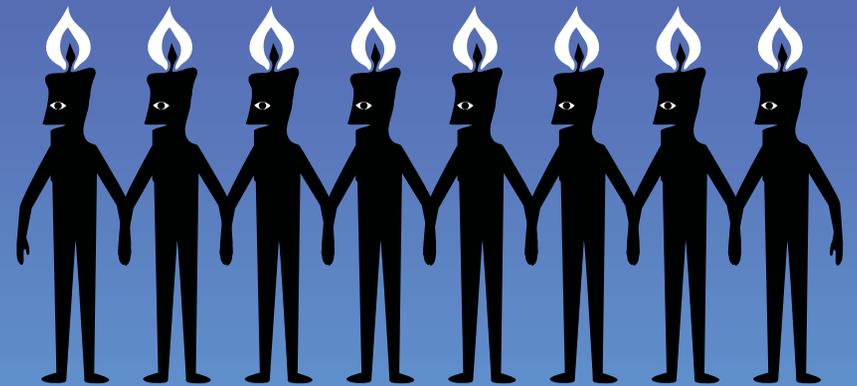
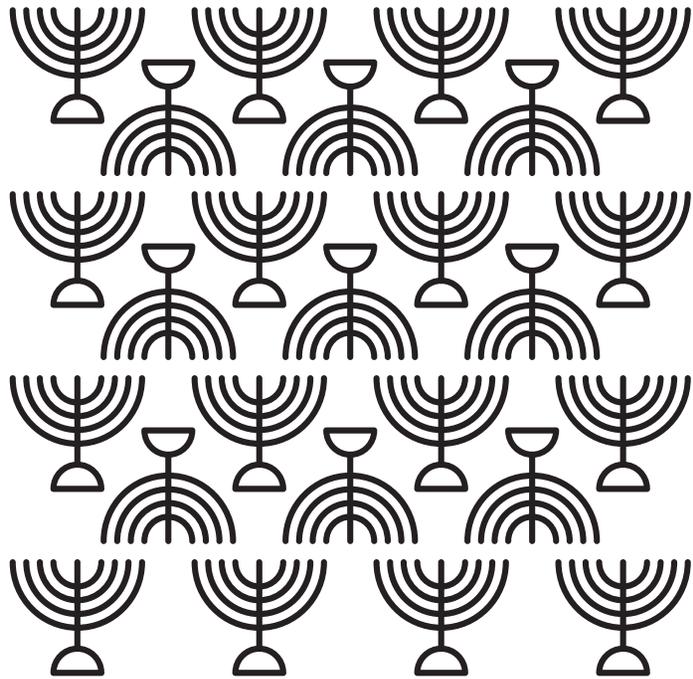


# Count Your Blessings

Eight Nights of Chanukah Wisdom\*



*\*or Hanukah, or Hanukkah, or Channukah*



## HAPPY CHANUKAH!

One of the best things about Chanukah is how easy it is to customize for your family or friends. Say some blessings, light some candles, eat some latkes or donuts if you're into that. Add presents if needed. Repeat x7. This leaves lots of room for you to make the holiday your own. You can write your own blessings, or make your own menorah.

Chanukah can be as low key or as high impact as you like. We're getting you started with this booklet of information and resources, and we hope you will come up with your own traditions and rituals to make the holiday special.

But here's one thing to remember: Jewish tradition stipulates that you should not use the light from your Chanukah candles to do other things (like working). Instead, the Chanukah light should be used to appreciate the holiday, and the beauty around you. This year we hope the light of your Chanukah candles will bring you joy, and help you to reflect and appreciate what's most valuable to you.

Warmly,

The Team at Custom & Craft

# THE CHANUKAH STORY, TWO WAYS

by Tamar Fox

## THE CLASSIC STORY...

Way back in 167 BCE, the Jews were living in the land of Israel, and were ruled by a Syrian Greek king named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus wanted the Jews to assimilate into Hellenistic culture, so he outlawed three core Jewish commandments: circumcising male babies, observing the Sabbath, and studying Torah. He also desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. A Jewish priest named Mattathias and his five sons--collectively known as the Maccabees, which means "hammers" -- led a revolt against Antiochus, and though they were heavily outnumbered, they ultimately succeeded in driving out the Syrian Greeks and rededicating the Temple to God.

When the Maccabees were cleaning the Temple for rededication, they discovered that the oil used to light the huge lamp had almost all been desecrated. There was only enough oil to light the lamp for one night, but when they lit the lamp, the oil miraculously burned for eight days and nights.

