



Dear Friends,

When it comes to Chanukah, we've all heard about the brave Maccabees, the miracle of the oil, the Holy Temple...and the main mitzvah of the holiday, lighting the Menorah. We'd like to discuss a lesser-known law regarding the Chanukah candles: "It is forbidden to use the lights of the Menorah for any personal benefit, only to gaze upon them." Now, a candle's most obvious purpose is for its light. Whether we cozy up to the candlelight to read a book or bask in their warmth, isn't that what candles are all about? And yet, we are specifically told to treat the Menorah candles differently, and not to "use" their lights. Instead, we are enjoined to ensure that the candles stay lit for at least half an hour, and to gaze upon the flames. What good does gazing accomplish? What is the point? In general, we are drawn to light. If you've ever taken the time to stare at a flame and watch its magical dance, you can relate to the magnetism of a flame. Our sages explain that within the Chanukah flames, shines the kabbalistic "Ohr Haganuz," a special spiritual light, that was present at Creation but then concealed. This awesome light is revealed yearly in the Menorah's candles. It is a light that is ethereal, reminding us of our own latent spiritual powers, to affect the world around us for the better. Just the act of looking at the Menorah's flames uplifts us. It's not their utility or function that we seek;

it's the very essence of the candles themselves that we desire to connect with. And what is their message? Be proud of who you are. Like the Maccabees, you have incredible power. Stand strong, and don't be intimidated by those who mock or persecute your beliefs and your very identity. Light will always triumph over darkness. Start with one candle, and increase in light, because we should always increase in goodness and kindness.

Take the time this Chanukah to let the magic of the Menorah enter your home and your spirit—light those Chanukah candles and watch yourself shine!



Happy Chanukah!

*Rabbi Schneur
& Chanie Wilhelm*

8 CHANUKAH FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW



Menorah on the Ellipse in front of the White House

1) Eight Nights = Miracle Lights

Why is Chanukah eight nights long? The Talmud asks and answers: The sages taught: On the 25th of Kislev, the days of Chanukah are eight. One may not eulogize on them, and one may not fast on them. This is because when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary. And when the Chashmonaean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that remained with the seal of the High Priest. And there was sufficient oil there to light the candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred, and they lit the candelabrum from it for eight days. The next year, the sages instituted those days and made them holidays with the recitation of Hallel and prayers of thanksgiving.

But there's more. Symbolically, "seven" is associated with the natural world: There are seven days of the week, seven musical notes, and seven years in the Sabbatical cycle. The world itself was created in seven days.

"Eight," however, represents the infinite and supernatural, in contrast to the finite and natural. The number eight evokes the transcendent and the G-dly. Eight is the number of miracles.

2) Light After Dark

The Chanukah candles must burn after night falls, since their purpose is to bring light into darkness. But they need to be lit early enough that someone will be around to see them. The lights need to be seen so they can serve their function of reminding others of the great miracle G-d wrought.

3) Before There Were Potatoes There Was ... Cheese!

Today, there is a widespread custom to enjoy potato latkes on Chanukah, since the oil they are fried in reminds us of the miracle of the flames on the Temple menorah burning for eight days. But there is an older custom to eat cheese pancakes on Chanukah, which is reminiscent of the dairy (and intoxicating) meal that the brave Judith fed the Greek general before she decapitated him in his sleep, saving her village. Apparently, cheese latkes morphed into potato latkes (potatoes were unknown in the Old World until the late 16th century), and a new custom was born.



4) You Light a Hillel Menorah

In the days of the Talmud, there were two major academies of learning: Hillel and Shammai. The House of Hillel taught that every night of Chanukah we add another candle—as we do today. The House of Shammai, however, maintained that we begin with eight lights on the first night and light one less flame every night, ending Chanukah with a single flame. Tempted to try the Shammai template? The time to do that is yet to come. Tradition tells us that when Moshiach comes, we will follow the rulings of the House of Shammai. But until then, there is a beautiful lesson to be learned from the Hillel model. Add more light every night. Every little bit of light adds up to create something brilliant.

5) Syrians, Greeks, Hellenists or Yevanim?

We sometimes hear of Greeks, Syrians, or even Hellenists in the Chanukah story. So who exactly were the interlopers who were expelled by the Maccabees? All of the above! After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire was broken up: the Seleucid Greek Empire was based in Syria, and the Ptolemaic Empire had its base in Alexandria, Egypt. The soldiers stationed in Judea belonged to the Syrian Greeks. And who are the Hellenists and the Yevanim? The very same people: Hella is the Greek word for Greece, and Yavan is how we say it in Hebrew.

(Now, just to make things a bit more confusing, there were also the Hellenized Jews, or “Mityavnim” in Hebrew, who sided with the Greeks/Yevanim/Hellenists/Syrians/Seleucids and posed a great threat to the survival of traditional Jewish life.)

