

Chanukah Customs, Rituals, and Songs

Source Sheet by Lily Solochek

Chanukah Candles

Shabbat 21b:8

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: It is a mitzva to place the Hanukkah lamp at the entrance to one's house on the outside, so that all can see it. If he lived upstairs, he places it at the window adjacent to the public domain. And in a time of danger, when the gentiles issued decrees to prohibit kindling lights, he places it on the table and that is sufficient to fulfill his obligation.

שבת כ"א ב:ח'

תנו רבנן נר חנוכה מצוה
להניחה על פתח ביתו
מבחוץ אם היה דר בעלייה
מניחה בחלון הסמוכה
לרשות הרבים ובשעת
הסכנה מניחה על שלחנו
ודיו

Shabbat 21b:5

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: The basic mitzva of Hanukkah is each day to have a light kindled by a person, the head of the household, for himself and his household. And the *mehadrin*, i.e., those who are meticulous in the performance of mitzvot, kindle a light for each and every one in the household. And the *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, who are even more

שבת כ"א ב:ה'

תנו רבנן מצות חנוכה נר איש
וביתו והמהדרין נר לכל אחד
ואחד והמהדרין מן המהדרין
בית שמאי אומרים יום ראשון
מדליק שמנה מכאן ואילך
פוחת והולך ובית הלל
אומרים יום ראשון מדליק
אחת מכאן ואילך מוסיף
והולך

meticulous, adjust the number of lights daily. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree as to the nature of that adjustment. **Beit Shammai say: On the first day one kindles eight** lights and, from **there on, gradually decreases** the number of lights until, on the last day of Hanukkah, he kindles one light.

And Beit Hillel say: On the first day one kindles one light, and from **there on, gradually increases** the number of lights until, on the last day, he kindles eight lights.

What do you think of Beit Shammai's idea? Why do you think we follow Beit Hillel's opinion?

Kol Bo 44:2

Women are obligated to light Hannukah candles, for they too were included in the miracle. This means that the enemies came to destroy everyone, men, women, and children, and there are those who say that the great miracle occurred through a woman. Her name was Judith, as the story goes, and she was the daughter of Yochanan, the high priest. She was extremely beautiful, and the Greek king wanted her to lay with him. She fed him a dish of cheese to make him

כל בו מ"ד:ב'

בכ"ה בכסלו יומי חנוכה אנון
דלא להתענאה בהון ודלא
למספד בהון. כי בבית שני
כשמלכה מלכות יון גזרו שמד
על ישראל ובטלו דתם ולא
הניחו אותם לעסוק בתורה
ובמצות ופשטו ידיהם
בממונם ובבנותיהם ונכנסו
להיכל ופרצו כו פרצות וטמאו
הטהרות וצר להם לישראל
מפניה' ולחצום לחץ גדול עד

thirsty, so that he would drink a great deal and became drunk, and recline and fall asleep. And it happened just that way, and once he was asleep, she took his sword and cut off his head. She brought his head to Jerusalem, and when the armies saw that their leader had been killed, they fled. For this reason, we have the custom of eating a cheese dish on Hannukah.

שרחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו
והושיעם מידם וגברו בני
חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולי'
והרגום והושיעו את ישראל
מידם והעמידו מלך מן
הכהנים וחזרה מלכות
לישראל יותר ממאתים שנה
עד חרבן בית שני.

Chag haBanot (Festival of Daughters)

In North African countries, the seventh night of Chanukah, Judith's night of triumph, was set aside as Chag haBanot, the Festival of the Daughters. Chag haBanot falls on the new moon of the Hebrew month of Tevet, which is the sixth or seventh night of Chanukah. (Chanukah is the only Jewish holiday that straddles two months. Rosh Hodesh, the celebration of the new month, is classically a women's festival.) In countries such as Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, a variety of customs surrounded Chag haBanot. One tradition was that women would come to the synagogue, touch the Torah, and pray for the health of their daughters. Mothers would give their daughters gifts, and bridegrooms would give gifts to their brides. Girls who were fighting were expected to reconcile on Chag haBanot. Old women and young women would come together to dance. There might be a feast in honor of Judith, where participants would eat cheese to remember Judith's subterfuge (in the story, Judith feeds the enemy general salty cheese to encourage his drinking of wine so that she can kill him once he has passed out), or women might take food from a ritual meal of Talmud scholars and give it to their daughters as protection from harm. There was also a custom of passing down inheritances on Chag haBanot.

