



# Table Talk: Quotes and Questions for Family Discussions

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Please enjoy this collection of sources, quotes, and discussion questions to enhance your Chanukah experience. In line with the theme of this issue, this guide will help you explore how the laws and themes of Chanukah relate to the idea of “spreading light to the world.” They are ideally meant to inspire family and other group discussion.

## The Location of the Chanukah Candles

The Sages taught in a baraita: It is a mitzvah to place the Chanukah candles outside of the entrance to one's house so that all can see it. If one lives upstairs, one places it at the window adjacent to the public domain. And in a time of danger when the gentiles issued decrees to prohibit kindling lights, one places it on the table and that is sufficient to fulfill one's obligation ... And on which side [of the entrance], does one place it? Rav Acha, 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 Chanukah candles will be on the left and the mezuzah on the right. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 21b–22a

- **According to the Talmud, where is the ideal place to light the Chanukah candles?**
- **What do you think constitutes a “time of danger”?**
- **What do you think these laws teach us about the message of Chanukah?**

## The Definition of “Outside”

Outside — Due to publicizing the miracle. Not in the public domain, rather in the courtyard, for their houses were open to the courtyard. Rashi (1040–1105), Shabbat 21b s.v. outside

It is a mitzvah to place it [the Chanukah lights] in the outside of the entrance of his house — we are dealing with a case in which there is no courtyard but rather a house [entrance] right next to a public domain. However, if there is a courtyard outside the house, it is a

mitzvah to place it by the entrance of the courtyard. Tosafot (12th and 13th centuries), Shabbat 21b, s.v. mitzvah

- **What is the disagreement between Rashi and Tosafot regarding the ideal location of the Chanukah candles?**
- **What do Tosafot's opinion highlight regarding the purpose of the Chanukah candles?**
- **Is this debate relevant today considering the construction of our modern living structures?**

## Justifications for Lighting Inside

Although now we don't light outside despite there being no more danger, that is because we are prevented from doing so. In all of our countries the days of Chanukah are days of heavy rainfall, snow, and strong winds, and therefore it is impossible to place it [i.e. the Chanukah candles] outside if we don't enclose it in a glass case, and the rabbis did not burden us with this [requirement]. Furthermore, in doing so it is not recognizable it is for

the mitzvah. Furthermore, not every country will allow us to place them outside. Therefore, we all light inside the house.

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829–1908), *Aruch Hashulchan*, Orach Chaim 671:24

- **What are the three reasons the Aruch HaShulchan gives as to why it is common to light indoors nowadays?**

- Can you think of any other mitzvot that are commonly not performed in their ideal form due to the weather?
- There are several halachic connections between

the mitzvah of Chanukah candles and a person's home. What do you think this connection teaches us?

## Lighting in between Two Mitzvot

Nowadays that we don't light outside and it's only publicized in one's household, there is no more decree that one should light at the entrance in-between two mitzvot [i.e. the Chanukah candles and the mezuzah]. Accordingly, it is no longer an obligation but something that those who are especially careful with mitzvot do ... Therefore, the Magen Avraham is correct when he writes that if one has a window facing a public domain one should place the Chanukah candles near the window ... because publicizing the miracle is more important than the idea of entering the house between two mitzvot.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895–1986), *Igrot Moshe*, Orach Chaim, 4:125

- According to Rabbi Feinstein, what is the main reason for the placement of the Chanukah candles?
- If one lives in an apartment that contains no windows facing a public domain, where should they light the Chanukah candles?
- Do you think there is a mitzvah to publicize the miracle of Chanukah in ways other than lighting the Chanukah candles?

