

# IN THOSE DAYS, IN THIS TIME

בימים דהם בזמן דזאת

A CHANUKAH GUIDE OF ANCESTRAL  
WONDERS AND PRESENT INTENTIONS

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## CHANUKAH 5786

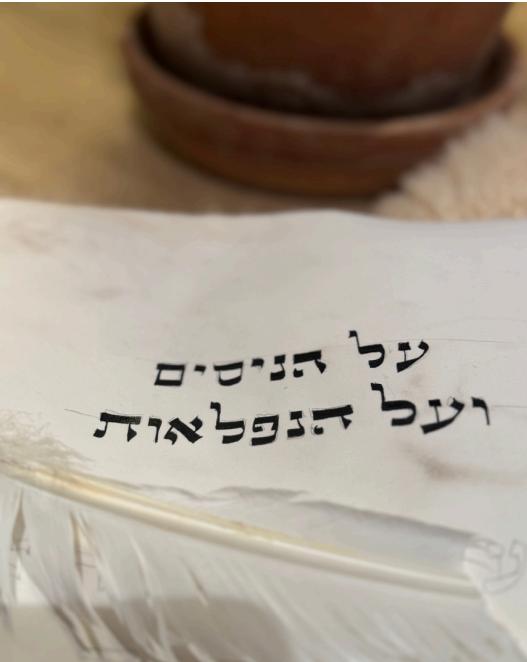
*Bluth's Ritual Studio is a Rabbi-and-Artist-run studio that specializes in creating Ketubahs, Jewish art, and holiday & lifecycle guides. Our hope is to infuse Jewish rituals with both meaning and aesthetic beauty, reimagining Judaism in a way that is both personal and beautiful.*

*We hope this guide enriches your Hanukkah experience and inspires meaningful rituals for years to come. Please feel free to share it with friends, family, and your community.*

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# IN THOSE DAYS, IN THIS TIME



Scribal Art, "on wonders and miracles" by Bluth



A young woman lights the Hanukkah candles. Photo courtesy of JDC Archives



Bluth's Chanukia. Chanukah 2024

*"These lights we kindle for the miracles, for the wonders, for the salvations, and for the deliverances that You performed for our ancestors in those days at this season."*

One of the quintessential songs of Chanukah, *hanerot halalu*, is a beautiful prayer with a timeless teaching that summarizes the energy of this holiday. A time which illuminates miracles and wonders, amidst darkness and struggles. A time to anchor in resilient ancestral moments, and draw that sacred energy into our lives today.

Chanukah pairs hope with action, of navigating uncertainty and hard times with a willingness to act. And when the personal, communal, and political may seem bleak, Chanukah can inspire us to have faith and imagine that better/change is possible. The Chanukah story is one of identity struggles, political radicalism, resilience, and resistance. In these stories we see courage and defiance. We see cultural fortitude and struggle. Hope and grief. We see different expressions of Judaism and how they interact- scenes not so dissimilar from today. And it can be a murky story, but within all that, we are given this holiday of hope and action.

And therein lies the power of that last line, *bayamim hahem bazman hazeh*, *in those days in this time*, where we draw from the resilience of our ancestors and cultivate that in our lives today.

As you move through this guide, you're invited to follow Chanukah one day at a time —each night offering a different lens, theme, and way to meet the light. Flip through at your own pace, linger where it resonates. Think of these pages as prompts, a companion to your own ritual. May each night open just enough space for reflection, warmth, and whatever blessing wants to emerge this season.



# THE BLESSINGS:

**Before lighting the candles, we say the following two blessings:**

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu lehadlik ner Chanukah.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, she'asah nisim la'avoteinu ba-yamim ha-hem ba-zman ha-zeh.

ברוך אתה אדוני אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו להדליק נר חנוכה

ברוך אתה אדוני אלהינו מלך העולם שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן זהה

**On the first night, we add the Shehechiyanu:**

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higi'anu la-zman ha-zeh.

