

The Menorah

The menorah is used during the eight day celebration of Hanukkah. The Hebrew word for menorah is Hanukiyah. Some people also call it a candelabra or candelabrum.

Hanukkah is celebrated each year on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. Depending on when that date falls, Hanukkah is celebrated in late November or early December.

The first menorah had seven branches. Each branch symbolized one day of the week and it burned olive oil. The second menorah also had seven branches, but when the first and second Temples were destroyed seven branched menorahs were no longer used. Seven branched menorahs are available in today's modern times though, in honor of and as a reminder of the first menorah.

Today the more common menorah has eight branches along with a ninth branch to hold the candle that is used to light the other candles. On the first night of Hanukkah one candle is light, the candle on the far right side of the menorah. It is lit by the Shamash candle (also called the server candle), which is the candle in the center of the menorah (the one that is higher than the other candles). The Shamash candle is always the candle used to light the other candles in the menorah. On each succeeding night of Hanukkah another candle is lit. The candles are placed in the menorah from right to left; but they are lit from left to right. By the eighth day of the Hanukkah celebration, all the candles on the menorah are lit.

It is encouraged that the menorah try to be lit as soon as the first stars can be seen in the night sky, but it can be later in the evening too. A blessing is spoken when the menorah is lit. The ceremony of lighting the menorah is traditionally witnessed by the entire household. After the menorah is lit, it is customarily placed in or near a window so people passing by can see it. The menorah stays lit until the candles burn themselves out.

The menorahs available today vary from simple to elaborate. There are special menorahs just for children brass; tabletop menorahs; floor menorahs; and menorahs that are electrified instead of burning candles. Some types and styles I've seen include: crystal, etched glass, aluminum, ceramic, wood, silver, gold, and even various animal menorahs such as a dove menorah and elephant menorah.

The menorah is an important Jewish symbol and is widely recognized. Many non-Jewish or gentile people may not be familiar with Jewish history and traditions but they likely know what a menorah is.

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About the Author

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