To commemorate this miracle we light a nine pronged candelabra, adding one candle each night. We also eat greasy foods, because oil was part of the Chanukah miracle.

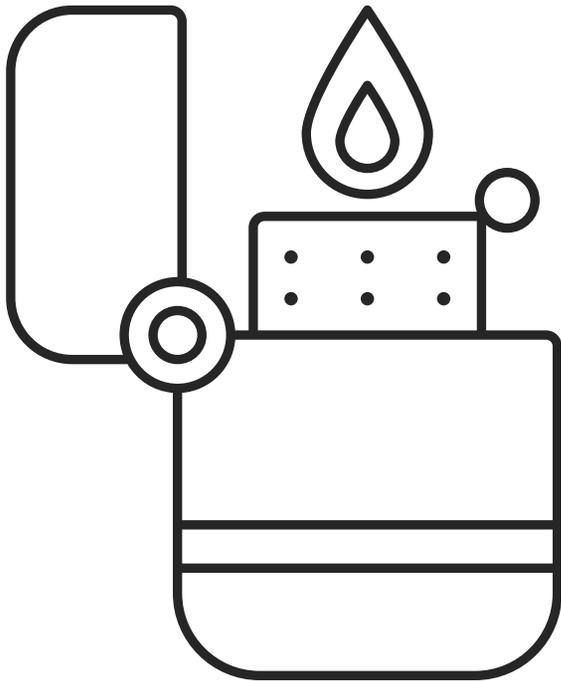
## AND THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY...

The real Chanukah story is a little more complicated. Some Jews were happy to assimilate into Hellenistic culture, and the Maccabees declared war on those Hellenized Jews as much as on the Syrian Greeks. The Maccabees used guerilla warfare tactics in a bloody war that went on for years, and only one Maccabee survived to see the end of the war in 164 BCE. That year the war prevented the Jews from being able to celebrate the autumn festival of Sukkot, so they decided that Sukkot should be celebrated once they rededicated the Temple, which they did on the 25th of the month of Kislev. Sukkot lasts seven days plus one extra day for the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, so the new holiday of rededication (Chanukah) became an eight day holiday.

So where did the oil story come from? About 600 years later, the Talmud tells the story of the oil miraculously lasting for eight days to explain why it's forbidden to fast on Chanukah. Many scholars believe that the story of the miracle was a later addition.



Judah, one of the five Maccabee sons  
(image from Wikipedia Commons)



**“There are two ways of spreading light; to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.”**

– Edith Wharton

**“Tonight we light the Chanukah candles from left to right.”**

– Michele Citrin, Pass the Candle

## HOW TO LIGHT THE MENORAH

A menorah is also called a “Hanukkiyah”

Each night of Chanukah, we light an additional candle to indicate the growing miracle of each successive night. On the first night, we light the shamash (helper) and use it to light one additional candle. On night two, we light the shamash, plus two candles, and so on until the final night when we have a hanukkiyah full of light. It is traditional to place the hanukkiyah on or near a window, so it can be seen from the street.



# HOW TO RECITE THE BLESSINGS

by Tamar Fox

Blessings are at the core of most Jewish holidays and rituals, and Chanukah is no different. Before lighting the candles we say two blessing, one for the commandment to light Chanukah candles, one for the miracle that was performed for our ancestors in the time of the Maccabees. On the first night we also say Shehechyanu, a blessing of thanksgiving for bringing us to this day.

When you think of blessings, you may think of good wishes, of making something holy. But Hebrew blessings are different. Most Hebrew blessings begin *Baruch Ata Adonai*, which means, Blessed are you, God. We're not blessing the candles, or the challah, or the ritual in front of us, we're blessing God (or the Universe, or the Source of Creation, or the Great Magical Unifier) for giving us the opportunity to experience the special moment of the present.

Even if you don't believe in God, Hebrew blessings can be a powerful way to express gratitude. It's a moment to stop and reflect, to feel thanks for the experience.

If you're not comfortable using the traditional blessings on Chanukah, try listing things you feel grateful for each night. Start with one thing on the first night, and build up to eight on the last night.

1 ***Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.***

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the Chanukah lights.

2 ***Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, she'asah nissim la'avoteinu ba'yamim ha-hem bazman ha'zeh.***

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who performed wonderous deeds for our ancestors in days of old at this season.

✻ *On the first night, we add:*

***Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam shehechyanu v'kiyemanu v'higyanu lazman hazeh.***

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.



