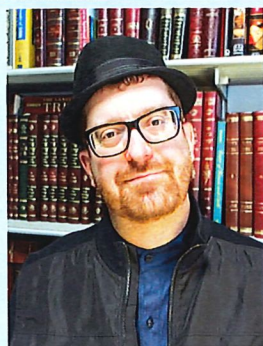


## Alighting the Gift and Gust of Hanukkah: A Story to Retell and Ritualize at Home Through the Generations

Rav Aubrey Glazer



Hanukkah is a holiday of light, but it is also a holiday of story-telling. Each candle we kindle is accompanied by memory, song, and narrative. In 1808, the Ukrainian Hasidic master Reb Nachman of Bratslav told his disciples a short but luminous tale known as "The Hanukkah Guest." It is a story of a mysterious visitor, a wondrous journey, and the discovery that

divine light can be found even in the simplest home.

Parents and grandparents can make this story a centerpiece of Hanukkah evenings, turning it into a ritual that deepens the holiday for children and adults alike. Below you'll find a retelling of the story, guidance for ritualizing it at home, and even a short script so children can act it out by candlelight.

### Retelling the Story

Here is the story in simple, family-friendly language:

*On the first night of Hanukkah, a simple Jew sat alone in his modest home, watching the candles flicker. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. A guest appeared - but not an ordinary guest. This visitor seemed to shine with a strange light.*

*The guest invited the man to come with him. Before he knew it, the man was lifted into the air, flying across the world. They landed in a hidden valley filled with wonders: trees that glowed, vessels made of Hebrew letters, fruits that sparkled with wisdom.*

*The guest showed him that the world is woven from God's words, that every letter and every vessel carries light. The man felt awe and joy, as though he had glimpsed the secret heart of creation.*

*Then, just as suddenly, he was back in his home. The Hanukkah candles still flickered on the table. But he was no longer the same. He had seen hidden light, and now he knew that even in his simple home, the divine presence was near.*

### Ritualizing the Story at Home

The power of Reb Nachman's tale is not only in hearing it once, but in weaving it into the rhythm of Hanukkah. Here are some ways to ritualize it:

- **Tell it by candlelight.** After lighting the menorah, dim the other lights and tell the story in your own words. The flickering flames will make the tale feel alive.
- **Make it participatory.** Invite children to act out the story. One can be the guest, another the householder, others the glowing trees or Hebrew letters.

- **Create a "hidden valley."** During the day, prepare Hebrew letters cut from paper or blocks. When you tell the story, bring them out as the magical vessels.
- **Connect to blessings.** After the story, ask each person to share one "hidden light" they saw that day - a kindness, a moment of beauty, a small miracle.

### A Simple Script for Family Play

Here is a short script you can use at home. It is written for children and adults to perform together, right after candle lighting.

**Characters:** Narrator, Householder, Guest, Trees/Letters (any number of children).

**Narrator:** Long ago, on Hanukkah night, a simple Jew sat in his home, watching the candles flicker.

**Householder:** (sits by candles, sighs) How quiet it is tonight. (Knock at the door.)

**Guest:** (enters, with a scarf or shawl to look mysterious) Shalom, friend. Will you come with me?

**Householder:** Who are you?

**Guest:** A guest of Hanukkah. Take my hand.

**Narrator:** Suddenly, the householder was lifted into the air. Together they flew across the world until they landed in a hidden valley.

**Trees/Letters:** (children hold up paper letters or wave arms like glowing trees) Welcome! We are the letters and trees of light.

**Guest:** Look - the world is woven of God's words. Every letter shines. Every vessel carries light.

**Householder:** (in awe) I never knew such beauty existed.

**Narrator:** And then, just as suddenly, he was back in his home. The Hanukkah candles still flickered.

**Householder:** (looking at candles) Now I see - even here, in my small home, the divine presence is near.

**Guest:** (bows, exits) Remember this light.

**Narrator:** And so, each Hanukkah, we too remember: the guest may come, the light may shine, and our homes can be filled with wonder.



### Take-aways:

Reb Nachman believed stories could awaken the soul. *The Hanukkah Guest* shows that the extraordinary can visit the ordinary, that light can be found in the simplest home. By retelling it each year, parents and grandparents give children a living connection to Jewish imagination and faith. Ritualizing the story strengthens family bonds. Children remember the warmth of sitting together, the thrill of acting out the tale, the glow of candles. Grandparents can add their own memories of Hanukkah, weaving family history into the story's fabric. Over time, the tale becomes part of the household's own tradition - a guest who returns each year.

Don't be fooled - Reb Nachman's story is not just about a magical guest; it's about learning to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. By retelling, dramatizing, and then discussing the story, families create a ritual that trains children - and adults - to notice hidden light in their own lives. That is the essence of Hanukkah: to kindle awareness, to override the twilight, and to carry divine presence into our homes and our marketplaces.

### APPENDIX:

**Short discussion guide** with questions following the play:

#### Discussion Guide: Talking About *The Hanukkah Guest*

After your family has acted out the story, gather around the menorah and invite everyone - children and adults - to share. These questions are simple enough for kids, but open-ended enough for deeper reflection:

##### 1. The Knock at the Door

- In the story, the guest arrives unexpectedly.
- Ask: "What does it feel like when someone surprises us with kindness? Have you ever had a 'guest' moment like that?"

##### 2. The Flight and the Valley

- The householder is lifted into a hidden valley of glowing letters and trees.
- Ask: "If you could fly anywhere with the Hanukkah Guest, where would you want to go? What would you hope to see?"

##### 3. The Letters of Light

- The guest shows that the world is made of God's words.
- Ask: "What words or songs make you feel strong or full of light? Can we share one together now?"

##### 4. The Return Home

- The man comes back to his simple house, but now he sees it differently.
- Ask: "What's something in our own home that feels ordinary but could be seen as special if we look again?"


##### 5. Our Own Hidden Lights

- Ask everyone: "What hidden light did you notice today - in yourself, in someone else, or in the world around you?"

### How to Ritualize the Discussion

- **Make it a nightly practice.** Each night of Hanukkah, after the play or story, choose one question to ask. Rotate so everyone gets to answer.
- **Keep a "Hidden Light Journal."** Write down the answers each night. By the end of Hanukkah, you'll have a family record of blessings and insights.
- **Link to the candles.** After the discussion, look at the menorah and say together: "These lights remind us that hidden light is always near."

## PrayerLab Shabbat



Are you curious about the choreography of prayer and ritual life in the synagogue services? Join us on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup> for the next installment of our interactive prayer lab service that will continue to explore key sections of the Amidah prayer. Bring your questions and curiosities.

**Saturday, December 13th**  
@ 9:30 am