

Lighting Chanukah Candles

The Chanukah Menorah

A Chanukah menorah should have eight spots for candles — one for each night — and an extra ninth spot that is at a different elevation or separated from the other eight spots. This ninth spot is for the *shamash* (helper candle) that is used to light the others.

When to Light Chanukah Candles

Since the Jewish day begins in the evening, Chanukah candles are lit after sundown.

However on Friday, waiting until sundown would mean waiting until Shabbat has begun. *Halakhah* (Jewish law) prohibits lighting a fire on Shabbat. So on Friday, when Chanukah and Shabbat overlap, the Chanukah candles are lit first (at the very end of the afternoon) and then the Shabbat candles are lit, bringing in Shabbat. On Saturday night, the order is reversed: The havdalah candle is lit and havdalah performed, ending Shabbat, and then the Chanukah candles are lit.

Placing Your Chanukah Menorah

According to the Talmud, the reason for lighting Chanukah candles is to publicize the Chanukah miracle (which, to them, is the victory of the few (the Israelites) over the many (the Greeks)). That is why the preferred spot for the Chanukah menorah is by an outside-facing window.

Placing the Candles in the Chanukah Menorah

As you face the Chanukah menorah, place the candles from right to left (like writing Hebrew). That means on the first night, one candle should be placed in the far right spot (other than the spot for the shamash). On the second night, two candles should be placed in the first two far-right spots. On the third night, three candles should be placed in the first three far-right spots, and so on each night.

Lighting the Candles

The shamash is always lit first before the *b'rakhot* (blessings) are recited.

While the candles are placed right to left, they are lit left to right. On the first night, there's only one candle (other than the shamash), so that's easy. On the second night, the candle on the left is lit first and then the candle to the right. On the third night, the candle on the left is lit first, then the candle to its right, and then the next candle to its right, and so on each night. The far left candle is always lit first each night.

Reciting the B'rakhot and Lighting the Candles

There are three *b'rakhot* (blessings) for lighting Chanukah candles (see below). The first two *b'rakhot* are recited each night. The third *b'rakah* is recited only on the first night of Chanukah. All the candles should be placed in the Chanukah menorah before reciting any *b'rakhot*.

Light the shamash and begin reciting the *b'rakhot*, but don't start lighting any candles just yet. When you get to the words "*she-asa nisim la-avoteinu* (who made miracles for our ancestors)," begin lighting the candles, left to right.

After the Candles are Lit

It is a long-standing custom to sing two liturgical poems, *Maoz Tzur* (Rock of Strength) and *haNeirot Halalu* (These Candles), immediately following the Chanukah candle lighting. *Maoz Tzur* summarizes Jewish history (and God's salvation), and *haNeirot Halalu* describes the purpose of lighting Chanukah candles. These are often followed by the many more contemporary songs written in Hebrew, English, Yiddish, Ladino, and other languages to celebrate Chanukah. *Latkes* (potato pancakes), *sufganiyot* (fried doughnuts), playing dreidel, and giving and receiving Chanukah gelt also show up as the evening progresses. Stories are always appropriate, and there are links to three audio files with Chanukah stories read by Aliza Palmer below.

Because the candles are lit to publicize the miracle of Chanukah, halakhah dictates the candles are not to be used for any purpose other than to serve as a symbol and reminder. Thus, reading by the light of the Chanukah menorah is forbidden (by halakhah).

Blessing 1

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִידְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּינוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה

Barukh atah, Adonai, eloheinu melekh ha-olam,

asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who set us apart through your commandments and commanded us to light a Chanukah light.

Blessing 2

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמֶן הַזֶּה

Barukh atah, Adonai, eloheinu melekh ha-olam,

she-asah nisim la-avoteinu bayamim hahem baz'man hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe,
who made miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time.

Blessing 3: Shehechyanu (First Night Only)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיָּנוּ, וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה

Barukh atah, Adonai, eloheinu melekh ha-olam,

shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the universe,
who has given us life and sustained us and enabled us to reach this time.

[Maccabee: The Story of Chanukah](#)

[The Borrowed Chanukah Latkes](#)

[Yuli and the S'vivon \(in Hebrew\)](#)

Eight Questions of Dedication

Chanukah is a holiday celebrating dedication, both physical and spiritual. The Maccabees demonstrated a physical commitment throughout the many battles in service to their spiritual commitment to the Torah and *mitzvot* (commandments). The dedication of the stones of the *Beit haMikdash* (Temple) with oil was a visible expression of a spiritual dedication to the service of the one God.

The question of dedication is as relevant today as in the times of the Maccabees. These eight questions, one for each night of Chanukah, are designed to stimulate conversation with your family and friends. They are an attempt to help connect what happened *bayamim hahem* (in those days) *laz'man hazeh* (to this time). Imagining all the Heilicher families discussing the same ideas throughout Chanukah also helps us connect as a community.

You can discuss these questions before or after lighting candles, around the dinner table, or even in the car on your way to the movies if you prefer. Feel free to add your own questions to the mix!

First Candle of Chanukah (24 Kislev 5785/December 25, 2024)

The Maccabees dedicated themselves to and fought for the freedom to serve God and Torah. What is a belief, idea, or truth you are dedicated to and would fight for?

Second Candle of Chanukah (25 Kislev 5785/December 26, 2024)

What is something in your life you've taken for granted but realize is worthy of more time and attention (i.e., dedication)?

Third Candle of Chanukah (26 Kislev 5785/December 27, 2024)

What is an important value your family is dedicated to? What does your family do to demonstrate that value and dedication? What else could you do?

Fourth Candle of Chanukah (27 Kislev 5785/December 28, 2024)

What is a favorite Chanukah memory you have? What does the memory represent, and what could you do to honor that memory (i.e., dedicate time and energy)?

Fifth Candle of Chanukah (28 Kislev 5785/December 29, 2024)

What's something about yourself you'd like to change? How will you dedicate yourself to that change?

Sixth Candle of Chanukah (29 Kislev 5785/December 30, 2024)

What does Israel mean to you? How do you demonstrate that meaning in your daily life?

Seventh Candle of Chanukah (30 Kislev 5785/December 31, 2024)

What does being Jewish mean to you? How do you demonstrate that importance in your daily life?

Eighth Candle of Chanukah (1 Tevet 5785/January 1, 2025)

What have these questions about dedication helped you understand about yourself/your family?