ברוך אתה אדוני אלהינו מלך העולם שהחינו וקימנו והגינו בזמן זהה

*After saying the blessings, we light the candles. Each night, light the newest (left-most) candle first and continue lighting from left to right. (We add candles to the menorah from right to left, while we light from left to right.)*



*the first candle*

# HOME + SACRED SPACE

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Unlike most other Jewish holidays, which bring us into Synagogues and into community in prayer, Chanukah invites us into a cozy experience within our own homes.

Whether we light with family, invite guests into our homes, or on our own - it's an opportunity to design our ritual so that it brings light and magic into our homes, our sacred temples, the places of our day to day.

And when we light the Chanukiah, we do so on the windowsill, the **precipice**, in an act of bringing the light of the home out into the streets. This is a reminder that ritual begins centered in our own experience, nourishing our own well-being, for the sake of being shared and rippling out to affect that which is beyond us.

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Home is the heart of Chanukah, a place where everyday space becomes sacred through warmth, care, and intention. The simple act of lighting within our own walls reminds us that holiness can begin in the most familiar corners, and from that grounded center, our light extends outward.

*the second candle*

# NARRATIVES

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## **The story of Chanukah is complicated. And, honestly, a little uncomfortable.**

Jews living under Seleucid Greek rule experienced real tensions. For some, Hellenization brought opportunity – access to broader culture, philosophy, trade, and civic life. But over time, especially under Antiochus IV, assimilation shifted from optional to coercive. Jewish religious practice became restricted and, at points, criminalized. Circumcision, Shabbat, and Temple worship were suppressed in favor of a state-enforced Greek religious and cultural order.

In response, the Maccabees led a revolt – not only against the Seleucid empire, but also against fellow Jews who had embraced assimilation. In many ways, it was as much a civil war as it was an anti-imperial uprising. The rebellion framed itself as a fight for religious freedom and cultural survival – and in that sense, it was.

## **But the story doesn't resolve cleanly.**

After their victory, the Maccabees established Hasmonean rule, which lasted for about a century. Over time, that rule became increasingly politicized and religiously rigid, enforcing Jewish law through power rather than consent, expanding territory, and at times compelling conversion. The movement that began as resistance to coercion ultimately produced new forms of it.

Even the rededication of the Temple – the moment Chanukah commemorates – was fragile. The Temple was restored during the period of the Maccabees, but only a couple of centuries later it was destroyed by the Romans. The political victory, like many before and after it, was temporary.

