165 BCE they retook Jerusalem, purified and rededicated the Temple (*chanukah* means dedication), and rekindled the eternal light that was to glow therein. The fighting continued many years more, but eventually the Maccabees and their descendants (called Hashmona'im) set up an independent Jewish state.

Unfortunately, that state degenerated as the Hashmona'im tried to become a nation like all other nations, adopting the same perversions of state power that other nations adopted, and becoming "realistic" and hence spiritually and morally corrupt.

The rabbis who shaped rabbinic Judaism, depressed at the defeat of Jewish rebellions against Rome and, aware of the moral degeneration of the Hashmona'im, tried, by focusing on a story about a miracle of a pot of oil that kept the Chanukah lights burning for eight nights, to downplay Chanukah's importance and reframe it into a minor "religious" event. But the Jewish people intuitively recognized that something miraculous had happened. The miracle was this: a critical mass of people had come to recognize that there was a Force in the world that made possible the transformation of what is to what ought to be (the Force that we call God). That recognition, when it takes hold of large numbers of people, becomes a manifestation of God's presence, and in that presence "the power of the people," suffused with divine energy, becomes greater than all the technology and manipulations of the most sophisticated forms of oppression.

Some right-wing Zionists today, believing in military power as the primary way to create security for Israel, have turned might into their god. They believe they are being "realistic" to think that peace and reconciliation are impossible, and that

Jewish survival depends on strength. Yet this way of thinking is Hellenism—the validation of that which is and the inability to commit to that which ought to be. We affirm a different vision of strength. Our survival and the survival of the entire planet, depend on our ability to create a world of love and caring, a world of peace and justice, a world in which every human being is treated as an embodiment of the spirit of God. The possibility of building such a world was precisely what Hellenism denied, and precisely what we affirm when we take God seriously.

• Making It Real •

In the contemporary world, Jews have turned Chanukah into a Christmas clone, trying to give their children and each other gifts to approximate the gift-giving frenzy that has been particularly promoted by the capitalist market. We need to find creative ways to give of our talents, our love and creativity—but if we can't resist the pressure of the market to equate love with buying materials goods, we undermine the spiritual message of Chanukah: that the world as constituted, with all its distortions, and with all of its incredible power to shape our sense of need and desire, can nevertheless be fundamentally changed, healed, transformed and rededicated to higher spiritual purpose.

What follows is a spiritual exercise that you can try with your family as a way to give this message more immediacy in our lives.

Try these exercises and you will see how Chanukah can have a different focus than a mere fixation on who has received the best presents.

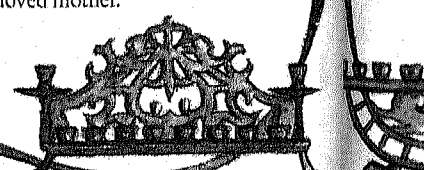
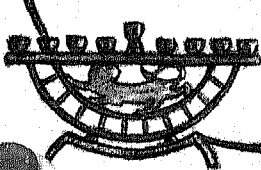
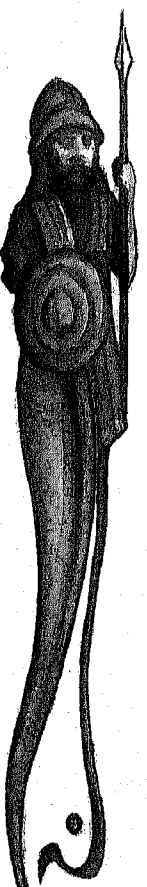
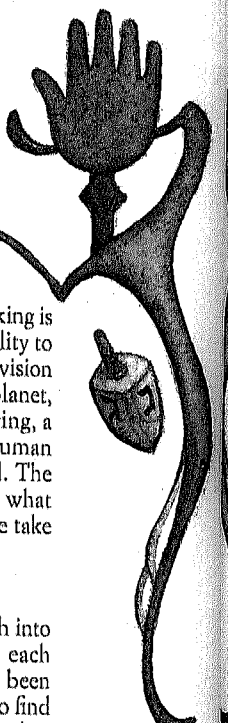
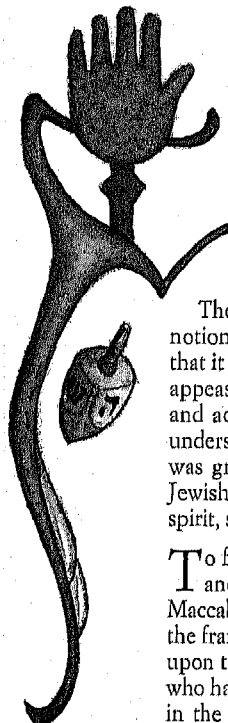
EACH EVENING, pick a theme in which you allow yourself to imagine how things could be if they were the way they ought to be. Then tell in detail what would have to happen in order for your vision to be made real, and how you might participate in some way in its actualization. Everyone in the family, TIKKUN discussion group, circle of friends, or any other group observing the ritual will share his or her answer.