**“ At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”**

–Albert Schweitzer

# LIGHTING THE MENORAH

by Alison Laichter

One of my favorite Chanukah traditions and “rule” is that we aren’t supposed to use the Chanukah candles’ light for any purpose. You shouldn’t use the light from the menorah to read or do work or even light your way through the dark. Instead, we are supposed to simply gaze at the light and enjoy it. Have you ever lit a candle and just sat and watched it burn? I recommend it. When I lead Chanukah meditation workshops, that’s always a profound exercise. It’s incredibly lovely to watch the candles burn out, one by one, returning us to darkness.

This time of year, I’m thinking a lot about bringing light to dark places. I’ve learned that we don’t just light candles to bring light to the darkest time of year during Chanukah. We are also reminding ourselves that we’re in constant motion. Things will change. Darkness leads to light and light to darkness, and somehow, there’s some comfort in that.

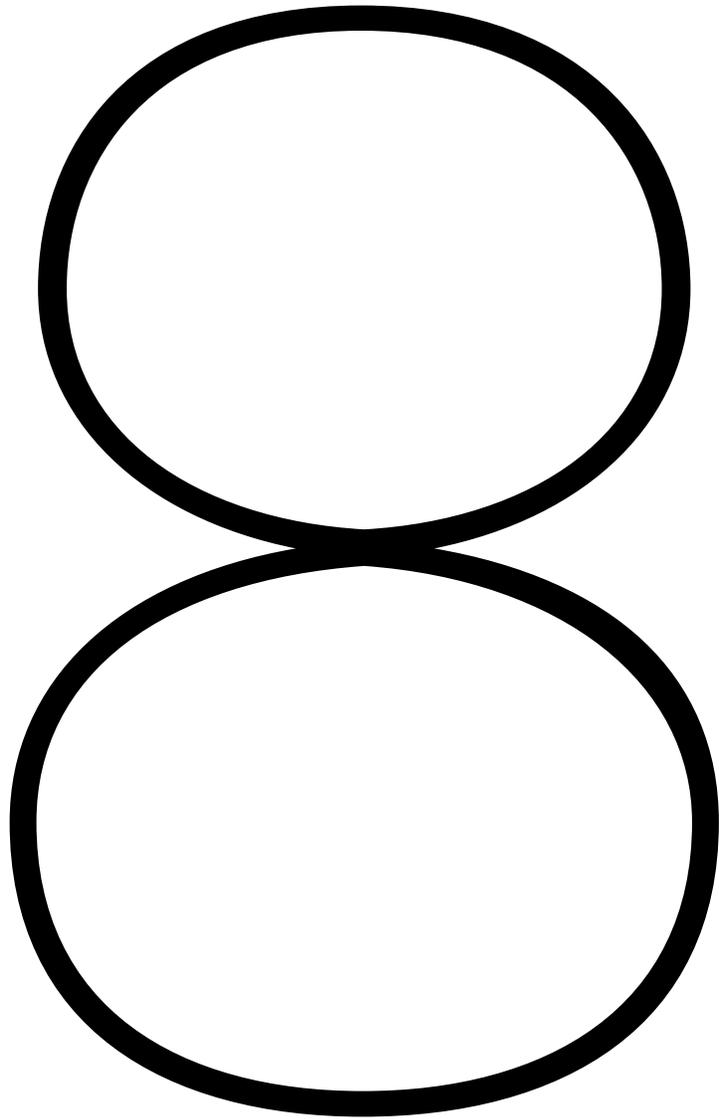
It’s been my experience that the scariest part of feeling lost or anxious, depressed or sad, is that we fear that we’ll feel that way forever. Of course, we know, intellectually, that everything changes and we won’t be stuck in any feeling forever, but in dark moments, it’s hard to see the light or sometimes even the possibility of light. So, we light candles and remember our ability to create light, joy, peace, love, and also that darkness precedes light and light goes to dark and back again.

We learn in the story of Chanukah that even the holiest place, the Temple, could be desecrated, that the eternal light can go out. How heartbreaking that must have been for the people of that time. And, if that’s possible, what

are the chances that our fragile, human hearts could ever stay whole and holy for our whole lives? Just like the Maccabees rededicated the Temple and searched through all of the brokenness for light, I’m using the holiday of Chanukah (which means “dedication”) to excavate my own heart and life, and rededicating myself to creating a life that brings light into the world.

Each night, when you light the candles, adding more and more as the holiday continues, take at least a few moments to simply gaze at the candlelight. Enjoy the gift of light, look inside and see what needs your dedication, and notice the tiny and huge miracles that have brought you to this very moment.

Happy Chanukah.



