

# Minhage Hanoukah

## Customs Related to Nerot Hanouka:

1) The Sepharadim were always careful to call what we light on *Hanouka* the “*Nerot Hanouka*” or simply “*Hanouka*”; as opposed to the term “Menora” which is reserved for the candelabra in the Bet Hamikdash (which only had 7 stems). The term “*Hanoukia*” is the term for it in Modern Hebrew.

**Proof:** The *Berayta* in Masechet Shabbat (21b) says: “*Misvat Hanouka ner ish ubeto*”. We see that the *Berayta* is simply referring to the candles as *Hanouka*.

2) The custom amongst all Middle Eastern and North African Jewish communities is to only use **pure olive oil** for the *Hanoukah* lights.

**Reason:** A. It is considered to be the best way to fulfill the commandment.  
B. There is a stronger connection between our actions & commemorating the miracle since the miracle took place with olive oil

3) It is preferable for one to light near the entranceway in order to publicize the miracle to those who pass by in the street. This should only be done if it's safe. However, if it is not safe, one may follow the custom of lighting inside the house, which publicizes the miracle to one's family members. (**Maharikash**)

4) The custom in our community is to follow the Kabbalah of the **AR"l**, as brought down in the Shulhan Aruch, and say "*Lehadliq Ner Hanoukah*" for the beracha, as opposed to "*Ner Shel Hanoukah*". Although “Ner Shel” is mentioned in the Gemara and among the Rishonim, there are many reasons to say “Ner Hanouka” based upon both grammatical and mystical interpretations. (See the Hid”a and Ben Ish Hai).

5) The law and custom for Sepharadim is that only **one** Hanoukah is used for the entire family. The custom of the Ashkenazim is for each member of the family to light his/her own personal Hanoukah.

In most Sephardic traditional families the head of the household gives each member of the family a chance to light, in order to share in the love of the misvah. On the 1st night the head of the household lights the first wick/candle, and his wife lights the shamash. On the 2nd night he lights the newest wick, his wife the next, the oldest child the shamash, etc. for all 8 nights.

**Important note:** A child may only light the ‘*nerot bahidur*’ (the extra candles lit each night) if they've reached the ‘age of hinnuch’ (which begins at approximately age 7). Children under this age may only light the shamash.

## Minhage Hanoukah

6) In the synagogue the Hanukah lights are to be placed against the southernmost wall. On the 1st night the Western most light is lit first, etc... (this is based upon an old responsa of **the Radbaz**).

7) The custom in many communities is to light the Hanoukah Lights in the synagogue during the daytime as well. This is done without a berakhah.

**Reason:** To publicize the miracle. (There is even greater *pirsum hanes* since the light of these wicks is not needed during the day). It also helps remind those who may not have lit at night what day of the holiday it is, enabling them to light the proper number that night.

8) There are some **Syrian** families who have a custom to light an extra light each night of the holiday.

**Procedure:** On the 1st night when all the Jews of the world light 2 lights (1 plus the shamash), they light 3 (one plus the shamash plus an extra shamash). At the end of the holiday when everyone has 9 (8 plus the shamash), these Spanish Aleppians have 10 (8 plus the shamash plus the extra shamash).

**Important Note:** Those who have this custom should light this extra light **on the side of the Hanouka** so that there should be a *bekeir* (recognition) as to what night it is.

**Reason:** Prior to the expulsion from Spain in 1492 there were indigenous Jewish communities in Israel, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, etc.. When the Sepharadim came from Spain there were always conflicts with the older resident communities. Over time the communities meshed and molded into one. One rare case though was in Aleppo, Syria. The indigenous community known as “Mustaarbim” remained somewhat separate with their own unique liturgy until 1930.

After the expulsion from Spain, some Sepharadim finally found haven in Aleppo. At first, the indigenous community would not accept them into the community. They were finally accepted by the community around the time of Hanoukah that year. This caused them much joy & they deemed it a miracle for themselves and their families for all times. They decided to light an extra light each night of the holiday to commemorate this momentous event.

Hence, families from Spain who lived in Aleppo have this special Hanoukah custom till today. These are some of the families that are Spanish Aleppians who adhere to this custom till today. Haber, Attie, Tawil, Betesh, Sutton, Cattan, Mishaan, Dweck.

## Minhage Hanoukah

9) The custom in **Aleppo** and in many other Sephardic cities was that prior to Hanoukah the shamash of the synagogue would give out a tall wax candle to each man which he would use for lighting the Hanoukah wicks. They in return would give him a small donation.

### Various Customs:

1) The custom on Hanoukah is to eat a type of sweetened fried dough.

The **Syrians** and particularly those from **Damascus** have a special pastry called 'Atayif for Hanoukah. It is thin round dough, which is stuffed with nuts and sugar and folded in half and deep-fried. It is then drizzled with sugary syrup while hot and served up fresh. The **Egyptians** have fried balls of dough known as Zalabya drizzled with syrup on top.

Reason: To recall the story of Yehudit who fed the Greek officer oily foods.

2) There was never a custom to give out presents on Hanoukah (rather this was reserved for Purim). This recent tradition perhaps came from communities who lived amongst Christians who exchanged presents for their holiday, which usually coincides with Hanukah.