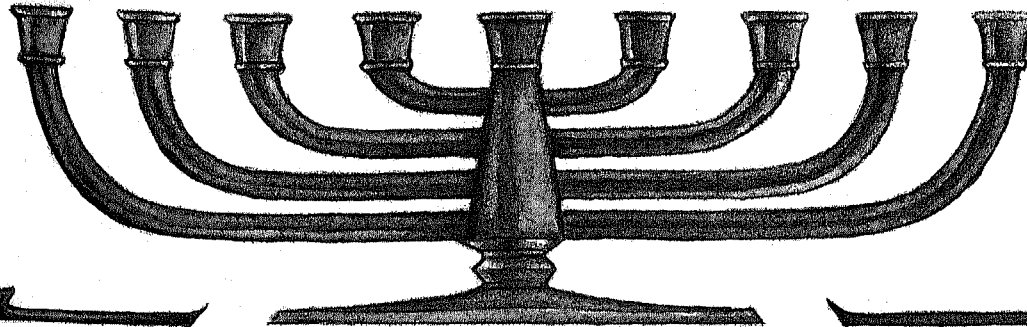
For example, imagine changes in your:

1. world of work
2. relationship with your parents
3. Jewish community
4. your neighborhood and relationship with neighbors
5. society
6. American politics
7. social change movements
8. larger world

Share your vision with others and listen, without criticizing, to theirs. Then rejoice and sing songs of celebration and of struggle—both Chanukah songs, and songs from other liberation struggles around the world.

Please reproduce this and encourage friends to use it as a guide for constructing their own meaningful Chanukah observance. And urge them to subscribe to TIKKUN magazine (send \$29 to TIKKUN, P.O. Box 460926, Escondido, CA 92046.) Written by Michael Lerner, editor of TIKKUN, in memory of his beloved mother.





The Peaceful Maccabee

A CEREMONY FOR THE EIGHT NIGHTS OF CHANUKAH

by Rabbi Leah Novick

On Chanukah we usually honor the Maccabees, brave men who fought with the sword against injustice. This year, we choose also to honor those courageous women who, throughout our history, have challenged injustice—not with the sword, but with word and deed. Each night, choose one of the women described below—a woman from our past—or choose a woman you know, a friend or relative, who has made a difference in the life of the community; read or tell her story. After each reading, everyone listening should repeat the woman's name and say, "Zichronah Livrachah, May her memory be a blessing." Then say the blessings over the Chanukiah and light the first candle of that night in her memory. You may also perform the entire ritual on the eighth night, which falls this year on Rosh Chodesh Tevet, "the New Moon of the Daughters." May the light of these women's lives continue to illuminate us.

Shamash:

Shlom Zion ha Malkah (Salome Alexandra)

Queen of Israel, first century BCE.

This ritual is devoted to one of the last Hasmonean rulers, "Shlom Zion ha Malkah," who brought peace and prosperity to Israel after the turbulent years associated with the later Maccabean dynasty. Shlom Zion (as the Talmud refers to her) or Salome Alexandra was married to Judah Aristobolus, the first Hasmonean to take the title of king and high priest in 104 BCE.

Her husband died of a fatal illness before she had any children, leading to a levirate marriage with the successor, his twenty-two-year-old brother, Alexander Jannai, with whom she had two sons. Alexander Jannai was associated with the upper-class Sadducees and persecuted the Pharisees, whom Shlom Zion supported. During Alexander Jannai's reign (considered tyrannical by historians), the head of the religious parliament, Rabbi Shimon Ben Shetach, was forced into exile.

However, on his deathbed, Alexander Jannai bequeathed the kingdom to Shlom Zion. She assumed the monarchy at age sixty-four and reinstated Rabbi Shimon and the Sanhedrin, an act which led to many educational and religious reforms, including the development of the marital contract, the *ketubah*.

The Talmud praises her wisdom and piety, indicating an almost messianic quality to the nine years she was in power: a time of abundance, justice, and peace. Historians cite her role in foreign policy; some credit her with successfully maintaining the kingdom against the surrounding empires through clever diplomacy.

Candle One:

Namnah "Bat ha Levi" of Baghdad

Eleventh-century Persian scholar.

A beautiful and wise teacher, Namnah lectured to rabbinical students in the Yeshivah of her father, Rabbi Shmuel Ben Eli, the enlightened eleventh-century Gaon of Baghdad.

