How, when, and where should we light Hanukka candles?

WHERE SHOULD WE LIGHT THE CANDLES?

We light the Hanukka candles to express our recognition and gratitude to HaShem for the miracles He performed for our ancestors. To emphasize this gratitude, we try to make the lighting as visible and public as possible (*pirsume Nisa*).

In the times of the *Gemara*, when these *halakhot* were established, towns were small, with a single main street, and houses were low and uniform in structure. The *hanukia* (candelabra) was placed outside the entrance door, about 40-50 cm from the ground and on the side opposite the *mezuza*. This was the optimal way to ensure that the candles were visible to those returning home from work. The Talmud and the *Shulchan Arukh* specify that this practice should continue today. To fulfill this tradition, it is recommended to use a special outdoor glass *hanukia* holder as seen here

To do this, we should obviously use a special outdoor glass Hanukka holder like to one you can see below,



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However, most families in our times place the Hanukka candles inside their homes, especially those who live in apartments. To fulfill the requirement of *pirsumé nisá*, the candles are placed near a window that is visible from the outside.

WHEN DO WE LIGHT HANUKKA CANDLES?

The general custom is to light the candles at dusk (*tset hakokhabim*), about 15-20 minutes after sunset. Some communities follow the opinion of Maimonides and the *Gemara*, which specify lighting the candles at sunset (*sheqiá*).

Why did the *Gemara* determine sunset as the ideal time? In ancient times, people finished their work at sunset and returned home before dusk. The period between sunset and dusk was the busiest time, as everyone was on the streets heading home. This was the ideal time to maximize the visibility of the Hanukka candles.

Another reason for lighting before dusk is to emphasize that the candles are specifically for Hanukka and not for general household lighting. In modern times, lighting at sunset might be too early for "rush hour." For example, in New York, sunset occurs around 4:30 PM. If one follows the Talmudic tradition of lighting at sunset, it is essential to use enough oil so that the candles remain lit for at least two hours after sunset, ensuring visibility when people return home from work.

If you cannot light the candles at the ideal time (sunset or dusk), you may light them later when the family is gathered at home.

HOW MANY CANDLES AND HANUKKIOT SHOULD WE LIGHT?

The Sephardic tradition is to light one *hanukia* per family (*mitsvat ish u-beto*). In many Ashkenazi communities, each family member lights their own *hanukia*.

Although the common practice today is to add a candle each night (one candle the first night, two the second, three the third, etc.), technically, it is sufficient to light a single candle (plus the *shamash*) each night. If additional candles cannot be lit, one candle per night fulfills the obligation.

OIL OR CANDLES?

The candles used for Hanukka can be made of wax, paraffin, etc. However, it is preferable to use candles with olive oil (typically glass receptacles with oil) since the miracle of Hanukka involved a jug of olive oil that lasted eight days. Oil candles generally burn longer than wax candles and far outlast small, birthday-like candles.

The *mitsva* of Hanukka candles cannot be fulfilled with electric lights. An electric *menora* may serve as decoration, but it does not fulfill the requirements of the *mitsva*.