

There's a fascinating debate in the Talmud, in Tractate Shabbat, between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai.

The question that they're debating is to how to light the chanukiya, the menorah that we use for chanuka.

Shammai says that the candles should be lit in descending order.

So eight candles on the first night, seven candles on the second night, and so on, down to one candle on the eighth night. You count down, in order to truly understand what happened.

The House of Hillel says that you need to light the candles in ascending order. So it's one on the first night, two on the second night, and so on. They use a rule that says that you increase in matters of holiness, you don't reduce. In Hebrew it's "maalin be'kodesh v'ein moridin."

It's a basic halachic rule, a rule of Jewish law. We increase in matters of holiness. We don't reduce.

So Hillel won the argument, and that's how we light our chanukiyot. But think about why they won, and why we do it in this way.

They won because the debate wasn't really 'about' candles and in what order we're meant to light them. It wasn't about Chanuka.

The debate was about holiness.

It was about our lives and our purpose.

It was about us.

Just as the number of candles increases each of the eight days, and we get a brighter light each night, that's how we grow from day to day. If all we do is count down to something, we lose the sense of the infinite and the expanse of horizons.

Every day we strive to do a little more. As Jews, we never say, "I'm perfect. I've done all I can do. I have no more to achieve." We struggle, we aspire. We grow.

Many, many years ago, in school, I had to learn classical history. And many of us studied Plutarch.

There's a famous quotation ascribed to Plutarch. It says that Alexander the Great wept when he declared, at the ripe old age of 33, that there were no more worlds to conquer.

But that's because he wasn't Jewish.

Jews wouldn't have cried because there are no more worlds to conquer. We don't see horizons that way.

The Ancient Greeks loved the physical body. They loved easy living. They raised pleasure to the highest level. Not spirituality, not intellectual passion, not long-term growth. A Jewish Alexander the Great would see life differently.

Because in life we grow. We add candles. We don't stop because we think the task is finished. We keep going because we know that we're not going to finish the task ... but we're not free to desist from starting it.

In Pirkei Avot, the "Sayings of the Fathers," we read ...

We're taught that you don't have to finish the work, but you're also not free to NOT start it either. And this is Max.

He has never tired from starting the necessary tasks – and he completed so many of them, too.

When you meet someone new, especially in our line of Jewish communal service, the inevitable first question you ask is, 'what do you do?' But how do you answer that when you retire? It's simple. You do what Max is doing.

You carry on creating. You carry on inspiring.

You carry on with the tasks.

Because this, in many ways, is the least 'real' retirement you'll ever see. Max isn't going to keep still. I've known him for eight years and you all know, as I do, that he can't keep still.

He's going to be a consultant in Minneapolis and a consultant for our national federation system.

He's going to teach a seminar on nonprofit management. He's going to volunteer with us. He's going to travel.

Max's retirement plans are busier than most leaders' work plans.

He has many candles yet to light.

And those candles build on years of dedication, and leadership, and creativity.

Max has left a deep and lasting imprint on who we are in our federation and in our community.

All too often, we allow leaders to retire quietly without affording them the honor that is due them. We don't thank them enough, or loudly enough, or kindly enough.

But what a *zchut*, what a privilege, to be able to do that tonight.

Plutarch, by the way, the great Greek historian, never said that Alexander the Great wept because there were no more worlds to conquer.

It's what we always think he said, and what countless internet searches will tell you. But it's not true.

Alexander the Great wept for an entirely different reason.

He wept because there were so many worlds ... and because he was still so young he hadn't conquered any of them yet.

And that is Max. He has so many more worlds yet to conquer. He has so much more to achieve. And this is just his beginning.

And for that we should truly be grateful.

Thank you.