Rabbi Petachiah of Regensburg described Namnah (also called Bat ha Levi) as follows:

"She is an expert in Scripture and Talmud. She gives instruction in scripture to young men through a window. She herself is within the building; whilst the disciples are below outside and do not see her."

Stories about Bat ha Levi say that her fiancé, a scholar

named Azariah, died before their wedding—considered a bad omen in those days. Soon after, she and her father are said to have passed away on the same day! Their graves were regarded as sacred by Persian Jews, who made pilgrimages to the site.

Candle Two:

Dulcie of Worms

Twelfth-century communal leader (martyred 22nd Kislev 1196).

Dulcie of Worms was part of a distinguished family of scholarly Franco-German Jews associated with the academies of higher learning in the cities of Worms, Mayence, and Speier. She was the great-granddaughter of the renowned French commentator "Rashi" (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040–1105).

In a poem, Dulcie's husband, the renowned Rabbi Eliezer Ben Yehudah of Worms, describes her religious devotion as well as her work in leading women's prayers in the synagogue and teaching women in various cities. He tells us that she supported his scholarly work with her business activities, provided room and board for his students, and also escorted brides, sewed Torah scrolls, made candles for the synagogue, etc.

Rebbitzin Dulcie also instructed her two daughters, named Belet and Chana. Both of the girls and Rebbitzin Dulcie were brutally murdered in 1196, between the second and third crusades, when two Soldiers of the Cross broke into their house. Despite her heroic efforts to save them, both girls were killed. Her son was wounded in the same incident and later died.

Candle Three:

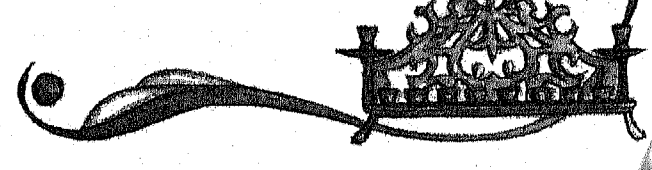
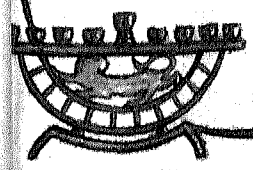
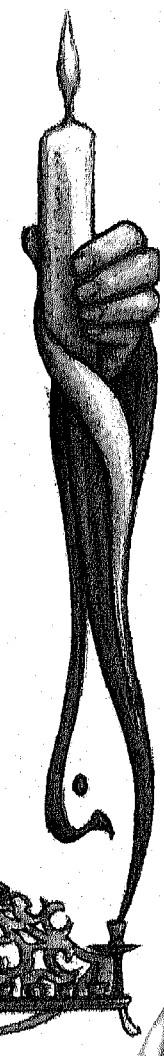
Rebbitzin Mizrachi

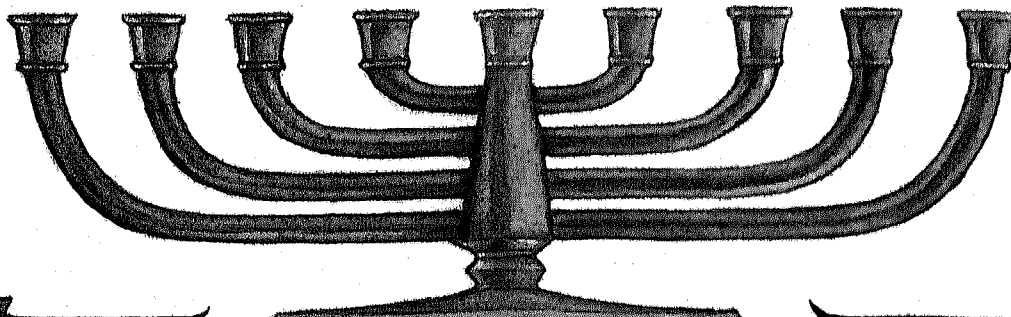
Sixteenth-century Kurdistan scholar and administrator.

In Amadiyah, Kurdistan, where women were held in high esteem and Jews traced their origins to the Assyrian exile, a sixteenth-century scholar offered his learned daughter, an only child, in marriage to Rabbi Jacob Mizrachi. The contract contained the stipulation that she never be troubled with housework.

The new "Rebbitzin" Mizrachi (who is referred to by some authors as Osnath Barazani, the daughter of poet Samuel Barazani) worked as a teacher in her husband's yeshivah and assumed its administration, freeing her husband to pursue his studies. Unfortunately, his death left her with two young children and a school with limited funds.

She maintained the school, with her son, for many years





despite financial difficulties. In fact, her poverty has made us richer: her fundraising appeals, drafted in poetic Hebrew, have survived to document her learning, humility, and courage in the face of adversity.