6) Chanukah in Space

In December of 1993, Space Shuttle Endeavour was sent into space to service the Hubble Space Telescope. One of the astronauts to

bravely perform a spacewalk to repair the telescope was Jeffrey Hoffman. Knowing that he would be stuck in space over Chanukah, Hoffman made sure to bring along a dreidel and a traveling menorah so that he'd be able to celebrate (because of lack of gravity and safety concerns, there was no way to light candles). Then, via live satellite communication, he showed his Chanukah supplies, gave his dreidel a twirl in the air, and wished Jews everywhere a happy Chanukah.

7) Is Your Menorah in the Doorway or at a Window?

The most common custom is to light the menorah at a window. In Mishnaic times, however, the menorah would be placed outside, on the left side of the door leading in from the street. Why was the menorah placed to the left of the door? Because the mezuzah is placed on the right side. With the mezuzah on one side and the menorah on the other, you are literally surrounded by holiness. The harsh realities of the diaspora, both sociopolitical and meteorological, forced the menorah to an indoor doorway, and some communities developed the custom to put it on the windowsill instead. Even today, many people prefer to light in a doorway, surrounding ourselves with the mitzvahs of mezuzah and the menorah, just as in ancient times.

8) Spreading the Light

The purpose of the menorah is to spread awareness to as many people as possible. This is why the menorah is also lit in the synagogue every night. But in recent years, the mitzvah of menorah has rippled out even further.



Rabbi Moshe Hecht with students
at the New Haven Hebrew Day School in 1987.

During Chanukah of 1973, some Chabad-Lubavitch yeshivah students were planning to go to Manhattan to distribute menorahs. They figured that if they could put a giant menorah on top of a car, many more people would notice them and take the menorahs they were distributing. Using wooden scraps and cinder blocks, they manage to make a large menorah and tie it down to the roof of a station wagon. The menorah turned out to be a success.

By 1974, Rabbi Abraham Shemtov had the unusual, perhaps wild, idea of lighting a menorah right in front of Independence Hall, which houses the Liberty Bell, the icon of American freedom. In 1975, on the opposite U.S. coast, Rabbi Chaim Drizin in San Francisco had made arrangements to light an oversized wooden menorah in the city's Union Square. Bill Graham—a child survivor of the Holocaust and a well-known music promoter—donated a 22-foot-tall mahogany menorah, and the tradition grew into its current form. At last count, Chabad-Lubavitch has set up more than 15,000 large public menorahs. Public lightings and Chanukah events are held in more than 100 countries around the world. Additionally, 5,000 menorah-topped vehicles roamed the roads, creating holiday awareness in cities, towns, and rural areas everywhere.

Bad Jew

BY SARA ESTHER CRISPE

Growing up, Chanukah was always my favorite holiday. I mean, isn't Chanukah every kid's favorite holiday? There were presents and Chanukah parties nightly, latkes and chocolate coins, sitting around and singing endless songs with my family. While I didn't necessarily find so much beauty or enjoyment in other aspects of Judaism as I grew up, Chanukah always remained the one holiday I felt a strong connection to.

Until I went to college.

I don't remember where or if or how I celebrated Chanukah my freshman year, but what happened my sophomore year is something I will never forget. About a week before Chanukah I discovered that my parents had sent me a gift through a local Jewish organization on campus. I hadn't known this Jewish group existed at my school, let alone gone to visit their center. With me that day when I went to pick up the package was my roommate Jen, a Japanese-American woman, as well as my best friend Viviana, who was Mexican-American; there was also Harley, who was French, Trichette, from the Caribbean, Melanie who was Indian and a girl from Ireland. Our little group represented just about every color, creed, and religion possible.

I was feeling way too cool and hip to actually hang out with my fellow Jewish students, who were too outwardly proud of their own religion for my comfort level. So I quickly took my package and left with my friends, eager to open it. Inside there was a little tin menorah, a box of blue and white candles and of course, the little chocolate gelt that I so loved. Yet looking at the menorah, I realized that I was going to need some instructions to even remember when or how to light.

Thinking out loud, I looked at my friends and said, "Wow, I feel like such a bad Jew, I can't even remember which way you light it, if it's from right to left or left to right..." Before I could figure out why I chose to share this concern of mine, my very own roommate, Jen, the Japanese-American, looked at me and said, loud and clear, "Bad Jew... off to the showers with you!"

Even as I write this now, more than fifteen years after it happened, I get the chills. I honestly can't even tell you what happened immediately after that, as I just don't remember. What I do remember is that everything stopped, froze actually, and then my mind started racing as I tried to come up with another explanation, another possibility for what she could have meant. Though no matter how hard I tried, there was simply no explanation...