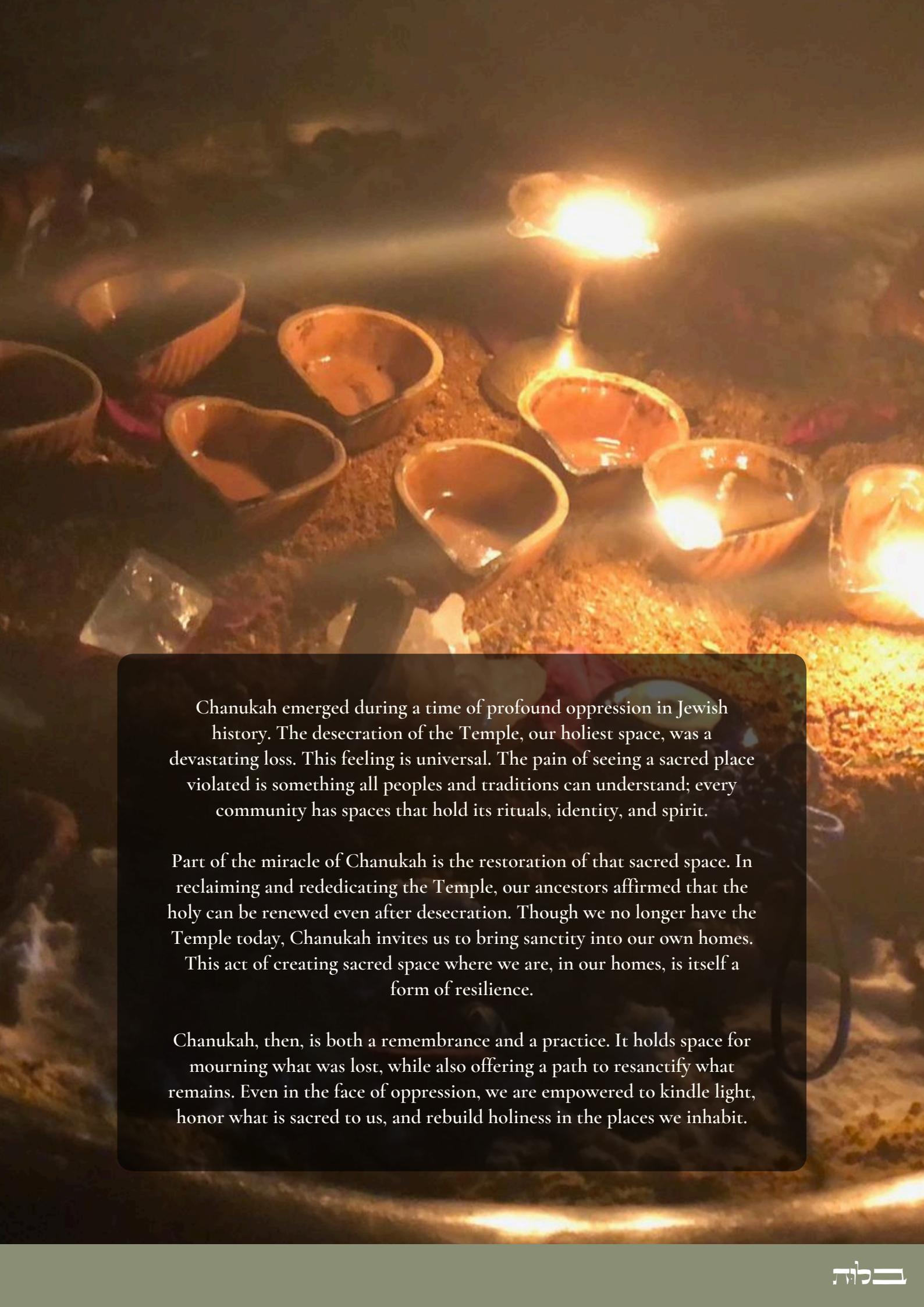
Which is part of what makes the Chanukah story feel so familiar. Messy. Fraught. Full of internal conflict, identity politics, power struggles, and moral gray zones. And yet, this is the radical move: the sages chose not to make the holiday about that.

Instead of centering Chanukah solely on historical triumph or political power, the Sages deliberately reshaped it into a holiday of seeding hope – of a small jug of oil, of the rededication of sacred space, of small victories and incremental steps. They preserved a memory not of conquest, but of persistence.

## **The stories we tell matter. They shape what we remember – and what we practice.**

By choosing the miracle of the oil, the sages turned Chanukah into a ritual of light in darkness, of achieving what seems impossible, of resilience and endurance. Chanukah becomes a lesson not in denial, but in disciplined optimism – the practice of lighting anyway, even when history is unresolved.

**Chanukah is about choosing the narratives that will fuel us forward. About ritualized hope in the face of hard times.**



Chanukah emerged during a time of profound oppression in Jewish history. The desecration of the Temple, our holiest space, was a devastating loss. This feeling is universal. The pain of seeing a sacred place violated is something all peoples and traditions can understand; every community has spaces that hold its rituals, identity, and spirit.

Part of the miracle of Chanukah is the restoration of that sacred space. In reclaiming and rededicating the Temple, our ancestors affirmed that the holy can be renewed even after desecration. Though we no longer have the Temple today, Chanukah invites us to bring sanctity into our own homes. This act of creating sacred space where we are, in our homes, is itself a form of resilience.

Chanukah, then, is both a remembrance and a practice. It holds space for mourning what was lost, while also offering a path to resanctify what remains. Even in the face of oppression, we are empowered to kindle light, honor what is sacred to us, and rebuild holiness in the places we inhabit.