**Candle Four:
Sarah Bat Tovim**

Early-eighteenth-century eastern European liturgist.

Sarah Bat Tovim is usually identified as a *firzogerin* (foresayer) who led and interpreted the prayers in the women's section of the synagogue. She wrote special prayers for women, known as *techinot*, which were usually drafted in Yiddish.

Sarah compiled religious pamphlets for women which included language to accompany the female mitzvot (challah, candles, and *mikvah*) and prayers for Rosh Chodesh (new moon) and High Holidays. The two booklets attributed to her are *Sheker ha Chen* (*Beauty is Deceptive*) and *Shlosba Shearim* (*Three Gates*).

The style of the early drafters of women's *techinot* was often emulated by male writers, eager to enter the *techinah* market. For that reason scholars debate Sarah Bat Tovim's historical authenticity. Whether she is archetypal or biologically real, she represents an early genre of female religious writer and teacher.

**Candle Five:
Soreh Bezalel**

Late-eighteenth-century woman of valor.

The story of Soreh Bezalel reflects the kind of faith and courage we associate with the tales of Ruth and Queen Esther. As a beautiful young woman in Germany, she proposed to an elderly teacher, Reb Yoseph, for whom she had great respect. The "Melamed" was amazed and agreed only after being convinced that Soreh was endangered by the advances of the local nobleman, who had threatened to kidnap her when she rejected his proposals.

After their secret marriage and escape to southern Poland, Soreh gave birth to Yehudah Leib Ben Bazalel, who would become an important member of the Baal Shem's circle. Not long after the boy's birth, her husband died.

Soreh raised the boy by herself, guiding him toward involvement with Chasiduth. He was assigned by the Baal Shem Tov and later the Maggid of Mezerich to the ransoming of Jewish captives. The early Hasidim honored his mother by calling him Rabbi Leib Soreh's, after his mother.

**Candle Six:
Penina Moise**

Early-nineteenth-century Sephardic-American writer.

Penina Moise, a religious poet, was the first Jew to publish a book of poetry in the United States. An acknowledged contributor to the majority culture, she did so without diminishing her commitment to Jewish life and values. Her hymns, which she wrote for the congregation in her community of Charleston, South Carolina, were later compiled in Reform and Conservative hymnals.

Her Sephardic family emigrated from Alsace to the West Indies and from there to the American South. Once wealthy, they lost all their resources, and Penina's life became one of

hardship after the death of her father when she was twelve years old. This was also the year she began publishing her poems.

Clearly precocious in understanding and responsibility, she resented the fact that girls could not have a bar mitzvah and were denied more advanced Jewish education. She is also known to have scoffed at the traditional daily prayer "Thank God, I was not created a woman," indicating that contemporary feminism has deep roots.

A lifetime of financial hardship and prolific writing culminated in the loss of her eyesight during her later years. Though she lived a long, productive, and saintly life her epitaph reflects a sadness that is not uncommon among accomplished Jewish women whose energies were directed to caring for others:

*Lay no flowers on my grave
They are for those who live in the sun
And I have always lived in the shadow*

**Candle Seven:
Rachel Luzzato-Morpurgo**

Nineteenth-century Italian mystical poet.

Most acknowledge that Kabbalah as a mystic philosophy brought the Shechinah (female presence of God) into prominence in Jewish thinking. Yet despite its emphasis on the female sacred energy, the movement is associated by all as being an exclusively male domain. One of the few identified female kabbalistic scholars was Rachel Luzzato, a descendant of the Italian kabbalist Moses Chaim Luzzato.

Her family, who were quite prominent, settled in Trieste where she was schooled in Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and secular subjects. She became conversant with the Talmud as a teenager and later studied the Zohar. She began writing poetry at the age of eighteen and continued to do so during her marriage to Jacob Morpurgo, in which she bore four children.

Living under strained financial conditions she nevertheless continued her writing and correspondence with other scholars. Despite a demanding domestic life in which she carried out all the housework and child care for her family, she produced the numerous poems that comprise the book *Rachel's Harp*.

**Candle Eight:
Malkele Die Triskerin**

Nineteenth-century eastern European Hasidic rebbe.

The practice of receiving contributions from the affluent to care for less fortunate members of the community was common Hasidic practice. The women who shaped the development of this form of philanthropy included "Malkele die Triskerin"—Malka the Rebbe of Trisk—who is known for her sponsorship of public meals for the needy. She reputedly held court and received petitions twice a day, indicating a rigorous schedule of responding to her Hasidim.

Malka was the daughter of Reb Avrohom of Trisk, a descendant of the Chernobyler Rebbe. After her husband Efraim's death, Malka assumed the direction of the court and was known for her love of music. She organized a choir of great singers and enjoyed Hasidic singing and dancing after every festive meal.