There was a collective gasp after Jen's remark, followed by absolute silence. No one said anything. I would like to hope that it was only because they were too shocked to speak, for the possibility that they weren't bothered by it is too much to bear. I don't remember walking back to our apartment, the very apartment I shared with this person. The next thing I recall is sitting on my bed, and my best friend, Viviana, was sitting next to me and crying. She couldn't even talk, she just cried and hugged me and told me she was so sorry.

Needless to say, that incident essentially ended my friendship with Jen. She did apologize, over and over again about how it came across wrong and it was just a joke and she didn't really mean it. I did believe she was sorry, truly sorry. But I felt she was sorry that she verbalized it, not that she was sorry that she thought it and most likely felt it. I could forgive her carelessness in opening her mouth when she shouldn't have, but how do you forgive someone when they share their true feelings, and those feelings are hatred towards you and your people?

That Chanukah I did not light the menorah. I did absolutely nothing to celebrate Chanukah. At the time, I felt I couldn't. Everything related to Chanukah suddenly was defined by that statement. Every time I

looked at the menorah, all I could think of was "Bad Jew..." I hated Jen so much for what she had said, but even more, I hated her for taking away Chanukah from me.

At the time, I had no way of knowing that this incident would be a major turning point in my life. It turns out that the most significant and life-changing choices I have probably ever made were based on my reaction to her statement. Prior to that day, I had planned on spending my junior year in France. I wanted something exciting and new and foreign. But after that Chanukah, I changed my mind and immediately applied for a space at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I realized that the only way I could combat what had happened would be to take the time to connect to the very people and place that clearly so many still hated.

My stay in Israel was very difficult at first, and quite a few times I wondered why I had even bothered coming. I was in a situation where due to a falling-out with my parents, I was financially independent that year. With no savings, my only option was to work full-time while studying at the university. The result was a pretty miserable existence. While my friends were out having fun, traveling and enjoying their experience in Israel, I was either in class or working as a waitress, and I rarely saw much outside the classroom or restaurant walls.

During Chanukah break, most of the other kids were visited by their parents and were brought great gifts. This only increased my negativity and left me feeling even more alone and deserted. At that point in time, it seemed that Jen's statement had taken my love of Chanukah away from me for good.

Then, the day before Chanukah, I came back to my dorm room and there was a card lying on my bed. It read simply, "With wishes for a happy Chanukah. Buy yourself something special!"

Felicia was a girl in the program who knew about my situation and how hard I was working that year. Her parents had come to visit and had given her \$100 to buy something for herself. She decided to give me that money.

Needless to say, this was one of the most generous and moving gifts I had ever received. Her love and support completely lifted me out of the depression in which I was quickly sinking. The night before Chanukah I took the money and went shopping. I wanted to buy something that would last and be meaningful. I decided that the one thing I really wanted was a beautiful menorah. I wanted a menorah that I could look at and love and not one that would remind me of Jen.

I spent hours searching for the perfect menorah and finally decided on one where all the branches could move except for the shamash. I felt it perfectly symbolized how I was feeling in life, with everything moving around me and changing, yet at the center of it all, at the core, was stability. That Chanukah I lit the menorah every night, and as I watched the flames leap upwards and increase with the nights, I allowed myself to shed the anger and resentment I had been carrying around with me.

That Chanukah I realized, in a very personal way, that fighting darkness with darkness accomplishes absolutely nothing. But even more so, that there was no point in fighting at all. All I needed to do was bring in light, illuminate myself and my surroundings, and the darkness would immediately dissipate and disappear.

I still get a bit sick when I think about this incident. But I also now recognize that it was truly a blessing in disguise. It was specifically the depth of that darkness, the hurt and hatred which I experienced, which was the catalyst for me to make a change.

I still have that menorah sitting on my bookshelf. It has traveled with me around the world, and not a Chanukah passes that it isn't lit. Now, as I light with my husband, a rabbi, and our four beautiful children, I look at that menorah and think about the beautiful lessons it holds.

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By Mrs. Sonya Goldberg

I was born in 1934, and at the age of just one month, I spent my first summer in Woodmont – and I've spent every single summer since then in Woodmont with just one exception, the summer my grandfather passed away. Benjamin Rosenthal (Benjamin St. is named for him) built our cottage in 1924 where Merwin & Edgefield Avenues meet, two doors away from the Hebrew Congregation of Woodmont.

We spent our days enjoying the beach. We'd go often to Anchor Beach. My father had rowboats and motorboats and we enjoyed using them in the water. When I was little (during the late 30s and 40s) there were no houses on Seabreeze Avenue. It was a big open field, and a man would come on Sundays with ponies and give pony rides. We had a group of about 10 boys and girls on the beach and we had more nerve than we should have. We used to see Mrs. Poli outside her mansion tending to her garden. One day we asked if we could walk out on her pier, and she told us that we could if we'd be quiet and behave. And we did!

