

## ***Hanukah in the Rabbinic Texts***

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### **1. Shabbat 21b:10-22a:2**

The Gemara asks: **What is Hanukkah**, and why are lights kindled on Hanukkah? The Gemara answers: The Sages taught in *Megillat Ta'anit*: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Hanukkah are eight.

### **2. II Maccabees 10:18**

(124 BCE in Greek, probably in Alexandria)

...The sanctuary was purified on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Kislev...this joyful celebration went on for eight days, it was like Sukkot, for they recalled how only a short time ago they had kept the festival while living like animals in the mountains and so they carried *lulavim* and *etrogim*, and they chanted hymns to God who had triumphantly led them to the purification of the Temple. A measure was passed by the public assembly that they entire Jewish people should observe these days ever year.

### **3. Pesikta Rabbati (Post 200 CE, written in Hebrew in Israel)**

Why are the lights kindled during Hanukah? At the time the sons of Hashmon triumphed over the kingdom of Greece, they entered the Temple and found there eight spears of iron which they grooved out, poured in oil and kindled wicks.

### **4. Megillat Taanit, Kislev 7-8 (1<sup>st</sup> century CE in Israel)**

On the twenty fifth of the month is Hannukka, eight days on which one does not eulogize because when the Greeks entered the Temple they defiled all the oil there. When the hand of the Hasmonians was made strong and they defeat the Greeks, they checked (in the Temple) and only found one jar of oil sealed with the mark of the High Priest which remained undefiled. Though there was only enough in it to light for one day, a miracle occurred through it and they lit the Temple lamps from it for eight days. The following year they decreed these to be eight days of celebration...

### 5. Shabbat 21b:5-6

**The Sages taught in a *baraita*:** The basic mitzvah 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 meticulous, adjust the number of lights daily. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree as to the nature of that adjustment. Beit Shammai says on the first day eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced. Beit Hillel says, on the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased.

### 6. Shabbat 21b

[Ulla](#) said: There were two *amora'im* in the West, Eretz Yisrael, who disagreed with regard to this dispute, Rabbi Yosei bar Avin and [Rabbi Yosei](#) bar Zevida. One said that the reason for [Beit Shammai](#)'s opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the incoming days, i.e., the future. On the first day, eight days remain in Hanukkah, one kindles eight lights, and on the second day seven days remain, one kindles seven, etc. The reason for [Beit Hillel](#)'s opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the outgoing days. Each day, the number of lights corresponds to the number of the days of Hanukkah that were already observed. And one said that the reason for [Beit Shammai](#)'s opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the bulls of the festival of *Sukkot*: Thirteen were sacrificed on the first day and each succeeding day one fewer was sacrificed ([Numbers 29:12–31](#)). The reason for [Beit Hillel](#)'s opinion is that the number of lights is based on the principle: One elevates to a higher level in matters of sanctity and one does not diminish sanctity. Therefore, if the objective is to have the number of lights correspond to the number of days, there is no alternative to increasing their number with the passing of each day.

### 7. Mishneh Torah, Scroll of Esther and Hanukkah 4:1-9

(12<sup>th</sup> Century Moses Maimonides in Egypt)

How many lamps should one light on Chanukah? It is a commandment that one light be kindled in each and every house whether it be a household

with many people or a house with a single person. One who enhances the commandment should light lamps according to the number of people of the house — a lamp for each and every person, whether they are men or women. One who enhances [it] further than this and performs the commandment in the choicest manner lights a lamp for each person on the first night and continues to add one lamp on each and every night...

### **8. Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 671:5**

(by Joseph Karo in Sfat, 16<sup>th</sup> Century)

One should place the Hanukkah light at the entrance which adjoins the public domain, on the outside. If the house opens to the public domain, he should place it at its entrance. If there is a courtyard in front of the house, he should place it at the entrance of the courtyard. If he lives in the upper floor, having no entrance leading to the public domain, he should place it at a window that adjoins the public domain. In a time of danger, when one is not allowed to perform mitzvot, it is enough that he place it on his table.

### **9. Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 672:2**

If one did not light with sunset, either due to forgetfulness or on purpose, s/he should go ahead and light until people stop passing through the marketplace, which is approximately half an hour, because then the people are passing and coming home and thus the miracle is publicized. Therefore one must place enough oil for that time, and if one put more oil in, s/he may extinguish the candle after that time has passed, and may use the light after that time.

### **10. Mishneh Torah, Scroll of Esther and Hanukkah 4:12-14**

The precept of lighting the *Hanukkah* lamp is exceedingly precious, and one should carefully observe it in order to acclaim the miracle, ever praising and thanking God for the miracles which he has performed for us. Even if one has nothing to eat except what he gets from charity, he should borrow, or sell his garment, to buy oil and lamps and light them. See that [if] one has only one coin, and the Kiddush of the [Shabbat] and lighting the Hanukkah lamp are before him — he should have buying oil for lighting the Hanukkah lamp precede over buying wine for Kiddush of the day.

**11. Shabbat 22a**

[Rabba](#) said: It is a mitzva to place the Hanukkah lamp within the handbreadth adjacent to the entrance. The Gemara asks: And where, on which side, does he place it? There is a difference of opinion: [Rav Aha, son of Rava](#), said: On the right side of the entrance. Rav Shmuel from Difti said: On the left. And the *halakha* is to place it on the left so that the Hanukkah lamp will be on the left and the *mezuzah* on the right. One who enters the house will be surrounded by mitzvot.