We have seen a tension when it comes to lighting Chanukah candles. On the one hand, Halacha dictates that ideally, we should light outside our homes and spread the light to others. On the other hand, the light must emanate from the home. Rashi and Tosafot may disagree as to whether the courtyard is considered an extension of the home, but they both agree that there must be some connection to the home. Furthermore, in various circumstances, we light indoors with a focus on publicizing the miracle and spreading the light to members of the home. When learning the following non-Halachic sources regarding Judaism's relationship with universalism, please think about how they may shed light on this tension. How do we share the light with others while also ensuring that our own home is filled with light?

## The Paradox of Judaism

Judaism embodies a unique paradox that has distinguished it from polytheism on the one hand and the great universal monotheisms, Christianity and Islam, on the other. Its God is universal: the creator of the universe, author and sovereign of all human life. But its covenant is particular: one people set among the nations, whose vocation is not to convert the world to its cause, but to be true to itself and to God. That juxtaposition of universality and particularity was to cause a tension

between Israel and others, and within Israel itself, that has lasted to this day.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (1948–2020), *Crisis and Covenant*, pg. 250

- According to Rabbi Sacks, what paradox does Judaism possess?
- Where in Tanach do we see evidence supporting Rabbi Sacks' claim?
- In what ways can this paradox enhance your religious belief and practice?

## The Rise of Universalism

The rise of universalist attitudes among Jewish authors in the Second Temple period can in part be attributed to the globalization of the ancient world. As Hellenism spread, Jews had to reckon with the world beyond their communities, a world that was enjoying increasing technological and cultural advances. Some Jews began to perceive themselves as part of a broader human network whose destiny lay not in the far-off end-time, but in the present era. Toward the end of the Second Temple period, Jews were writing universalist texts that, like

the universalist literature which preceded it, invited all humankind to worship the One True God in a sustained manner. Yet these Jews began to omit distinguishing aspects of the Jewish community that was at the forefront of earlier universalist texts.

Dr. Malka Simkovich, *The Making of Jewish Universalism: From Exile to Alexandria* (Lexington Books, 2017), pg. xxiv

- According to Dr. Simkovich, why did universalist attitudes rise during the Second Temple period?
- How may this observation relate to Chanukah and

## the fight against Hellenism?

- What are potential downsides to emphasizing the

## universalistic aspects of Judaism?

### Exile vs. Redemption

In the Diaspora, which is likened to the evening, the focus of our actions is ourselves. ... But in the time of redemption, when the light of Israel is raised, the time will come for enacting [the words in the blessing before] the morning Shema, ahava rabba (a great love), when all the nations will say that the light of Israel will become “the light of the world.”

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (1865–1935), *Ein Ayah*, Berakhot 2a

- Compare the accompanying blessings of the Kriat Shema recited in the evening and Kriat Shema recited in the morning. What difference does Rav Kook pick up on that leads him to this statement?
- The prevalent custom in Israel is to light the Chanukah candles outside, whereas the common custom outside of Israel is to light inside. How do Rav Kook’s comments explain this phenomenon?
- What is one way in which Israel may already be considered “the light of the world”?

### The Sanctity of Separateness

They wanted the Jews to assimilate into their culture, and unfortunately many Jews did. The Greeks brought their idols into the Temple and sacrificed pigs. And they sought out every jar and cruse of oil they could find to defile it, to compromise the purity of the oil, for the major characteristic of oil is that it separates and rises to the top of anything it is mixed with. Oil always remains separate; it always retains its essence. The crux of the war with the Greeks was much more than political. The Greeks wanted us to lose our essence and become intermingled with them. But we already had the example of Yosef, who always remained the Ivri, the different

one. The Hasmonians understood that they, too, and the entire nation, could retain their specific separate Jewish identity even amid this strong alien culture.

Mrs. Shira Smiles, YU Chanukah To-Go, 5776

- According to Mrs. Smiles, what may be the message of Chanukah in regards to our discussion of particularism and universalism?
- Is the theme of particularism that is evident in the holiday of Chanukah necessarily in contradiction to the idea of “spreading light to the world”?
- What is one way in which you can strengthen your Jewish identity in the midst of a strong alien culture?

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