When the war was over in August 1945, I was 11. There was a big bench on the side of Sloppy Joe's [now Bonfire Grille] where people would wait for the trolley. Everyone was so ecstatic that the war was over and they made a fire to celebrate. Mr. Rosenthal's grandson ran into his "barn" and got his wheelbarrow to throw in the fire. The bench from Sloppy Joe's went in and they were looking for more things to throw in to feed the fire. Everyone was so happy and the fire burned for 3 days. When I got old enough I worked for Mr. Leibowitz who had a laundry service. I would take in the laundry and sort it right next door to our cottage. These were all great years.

Mrs. Finklehoffe from Springfield had a building with rooming houses right across from HCW, where the Tri-Beach Community Center is now. The first floor had stoves and refrigerators: a "koch-alien," and the rooms upstairs were rented out for the summer. The people that came were from New Haven, Waterbury, and New York. She had a big family and one son, Fred Finklehoffe, was a producer in Hollywood. Whenever he wrote a play, the titles were painted onto the steps inside the boarding house.

Some people I remember from my youth: On Gillette St. there was a man who owned a horse and would dress up like a sheikh with a "shmatte" on his head and he would ride down the hill on his horse. The fish-man was Italian, and he'd come in an old truck and would wrap the fish in newspaper. Rabbi Shuchotowitz lived on Sherman



HCW Sunday School class in 1938. Sonya is sitting in the bottom row, second from left.

Avenue in New Haven. He came to Woodmont for Shabbos several times in the 1940s and he'd stay at our cottage. He was also the rabbi who married us. I remember Pearl Baker who came often to the shul. They lived up on the hill.

My family was very involved with the Hebrew Congregation of Woodmont. My grandmother was an invalid and could not attend services, but she insisted on sitting in her yard on Saturday mornings so she could hear the prayers from the shul a couple of doors away. In fact, the two front doors of the synagogue building each had a window with an inscription dedicated to each of my grandparents, Rose and William Erlichman.

I attended the Sunday Hebrew school at HCW. Mrs. Max ran the Sunday school and was a dearly beloved teacher. She lived in a cottage on Burwell Ave., and I remember that she had a fish pond. We would put on plays. One year, we wore long dresses blue with silver stars pasted on. We marched in with wooden bowls—I still have my bowl that I used in that play! I went to the Sunday school through my teen years and then after Mrs. Max passed away, the school closed.

Every year, the ladies' auxiliary had a card party to raise funds for the shul. It was the social event of the season! They held a raffle and usually my father would obtain the prizes for the winners. The lions that graced the ark were from a little shul on Greenwood St. in New Haven. My son William used to blow the shofar at the shul on the second day of Rosh Hashana. We still have our cottage in Woodmont (the very same one my grandfather bought—not much has changed) and enjoy coming to the beach each summer and being with friends.

For more Bagel Beach memories or to submit your own, visit our blog at www.BagelBeach.com.



In the beginning...G-d said, "Let There Be Light."
- Genesis 1:1-3

The reference is not only to physical light as we know it. This initial statement is rather the mandate of all Creation. The ultimate goal and purpose of creation is that the Divine Light shine throughout the world, transforming everything, even darkness itself, so that it, too, will shine.

- Based on the teachings of the Rebbe

LETTERS FROM OUR INBOX

Dear Rabbi and Chanie Wilhelm,
Thank you so very much for the (warm) challah. Words cannot convey how touched we are. Thanks for this kind gesture.
- L & P

It was almost a year ago, I can't believe...that the Rabbi placed my Mezuzah on my door! Milford Chabad has added great happiness to a rather difficult year.
I am grateful to have found you.
- Leslie

Thank you for the warm welcome over the Holidays -- My parents have found a "new" home at Chabad of Milford.
- Judy P.

Dear Chanie,
"Gift of Life" was such a wonderful talk last night! Amazing how the whole thing came together starting with you...G-d sure works miracles!
- Judy S.

Hi Rabbi and Chanie!
Thank you so so much for letting me pray in the Sukkah last night. Your whole family is wonderful. I am ecstatic over having my own Lulav and etrog. I did my prayers including for first day and looked at Chabad.org on how to shake them.
This means so much to me. I have never had my own Lulav and etrog.
Thank you, thank you for all you and your family give to the community. Sending much much love
- D.

Dear Friends,
Thank you for always remembering me. Happy and healthy New Year to you and your families.
Sincerely,
- Barbara H.

Rabbi,
Thank you so much for going to visit my mother in rehab. This is such a difficult time, and you being there made it easier for us. Wishing you a wonderful week,
- Wendy

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