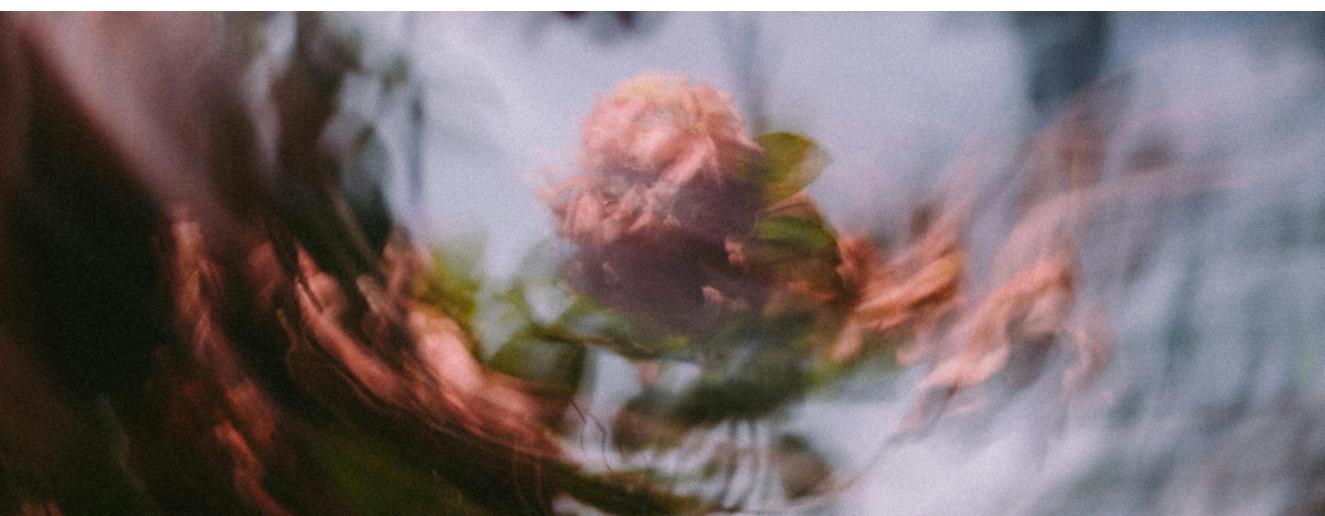
*the third candle*

# SOLSTICE

Many cultures mark the winter solstice with their own traditions; Chanukah is our way of honouring that turning point—finding light in the darkest days and welcoming the slow return of lengthening daylight. **This is seasonal ritual.**

Chanukah comes at a particularly dark time of the year, when the days are the shortest and the nights are the longest. And the holiday extends over the new moon, meaning that the nights themselves have the least light as well, with no moonlight to light up the darkest skies. Long and dark nights.

Chanukah serves as a reminder to bring light to dark places, physically and metaphorically, and celebrate the capacity to increase light. We celebrate the lengthening of the days and the continued cycling of the seasons.



## **The seeds of Channukah in the Garden of Eden:**

The Gmara tells a story - Adam, in the Garden of Eden, was very frightened at this time of year. The darkness was growing. The nights were getting longer with the diminishing daylight and the nights were getting darker with the waning moon. Adam feared the darkness would continue indefinitely, causing the world's end.

And so, fearful and yearning for light and life in that first winter in the Garden of Eden, Adam fasted. He fasted until the first solstice, when the cycle of sun and moon shifted, and days began to get progressively longer. In abundant relief and celebration, Adam marked this solstice season with a holiday of eight days, a time to celebrate, to sing and praise - for the light of the world increased, and life would be sustained.

**And so, we remember that the sun will rise again. This is the essence of the third candle.**



*the fourth candle*

# DREIDEL, CANDLES, LATKES



## A holiday with PLAY!

Because it's through play that we learn – how to remember, how to belong, how to feel joy in our bodies. Chanukah comes with its own toolkit of delight: the playful spin of the dreidel, the slow-building glow of candles – one more each night – and fried foods that honour the miracle of the oil: latkes, sufganiyot, sfenj, buñuelos.

