

Candles & Chanukah

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First, a bit of Jewish law...

צריך לזהר מעד בהדלקת נרות חנוכה. ואפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה...

Tzarich l'zaher me'od b'hadlakat nerot chanukah; v'afiloo ani ha'mitparness min ha'tzedakah
משנה ברורה, הלכות חנוכה סימן תרעא (א)

A person needs to be really careful to light Chanukah lights, even a poor person who sustains themselves just from tzedakah...

Mishna Brura, Laws of Chanukah, part 671 (1)

נר חנוכה מניחו על פתח הסמוך לרשות הרבים מבחוץ... שאין לו פתח פתוח לרשות הרבים, מניחו
בחלון הסמוך לרשות הרבים.

Ner chanukah manicho al petach hasamooch li'r'shut ha'rabim mi'bachutz'sh'eiyn lo petach
patuach li'r'shut ha'rabim, manicho ba'chalon hasamooch li'r'shut ha'rabim

משנה ברורה, הלכות חנוכה סימן תרעא (ה)

A Chanukah light should be placed in the entrance (a porch) to a public space...if there is no porch, it should be placed in a window next to the public space.

Mishna Brura, Laws of Chanukah, part 671 (5)

But why does the Mishna Brura tell us that lighting the candles is so very important? And why do they have to be in a public place where everyone can see them? There is a very simple answer...

Because we have to publicise the miracle of Chanukah (to everyone)...

משום פרסומי נסה...

mi'shum pirsumei nissah...

Aha...so Chanukah is all about **Jewish pride!** Being confident enough to say to the world... look at what I do and for us to share a message with the rest of the world!

What else can the lights mean?...

As each evening of Chanukah comes, Jews around their chanukkiot are treated to a sort of ritual dance. It is not a dance of people, but a dance of flames and wicks. As the candles burn low, or as the oil in the chanukiah gradually runs out, the fires do not simply disappear. For the last few moments of their burning, they flicker, seemingly ready to be extinguished, when suddenly they leap back to life. Just when it seems that the flame is gone, it suddenly revives. One moment there is darkness, and next, light reborn and renewed. There is a beauty, an almost magical quality, to this display. It is a quasi-desperate exhibition, a suggestion that the fire does not want to die. It struggles desperately to live. Though the flame will eventually die out, our response is to light the flames again the next evening, adding an additional candle or wick to the collection, making our point that we simply will not allow the lights to go out.

That is the point of Chanukah. It is about lights, but not only the lights of the candles. Chanukah proclaims and insists that the downtrodden, the powerless, the dispossessed and the all but vanquished are these flames. "We have survived, apparently against all odds," we say to the world, "and we believe that you can - and will - as well."

Rabbi Daniel Gordis

Does the World Need the Jews, p.130