Dear JVP supporters,

Hanukkah greetings from your newly-formed Rabbinical Council. Some of us are long-time Jewish Voice for Peace activists; others have just joined you in your good work. We thought we’d introduce ourselves by sending you a collection of Hanukkah gifts. So please accept, with our love and gratitude, this bundle of readings, blessings and more, which we have composed for all those who join with JVP to work for a just peace for Israelis and Palestinians. We hope these words will add a little connective spark to your Hanukkah or winter holiday season, wherever and however you will be celebrating. While the texts are specific to the traditions of Hanukkah, we believe they can be easily adapted to other traditions. May our light burn strong together --

Hag sameach/ Happy Holidays!

********

A blessing which could be said when lighting the menorah or Hanukkah candles:

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher yatzar or b'choshech, shir b'ma'avak v'kehila b'yimei milchama.

Blessed are you, Holy One, who creates light in darkness, song in struggle, and fellowship in times of war. (Alissa Wise, Rabbinic Cabinet co-chair)

********

A text to discuss:

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. And nations shall no longer study war." Isaiah 2:4

When the children of the Hasmonean high priest defeated the (ancient) Greeks, they entered the Temple and found eight iron spears. They stuck candles in the spears and kindled them for light.

From Megillat Ta'anit

Another message from the lineage of nonviolence: transforming instruments of violence into instruments of peace and illumination.

Tell a story from the history of nonviolence when a force more powerful (shmirat shalom/ keeping of the peace) overcame violence with acts of kindness, resistance or spiritual transformation. (Lynn Gottlieb)

********

Visit www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org for much more on the rabbinical council and Jewish Voice for Peace.
A Hanukkah teaching and call to action:

Why did the rabbis chose Zecharia 4:6 to be the Haftorah (additional scripture) reading for the Shabbat of Hanukkah? The biblical prophet Zecharia has a vision of a menorah fed by olive trees and asks an angel what it means. The rabbis highlighted the angel's response “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit – said the Lord of Hosts.” This was their way of opposing the valorization of military might. They had seen that zealotry in their own time had brought about the Destruction of the Second Temple, the loss of all political autonomy for Jews in the land of Israel and a great dispersal of Jews throughout the ancient world. They did not want any more disastrous rebellions. They did not want warriors to be the heroes of the Hanukkah story.

Instead, they wanted to remind Jews that there is a spiritual dimension to our lives. That the spirit of what they called God and what we might call goodness is fed by peaceful means.

By celebrating Hanukkah in both the spirit of the Maccabees’ courage to take a principled stand and by taking the rabbis’ message seriously – to inform our actions with the spirit of goodness, justice and peace, we can perhaps bring more light into the world, not just by lighting candles, but also by our actions on behalf of peace.

Here are eight suggestions:

1. **Join the Dec. 10 day of action that JVP is organizing.** Set a goal of getting at least eight people to sign the petition asking investment giant TIAA – CREF to divest from the Israeli occupation. This could easily be done by downloading the petition here and bringing it to any Hanukkah party you host or attend.
2. Dedicate at least one night of Hanukkah to discuss the issue of how to bring about justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.
3. **Donate to JVP instead of giving gifts at least one of the eight nights.**
4. Set a goal of asking 8 folks you know to join JVP.
5. Tell any people under 35 at your celebrations about Young, Jewish, and Proud, JVP’s youth leadership institute behind the protests at Prime Minister Netanyahu’s speech in New Orleans. Visit [http://youngjewishproud.org/](http://youngjewishproud.org/) where everyone can sign the declaration of support. Share this Hanukkah resource, and the JVP Rabbinical Council with a rabbi, cantor, or rabbinical or cantorial student you know. [http://tinyurl.com/jvprabbi](http://tinyurl.com/jvprabbi)
6. Screen a movie starring one of the 250 Hollywood and Broadway stars who signed the statement of support for the Israeli actors boycott of Ariel settlement and tell your guests about the campaign. You can read the statement and list of names here: [http://tinyurl.com/JVP Ariel Campaign](http://tinyurl.com/JVP Ariel Campaign)
8. Perhaps most importantly; do not despair! Light the menorah of your own heart and be willing to be seen as a small but significant flame in the darkness. (Rain Zohav)

Visit [www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org](http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org) for much more on the rabbinical council and Jewish Voice for Peace.
A reading dedicating a candle to Gaza:

On the morning of December 27, 2008, the sixth day of Hanukkah, Israel initiated a massive military assault against Gaza it called “Operation Cast Lead.” The name of the operation was a reference to a popular Hanukkah song written by Chaim Nachman Bialik: “My teacher gave a dreidel to me/A dreidel of cast lead.”

When Israel’s military actions ended on January 18, some 1,400 Palestinians had been killed. Among the dead were hundreds of unarmed civilians, including some 300 children.

Personal testimonies from the Gazans who lived through Israel’s military assault indicate tragedy beyond human comprehension. Here is one such account - taken from Amnesty International’s 2009 Report, “Operation Cast Lead: 22 Days of Death and Destruction”:

After Sabah’s house was shelled I ran over there. She was on fire and was holding her baby girl Shahed, who was completely burned. Her husband and some of the children were dead and others were burning. Ambulances could not come because the area was surrounded by the Israeli army. We put some of the injured in a wagon tied to the tractor to take them to hospital. My nephew Muhammad (Sabah’s son) picked up his wife, Ghada, who was burning all over her body, and I took her little girl, Farah, who was also on fire. My nephew Muhammad-Hikmat drove the tractor and my son Matar and my nephews ‘Omar and ‘Ali also came with us and took the body of baby Shahed and two other bodies. Sabah and the other wounded were put into a car; other relatives were also leaving. We drove toward the nearest hospital, Kamal ‘Adwan hospital. As we got near the school, on the way to al-‘Atarrah Square we saw Israeli soldiers and stopped, and suddenly, the soldiers shot at us. My son Matar and Muhammad-Hikmat were killed. The soldiers made us get out of the wagon. I ran away with ‘Ali and ‘Omar, who had also been shot and were injured. Muhammad, Ghada and Farah were allowed to go on but only on foot and the soldiers did not allow them to take the dead.

This Hanukkah, how will we Jews choose to commemorate a legacy such as this? Many of us will invariably retreat behind a veil of defensiveness – claiming Israel’s action was an appropriate, commensurate response to the threat posed by Hamas. Some of us might be troubled, but choose to look away from the hard and painful reality of this event. Still others will simply allow Gaza to become subsumed by the sheer volume of world crises that seem to call out for our attention.

This Hanukkah, however, we’d like to propose something else: light a candle for Gaza.

After all, this is the season in which we rededicate our determination to create light amidst the darkness. And quite frankly, the time is long overdue for the American Jewish community to shine

Visit www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org for much more on the rabbical council and Jewish Voice for Peace.
a light on the dark truth of “Operation Cast Lead.”

Indeed, we have been deeply complicit in keeping this truth away from the light of day. Two years later, Israel still refuses to conduct a credible, transparent and independent investigation of its actions in Gaza. The sole attempt at such an investigation, the Goldstone Report, was successfully blackballed and eventually quashed under a campaign spearheaded by Israel and the US.

On Hanukkah, the festival that enshrines the ongoing human struggle for freedom, the season that seeks to shed light on the dark places of our world, it is time for us stand in solidarity all who are oppressed – particularly when we, as American Jews, are party to that oppression. Please light a candle for Gaza. (Brant Rosen, Rabbinic Cabinet co-chair)

Visit www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org for much more on the rabbical council and Jewish Voice for Peace.