**“Eight is the number of infinity, one more than what you know how to be. And this is the light of festivity, when your broken heart yearns to be free.”**

– Matisyahu

# A WRITING MEDITATION

Just as the Maccabees rededicated the Temple (the Hebrew word Chanukah means “dedication”), looked through the rubble, and miraculously found the ingredients for light, we can use this holiday to look through our own rubble and find our own sources of light. Use this writing meditation to take time to pause and reflect on light, dedication, and miracles. Consider these eight questions and the time you’re taking to write your answers a gift to yourself. Happy Chanukah!

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## **Instructions:**

Take a deep breath. Close your eyes. Take a full breath. Check in with your body, and ask yourself “what does it feel like to breathe?” and return to the physicality of your breath. Become aware of how your breath comes and goes, how your lungs fill and empty, your belly rises and falls.

Use the questions on the next page to guide your writing meditation practice. Take your time and give yourself the gift of presence. This is being present. This is your practice, your exploration of dedication, and your opportunity to find out what lights up your life. Who knows, you could discover some hidden miracles!

When your mind inevitably wanders, because that’s what minds do, gently bring yourself back to this moment on your next inhale. Practice returning to your self, and to this paper in your hands.

## The Questions

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- What brings light to my life?
- How can I kindle that light?
- How can I bring more light into the world?
- What miracles have I experienced during difficult times?
- What miracles am I trying to cultivate in my life?
- How can I bring about miracles in the lives of others?
- What will I (re)dedicate myself to this year?

*May our practice light us from within and allow us to radiate outwards, during the darkest time of the year and always, bringing light and peace to ourselves and the world.*

Write your innermost thoughts here...

(This is a safe space.)

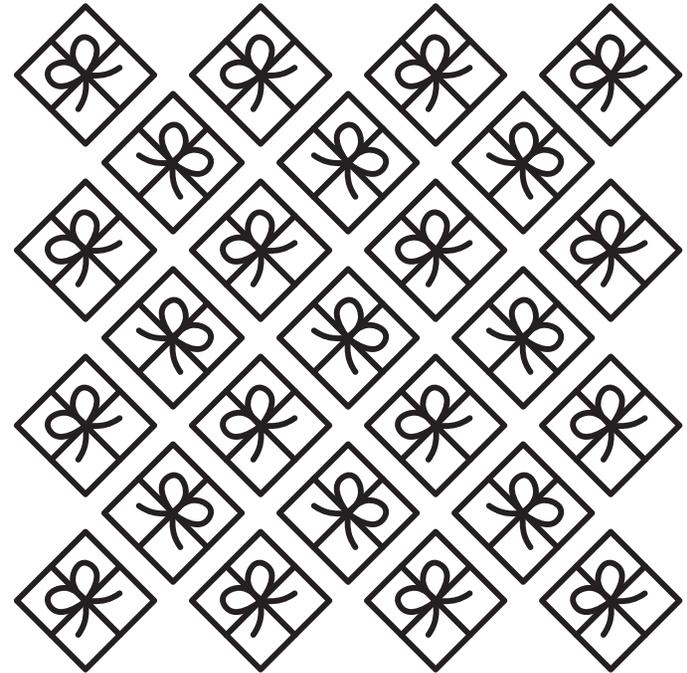
# 'TIS A GIFT TO BE SIMPLE

In the season of gift giving, an exercise to help you choose gifts for people you love. (You don't need to write this one down, unless you want to!)

## The Questions

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- What's the best gift you ever received?  
What made it so special?
- What was the worst gift you ever received?  
What made it so bad?
- On an average day, what would make you think of this person?
- What is something you wish people said to you more often?
- What is a compliment you've never forgotten?



## DREIDEL RULES!

Dreidel (a Yiddish word, in Hebrew it's *sevivon*, and in either language means "to turn around") is a top with four sides. Each side of the dreidel has a different Hebrew letter: Nun, Gimmel, Hey, and Shin. Together the letters are an acronym for the phrase, "Nes gadol haya sham," "A great miracle happened there." The "there" signifies Israel, and in Israel, dreidels have a Pey instead of a Shin. The Pey stands for the word "Po," which means "here."

Dreidel is a game played all over the world during Chanukah, with any amount of players, and you can play with gelt (gold foil wrapped chocolate coins), or actual coins, nuts, candies, whatever you want. Here are the rules:

Each player has a bunch of pieces of gelt. Everyone puts one piece into the center. The center "pot" may need to be replenished after every round, so every time it's empty, everyone again puts one piece of gelt in the pot to continue playing.