Chocolate gelt scattered across tables. Chanukah songs on repeat... This is ritual pedagogy 101! The best way for kids to learn, and honestly, for adults too is through play.

I grew up on The Animated Menorah – an utterly wild and wonderful story about siblings who use a floppy-disk latke as the key to a dreidel-shaped spaceship, traveling back in time to the era of the Maccabees. Equal parts absurd and unforgettable.

In lives packed with responsibility and constant doing, Chanukah gives us not one, but eight nights to lean into play. To linger. To repeat. To delight without productivity.

This is magic.  
This is medicine.

Photo: Courtesy of Williams Sonoma



Photo: Rabbi Arielle Stein [@rabbiariellestein](#)  
Courtesy of Kevin Farley [@kevinfarley](#)  
Chanukia by [@cherinstudio](#)

*the fifth candle*

# ANCESTRAL MIRACLE

בִּימִים הָמִם בָּזְמִן הַזֶּה

“In those days, in this time” – draws a direct line between our ancestors’ world and our own. It reminds us that their miracles were not abstractions, but lived moments of risk, doubt, and devotion. And that is what we seek in our lives now, too.

When we light Chanukah candles today, their glow continues that same impulse: to create light even when it seems fragile, unlikely to last, or even unnecessary.

The halakhah here is striking. Unlike Shabbat candles, which are lit to serve a clear function – to bring peace and usable light into the home – Chanukah candles are deliberately non-functional. We are instructed not to use their light. Not to read by it. Not to illuminate the room. Not to derive practical benefit at all.

## **Their purpose is simply to be seen.**

To pause us. To draw our attention. To publicize the miracle – *pirsumei nisa* – by allowing the light to exist as light alone. Aesthetic. Symbolic. Meaning-laden.

In other words, Chanukah light is not utilitarian. It is contemplative – meaningful and inspiring. It asks us to look, to linger, and to remember that not all light is meant to be used. Some light exists simply to be tended – as an act of hope rather than efficiency, of meaning rather than function.

The Chanukah flames echo an ancestral instinct: to kindle something fragile and beautiful for no purpose other than honoring what matters. And in lighting them, we step into that same posture – choosing hope over resignation, ritual over fear, and trusting that even small acts can carry the weight of ancient courage.



Our ancestors created tradition through small, meaningful acts repeated over time. This Chanukah, consider yourself invited into that same creative lineage.

Notice the little rituals you already love. How did you celebrate as kids? What would you like to bring into your life now? This is ritual, and it's yours to design. While rooted in your own memories, and tradition, you are invited to Innovate in your practice!



Photo: An elderly woman joins the younger women in dancing to celebrate Hannukah at a Jewish Center. Riga, Latvia, 1990.

Photo courtesy of JDC Archives



Photo: A brother and sister light the Chanukia. 1990. Courtesy of JDC Archives



Photo: Young boy shows his brother how to light the candles. Courtesy of Chicago Tribune



Photo: A Hannukah celebration in the Bene Israel congregation in India. Courtesy of JDC Archives

*the sixth candle*

# THE DIFFERENT WAYS WE LIGHT

**Where the Maccabees once enforced Jewish practice through power rather than consent, the centuries that followed gave rise to something far gentler—Jewish customs that blossomed organically across the world, shaped not by decree but by the lived creativity of each community.**

Though the core ritual of Chanukah is the same everywhere, lighting candles and celebrating the miracle of perseverance, Jewish communities around the world developed their own beautiful ways of honoring these eight nights. Rooted in local culture, communal memory, and generations of creativity, these customs shine a light on how diverse and vibrant Jewish life has always been.

Here are four traditions that open a window into the beauty and expansiveness of Jewish culture across the world:

### **1. Coconut Oil Lamps & Kolam Designs – Cochin (South India)**

In the Jewish communities of Cochin, families lit their Chanukias with coconut oil, a reflection of local materials and longstanding practice. Many also decorated the threshold with kolam-style patterns, temporary chalk or flour designs symbolizing blessing and welcome, infusing the festival of light with the artistry and hospitality of Kerala's broader culture.