(<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/chag-habanot-festival-daughters>)

Chanukah Songs -- Changing Messages

Siddur Ashkenaz, Festivals, Chanukah,
Service for Lighting Chanukah
Candles, Maoz Tzur 27

- (1) O Fortress, Rock of my salvation, unto thee it is becoming to give praise:
- (2) let my house of prayer be restored, and I will there offer thee thanksgivings
- (3) when thou shalt have prepared a slaughter of the blaspheming foe,
- (4) I will complete with song and psalm the dedication of the altar.
- (6) Full sated was my soul with ills, my strength was spent with sorrow;
- (7) they embittered my life by hardship during my subjection to the dominion of Egypt,
- (8) but God with his great power brought forth the chosen race,
- (9) while the host of Pharaoh and all his seed sank like a stone into the deep.
- (11) To his holy oracle he brought me, yet there also I found no peace,
- (12) for the oppressor came and led me captive, because I had served strange gods:
- (13) I had to quaff the wine of bewilderment; well nigh had I perished,
- (14) when Babylon's end drew near;

סידור אשכנז, חגים, חנוכה,
סדר הדלקת נרות חנוכה,
מעוז צור כ"ז

מְעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי לְךָ נֶאֱדָה
לְשִׁבְחָה.
תִּכּוֹן בֵּית תְּפִלָּתִי וְשֵׁם תּוֹדָה
נִזְבַּח.
לֵעֵת תִּכְיִן מִטְבַּח מִצָּר
הַמִּנְבַּח.
אֲז אֶגְמֹר בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר חֲנֻכַּת
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.
רְעוֹת שְׁבַעָה נִפְשֵׁי בִיגוֹן כַּחֲדָי
כָּלָה.
חַיֵּי מָרוֹר בְּקוֹשֵׁי בְשָׁעֲבוֹד
מַלְכוּת עֶגְלָה. וּבִידוֹ הַגְּדוּלָה
הוֹצִיא אֶת הַסַּגְלָה.
חֵיל פְּרַעָה וְכָל זֶרְעוֹ יִרְדּוּ כְּאֶבֶן
בְּמִצּוֹלָה.

דְּבִיר קִדְשׁוֹ הֵבִיאֲנִי וְגַם שָׁם
לֹא שָׁקַטְתִּי. וּבָא נוֹגֵשׁ וְהִגְלֵנִי.
כִּי זָרִים עֲבַדְתִּי.
וַיִּין רַעַל מִסַּכְתִּי כְּמַעַט
שְׁעָבַרְתִּי.
קֶץ בָּבֶל, זֶרְבָבֶל, לְקֶץ שְׁבַעִים

through Zerubbabel I was saved
after seventy years.

(16) The Agagite (Haman), the son
of Hammedatha, sought to cut down
the lofty fir tree

(17) but his design became a snare
to himself, and his pride was
brought to an end.

(18) The head of the Benjamite thou
didst exalt, but the enemy's name
thou Midst blot out:

(19) the many sons he had gotten
thou didst hang upon the gallows.

(21) The Grecians were gathered
against me in the days of the
Hasmoneans;

(22) they broke down the walls of
my towers, and defiled all the oils;

(23) but from one of the last
remaining flasks a miracle was
wrought for thy beloved

(24) and their men of understanding
appointed these eight days for song
and praises.

*(Bare Your holy arm and hasten the
End for salvation - Avenge the
vengeance of Your servants' blood
from the wicked nation. For the
triumph is too long delayed for us,
and there is no end to days of evil,
Repel the Red One in the
nethermost shadow and establish
for us the seven shepherds.)*

נושעתִי.

כָּרוֹת קוֹמַת בְּרוֹשׁ, בְּקֶשׁ אֲגָגִי
בֶּן הַמְּדַתָּא. וְנִהְיְתָה לוֹ לְפַח
וּלְמוֹקֶשׁ וּגְאוֹתוֹ נִשְׁבְּתָהּ. רֹאשׁ
יְמִינִי נִשְׁאֵת וְאוֹיֵב שְׁמוֹ מְחִיתָ.
רַב בְּנָיו וְקִנְיָנָיו עַל הָעֵץ תָּלִיתָ.

יָוֹנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי אֲזִי בְיָמֵי
חֲשֹׁמְנִים.

וּפְרָצוּ חוֹמוֹת מִגְדְּלֵי וְטַמְאוּ
כָּל הַשְּׁמָנִים. וּמְנוֹתַר קִנְקָנִים
נַעֲשָׂה נֶס לְשׁוֹשְׁנִים.

בְּנֵי בֵינָה יְמֵי שְׁמוֹנָה קָבְעוּ
שִׁיר וּרְנָנִים.

חֲשׂוּף זְרוּעַ קְדֻשְׁךָ וְקָרַב קֶץ
הַיְשׁוּעָה. נִקֵּם נִקְמַת דָּם
עַבְדֶּיךָ מֵאֵמֶה הַרְשָׁעָה. כִּי
אָרְכָה לָנוּ הַשָּׁעָה וְאִין קֶץ
לְיָמֵי הַרְעָה. דַּחַה אֲדָמוֹן בְּצֶל
צִלְמוֹן, הִקֵּם לָנוּ רוּעָה שְׁבַעָה

What's the tone of this song? What are the biblical and historical allusions you recognize?

What's the tone of this song? How does it compare to Maoz Tzur?

Light One Candle (Peter, Paul and Mary - 1986)

Light one candle for the Maccabee children
With thanks that their light didn't die
Light one candle for the pain they endured
When their right to exist was denied
Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice
Justice and freedom demand
But light one candle for the wisdom to know
When the peacemaker's time is at hand

Don't let the light go out!
It's lasted for so many years!
Don't let the light go out!
Let it shine through our hope and our tears.

Light one candle for the strength that we need
To never become our own foe
And light one candle for those who are suffering
Pain we learned so long ago
Light one candle for all we believe in
That anger not tear us apart
And light one candle to find us together
With peace as the song in our hearts

Don't let the light go out

What is the memory that's valued so highly
That we keep it alive in that flame?
What's the commitment to those who have died
That we cry out they've not died in vain?
We have come this far always believing
That justice would somehow prevail
This is the burden, this is the promise
This is why we will not fail!

Don't let the light go out ...

What about the Dreidel?

... the standard explanation is that the letters *nun, gimmel, hey, shin*, which appear on the dreidel in the Diaspora, stand for *nes gadol haya sham*—"a great miracle happened there," while in Israel the dreidel says *nun, gimmel, hey, pey*, which means "a great miracle happened here."

One 19th-century rabbi maintained that Jews played with the dreidel in order to fool the Greeks if they were caught studying Torah, which had been outlawed. Others figured out elaborate gematriot [numerological explanations based on the fact that every Hebrew letter has a numerical equivalent] and word plays for the letters *nun, gimmel, hey, shin*. For example, *nun, gimmel, hey, shin* in gematria equals 358, which is also the numerical equivalent of *mashiach* or Messiah!

Finally, the letters *nun, gimmel, hey, shin* are supposed to represent the four kingdoms that tried to destroy us [in ancient times]: N = Nebuchadnetzar = Babylon; H = Haman = Persia = Madai; G = Gog = Greece; and S = Seir = Rome.

As a matter of fact, all of these elaborate explanations were invented after the fact.

In England and Ireland there is a game called totum or teetotum that is

especially popular at Christmastime. In English, this game is first mentioned as “totum” ca. 1500-1520. The name comes from the Latin “totum,” which means “all.” By 1720, the game was called T- totum or teetotum, and by 1801 the four letters already represented four words in English: T = Take all; H = Half; P = Put down; and N = Nothing.

Our Eastern European game of dreidel (including the letters nun, gimmel, hey, shin) is directly based on the German equivalent of the totum game: N = Nichts = nothing; G = Ganz = all; H = Halb = half; and S = Stell ein = put in. In German, the spinning top was called a “torrel” or “trundl,” and in Yiddish it was called a “dreidel,” [...]

Thus the dreidel game represents an irony of Jewish history. In order to celebrate the holiday of Hanukkah, which celebrates our victory over cultural assimilation, we play the dreidel game, which is an excellent example of cultural assimilation!

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-origin-of-the-dreidel/>

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