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Hanukkah

Because learning Torah is sweet

כ״ה כִּסְלֵו–ב׳ טֵבֵת תשפ״ז December 4–12, 2026

עִנְיָנֵי דְיוֹקָא • The Calendar

The central mitzvah of Hanukkah is to light candles each of the holiday's eight nights. Rambam describes how special this mitzvah is:

Mishneh Torah Laws of Purim and Hanukkah 4:12 (Spain and Egypt, 850 years ago)

The mitzvah of lighting Hanukkah candles is extremely precious. A person should observe it carefully to publicize the miracle and to increase our praise of God and our thanks for God's miracles.

Even if a person relies on tzedakah (charity) to have enough food, they should lend out or sell their own clothing in order to have money to purchase oil and candles for Hanukkah.

משנה תורה הלכות מגילת אסתר וחנוכה ד:יב

מִצְוַת נֵר חֲנֻכָּה מִצְוָה חֲבִיבָה הִיא עַד מְאֹד וְצָרִיךְ אָדָם לְהִזָּהֵר בָּהּ כְּדֵי לְהוֹדִיעַ הַנֵּס וּלְהוֹסִיף בְּשֶׁבַח הָאֵ-ל וְהוֹדָיָה לוֹ עַל הַנִּסִּים שֶׁעָשָׂה לָנוּ.

אֲפִלּוּ אֵין לוֹ מַה יֹּאכַל אֶלָּא מִן הַצְּדָקָה שׁוֹאֵל אוֹ מוֹכֵר כְּסוּתוֹ וּלוֹוֶה שֶׁמֶן וְנֵרוֹת וּמַדְלִיק.

- It's unusual for Rambam to call a mitzvah "extremely precious." It seems like it was one of his favorite mitzvot! Why might he have used this language for Hanukkah candles?
- In what ways is the mitzvah of lighting Hanukkah candles "extremely precious" to you?
- According to the Rambam, what is the purpose of lighting Hanukkah candles?
- If a person was struggling to have enough money to buy food, why should they spend money on Hanukkah candles? What does that tell you about how important it is to do this this mitzvah? What do you think makes it so important?







מִנְהָג • Customs

Tzedakah on Hanukkah

The Gemara says you should place your Hanukkah lights in your doorway (Bavli Shabbat 21b). The reason is for פִּרְסוּמֵי נִיסָּא (pirsumei nisa, publicizing the miracle). This is also the reason that the Gemara tells us to light at the time of evening when people are still outside, perhaps walking home from work, and would be able to see our candles.

R. Avraham Gombiner, author of the Magen Avraham (Poland, 350 years ago), describes a מִנְהָג (minhag, custom) that would take place on Hanukkah, also at the doorway:

Magen Avraham 670:1

Young people who are poor would go around from door to door (to collect tzedakah) on Hanukkah.

מגן אברהם תע:א

נוֹהֲגִין הַנְּעָרִים הָעֲנִיִּים לְסַבֵּב בַּחֲנֻכָּה עַל הַפְּתָחִים.

The Hatam Sofer (Eastern Europe, 200 years ago) wondered what made this different from any other time. It's always good to give tzedakah! Why would there be a minhag for poor people to collect money specifically on Hanukkah?

Derashot Hatam Sofer

The person who is poor could enter and exit people's homes between their mezuzah and their candles.

דרשות חתם סופר

נִרְאֶה כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּכָּנֵס וְיֵצֵא הֶעָנִי בֵּין מְזוּזָה לְנֵר.

According to the Hatam Sofer, the Magen Avraham teaches us that something else is supposed to happen at this time, too. While the candles are lit, you're supposed to welcome the poor to walk between your candles and your mezuzah—meaning, through your doorway and into your home! So, the minhag wasn't only to give tzedakah on Hanukkah, but to give tzedakah specifically while the candles were lit.

The Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash was also connected to tzedakah. R. Elazar ha-Kalir (1,500 years ago) wrote poems describing the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, and we read some of these on Tisha B'Av. Here's a line from one where he suggests why the Menorah in particular was destroyed 2,000 years ago:



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The candles were extinguished and the Menorah was bent down to the ground when they sinned by not giving bread (to the poor).

קינה י

וְנֵרוֹת נִכְבּוּ וּמְנוֹרָה נִכְפָּת.
כְּפָשְׁעוּ בְּלֶחֶם וּפַת.

- Why would tzedakah be connected to the Menorah and Hanukkah candles? What does one have to do with the other?
- How can the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days inspire us to give with generosity?

Try it out!

Today, most of us light our Hanukkah candles indoors, placing them in the window instead of the doorway. But we can still put tzedakah in a tzedakah box while the candles are lit. Try doing that at home. How does it change the way it feels to light Hanukkah candles?



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הַדְלָקַת נֵרוֹת • Candle Lighting

These are the בְּרָכוֹת (berakhot, blessings) to recite before lighting Hanukkah candles:



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳
אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

Blessed are You, God our Lord, Ruler of the world, Who has made us holy with mitzvot and commanded us to light Hanukkah candles.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳
אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Blessed are You, God our Lord, Ruler of the world, Who made miracles for our ancestors in those days on this date.

This berakhah is only for the first night you light Hanukkah candles this year:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳
אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ
לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Blessed are You, God our Lord, Ruler of the world, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this time.

We say or sing Hanerot Hallalu after lighting the first candle (Arukh Hashulhan OH 676:8). It reviews some of the main halakhot and goals of Hanukkah candles (p. 2–3).

הַנֵּרוֹת הַלָּלוּ שֲׁאָנוּ מַדְלִיקִין, עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַנִּפְלָאוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת
וְעַל הַמִּלְחָמוֹת, שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה, עַל יְדֵי
כֹּהֲנֶיךָ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים. וְכָל שְׁמוֹנַת יְמֵי חֲנֻכָּה הַנֵּרוֹת הַלָּלוּ קֹדֶשׁ הֵם וְאֵין
לָנוּ רְשׁוּת לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶם, אֶלָּא לִרְאוֹתָם בִּלְבָד, כְּדֵי לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל
לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל עַל נִסֶּיךָ וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְעַל יְשׁוּעָתֶךָ.



These candles we light are for the miracles, wonders, salvations, and wars that You made for our ancestors in those days on this date, by the hands of your holy kohanim (priests). During all the eight days of Hanukkah these lights are holy, and we aren't permitted to make use of them; we're only supposed to look at them, so that we can give thanks and praise to Your Great Name for Your miracles, wonders, and salvations.