### **2. A Lamp for Elijah – Italy**

Italian Jewish communities preserved a tradition of kindling an extra lamp after the congregation left the synagogue, dedicated to Elijah the Prophet. This quiet flame symbolized hope, redemption, and a sense that divine presence accompanies the community back into their homes.

### **3. Ash-Baked Eggs – Yemen**

In Yemen, families placed eggs to bake in the warm ashes of the Chanukah lamps. These eggs, symbolizing renewal and the continuity of life, were shared among family members, creating a sensory ritual that intertwined the festival's themes of resilience and rebirth.

### **4. Chag HaMelamdim (Teachers) – Syria**

Aleppian and Syrian Jews observed Chanukah as a time to honor teachers. Students would bring small gifts or blessings to their melamdim, acknowledging those who guarded and transmitted Torah. The festival became both a celebration of miracles and a moment of gratitude for learning and its bearers.



Photo: Courtesy of [@miraoreck](#)

*the seventh candle*

# CHAG HABANOT

## EID AL B'NAT – FESTIVAL OF THE DAUGHTERS

*On this New Moon, a time of potential...*

Tonight is the new moon (of the month of Tevet), when the moon is barely visible if at all. From here on, the light begins to grow. When we welcome the new month, we usher in renewal and new potential.

This day in particular, has a special potency. "Jews of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia celebrated 1 Tevet as the Festival of the Daughters, a time to honor Judith and all heroines. Mothers would give their daughters gifts on that day and pass inheritances to them. Old women and young women would come together to dance. Another tradition was for women to pray for the health of their daughters. 1 Tevet, the darkest night of winter, is a time to draw the generations together, letting the root of one generation grow into a new cluster of strong branches."

- Rabbi Jill Hammer



Women from Tripoli, Libya, celebrate 'Eid Al Banat'.

(photo credit: Or Shalom, the Center for Preservation and Transmission of Libyan Jewry Heritage)

In the mystical book, the Sefer Yezirah, the month of Tevet is associated with the letter AYIN, meaning eye. The eye is associated with protection, or warding off the evil eye. "Bli Ayin Hara", "Kenaiynehora". Throughout the ages, Jews have had various rituals for protection. There are practices for setting boundaries, for deflection and for connection, and for cleansing.

Via amulets or prayers, incantations, eye symbols, garlic and more - these are ancestral practices to bring protection and thriving (source from "Jewish Protection Magic Course" with Dori Midnight). These practices are fitting as we welcome the month of Tevet, associated with the eye, and as we light the Candles, which we watch shine brightly each night.

*the eighth candle*

# ZOT CHANUKAH

## **Tonight we light the final light.**

The sages teach us that to understand Chnnukah, means experiencing the 8th night. Within the crescendo moment, lies the whole holiday itself.

8 is a holy number. It is a number that is beyond 7, beyond the 7 days of the week, beyond even Shabbat. 8 suggests a wholeness. 8 alludes to something that is redemptive.

We call tonight Zot Chanukah (or for chassidim, Zos Channukeh), meaning THIS is Chanukah. It comes from the passage in the Torah reading that says "zot chanukat hamizbeach", meaning this is the dedication of the altar.

Chanukah is connected to the Temple, and the struggle to keep our holy places sanctified. Zot Chanukah is connected to the altar. To the place of offerings by the 12 tribes of Israel.



Photo: A pre school boy spins a top or dreidel for Hanukah. Riga, Latvia, 1990.  
Courtesy of JDC Archives



So, as our holiday reaches its fullness, and the sliver moon begins it's journey to fullness, let us ask ourselves -

What is my offering?  
What is my souls contribution to this world, to my family, to my beloveds?  
What is a part of you that you want to give in service to your community and to humanity?

Our world is not full without each of you.  
We are not whole without the gifts of each person, plant, and animal on this earth.

And this is the essence of the 8th night.  
The 8th night of our festival of praise and thanksgiving.

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