Now, it's time to spin. Each player spins the dreidel, and if the dreidel lands on

**Nun, the player does nothing.**

**Gimmel, the player wins everything in the pot!**

**Hey, the player takes half of the pot.**

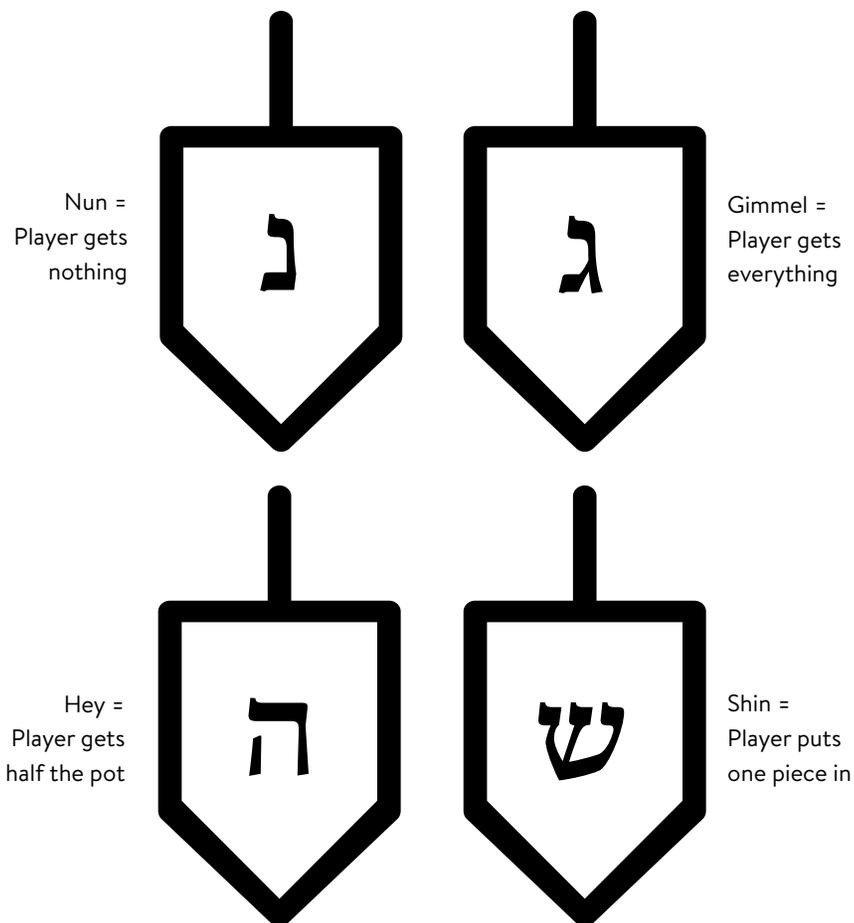
**Shin, the player puts a piece of gelt in the pot.**

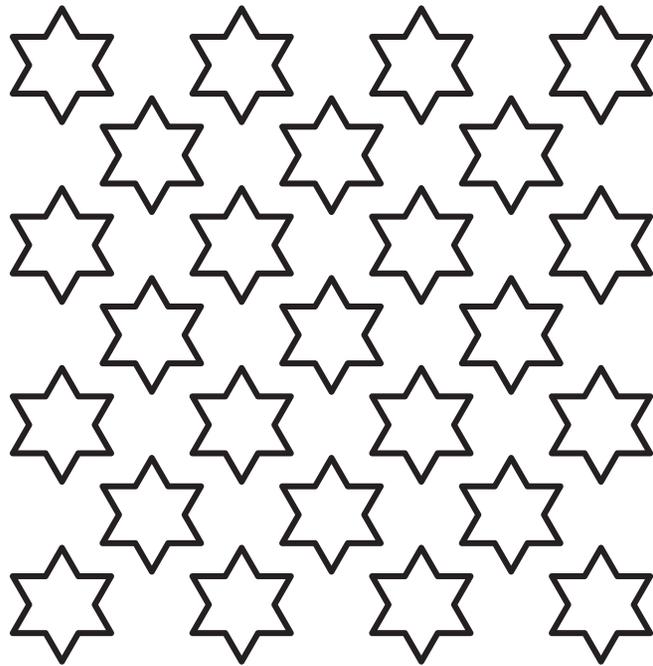
If you run out of gelt, you're out. If you get all the gelt, you win!

## נס גדול היה שם

Nes gadol haya sham

A great miracle happened there





**“In the right light,  
at the right time,  
everything is extraordinary.”**

– Aaron Rose