

# HANUKAH NOTES

A COMPANION TO



THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

# THE JEWISH RENAISSANCE PROJECT

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## HANUKAH

Hanukah is a much loved holiday for many reasons, including presents, potato latkes, and candles. What's more, it gives Jews something to do while the rest of the world is busy decorating their Christmas trees. But also that Hanukah has a history and tradition worthy of investigation.

*Hanukah Notes* was compiled to unlock the power of this history and to serve as your companion as you engage with tradition. We hope that this booklet will deepen your connections to the themes and rituals of Hanukah, and make the holiday come to life in a way that helps you ask new questions and find new layers of meaning and wisdom.





# THE MENORAH AND THE CHRISTMAS TREE



We all know the story of Hanukkah that goes something like this: “There was only enough oil to light the Temple’s Menorah for one night, but because of a miracle, the oil burned for eight nights.” We spend so much time talking about this miracle that we forget to ask the obvious question. What is the purpose of having a Menorah in the first place?

Scholars believe that the Menorah, with its seven branches, is not just a fancy candle stick. Rather, they believe that it is a stylized rendition of a sacred tree (think Garden of Eden and the Tree of Knowledge).

Throughout the Ancient Near East, there was a popular myth that at the center of the world was a sacred mountain, and at the top of that mountain was a sacred garden, and at the center of that garden was a sacred tree.



In all of these myths, the mountain, the garden and the tree existed for the pleasure of the Gods. Israelite religion, however, had a different take.

Instead of God getting all of the good stuff in the garden, in our story, it was humanity, represented by Adam and Eve, that had the honor of being able to live in the Garden. In the Israelite version, the sacred tree was placed in our Garden as a symbol of God’s presence.



# THE MENORAH AND THE CHRISTMAS TREE



After Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, their relationship with God was severed. Not only could they no longer enjoy the Garden, but they were now separated from the presence of God represented by the sacred tree.

Based on this, it seems that when God commanded Moses in the Book of Exodus to put this Menorah (a symbolic representation of the sacred tree) into the tabernacle, God was attempting to reconnect with humanity in this symbolic way. In a sense, the tabernacle was like a new Garden of Eden.



While the idea that God's presence can be represented by of a fiery tree may seem strange at first, think about the burning bush. In fact, the idea of representing God's presence in this form was a notion that was easily understood by the Israelites in their day.

So now that we know that the Menorah was sacred tree set on fire that was intended to represent God's presence, we have to ask the question, "What is the meaning behind a Christmas tree?" Obviously, both the Menorah and the Christmas tree share the same symbolic roots (no pun intended). Both are derivations of the ancient Near Eastern myth of the sacred tree. While these religious symbols share the same source, each religion has adapted and transformed this original idea in a way that is authentic to its own tradition.

For Jews, we have transformed the sacred tree myth into a symbol of God's presence in our lives and a reminder that miracles occurred in the past and still occur in our days.

# THE HISTORY OF HANUKAH

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Adapted from “*Origins of Hanukah*” by Rabbi Arthur Waskow

Hanukah dates back to the struggle led by the Maccabees - a family from the priestly tribe - against the Hellenistic overseers of the Land of Israel and against Hellenized Jews, from 169 to 166 BCE.

The Maccabean war was a fusion of anti-colonial and civil war. Antiochus Epiphanes, the Hellenistic King of the Syrian branch of Alexander the Great’s empire, had decreed that local religions, including Judaism, be rooted out. Circumcision, kosher food and Shabbat were outlawed and made punishable by death.

Hellenistic rituals and sacrifices were instituted at the Temple in Jerusalem and at shrines throughout the land. Many Jews, filled with admiration for the worldly wisdom and power of Hellenistic culture, followed the direction and obeyed the decrees.

But others, deeply committed to tradition, were filled with fury at the oppressive decrees and with revulsion at the cooperation of their compatriots.

They rallied under the leadership of Mattathias the Priest, a Hasmonean who lived in *Modi’in*, and his five sons - who came to be called Maccabees.

After three years of guerrilla warfare in the hills and forests against the regular armies of Antiochus, the Macabean forces won.



# THE HISTORY OF HANUKAH

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The Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem in 166 BCE, and set out to rededicate the Holy Temple. The festival of Hanukkah that we celebrate today not only marks the military victory, but also the eight day festival of celebration and rededication that followed.



**Was There a Civil War?** There are many scholars today who argue that the holiday is about much more than simply the Maccabees restoring Jewish sovereignty to Jerusalem and Israel. They point to evidence that suggests that there was also violence between Jews. The fighting occurred between the rebels and the aristocratic ruling class of Jews who were fighting not only to maintain their assimilated lifestyle, but also to keep the economic and political power they enjoyed.

**What Does Hanukkah Mean for Israelis Today?** The themes and history of the holiday strike a deep cord in Jews living in Israel today for at least two reasons:

1) Judah Maccabee and his military response to oppression has been held up as a symbol by some modern Zionists who believe that Jewish military strength is the key to Jewish safety and survival.

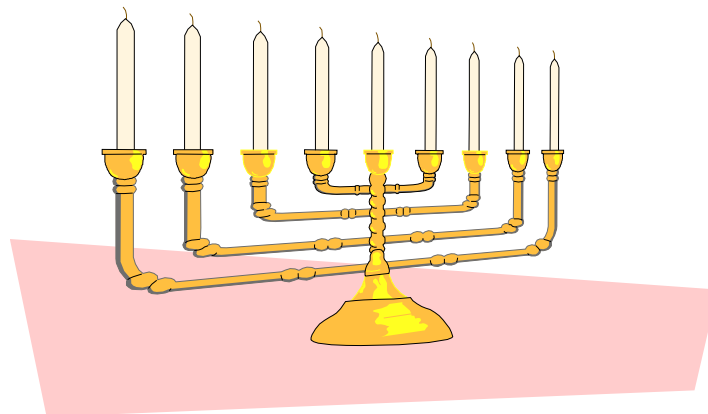
2) With rising tension between “religious” and “secular” Israel and in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (by a religious Jew), many Israelis see the civil war aspects of Hanukkah as a historical parallel to modern times. They worry, that left unchecked, the tensions between secular and religious Jews could provoke another civil war.

# WHY 8 DAYS?

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The miracle of Hanukah is most commonly understood as the oil in the menorah lamp lasting eight days when it was only expected to last one. However, there have been many other explanations as to why we celebrate this holiday for eight days.

One widely accepted theory explains that Jews living under the rule of Antiochus were not permitted to observe the fall holiday of *Sukkot*. When the Maccabees rededicated the Temple, they were able to observe a belated celebration of Sukkot which also happened to be an eight-day festival. It is written in the *Book of Maccabees*: “*The Jews celebrated joyfully for eight days as on the feast of Booths [Sukkot].*”



Further speculation has to do with the meaning behind the word *Hanukah*, or *dedication*. The original dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem lasted eight days. Therefore, many believe that because Hanukah marked the re-dedication of the Temple after Antiochus and the Syrians defiled it, the festival of Hanukah lasts eight days as well.

## WHY 8 DAYS?

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A more abstract interpretation for the length of this holiday is based on the biblical story of creation. Since the world was created in seven days, the number seven is representative of the tangible aspects of the universe—everything we can feel, touch, and smell. It then follows that the number eight signifies something beyond our physical world—a type of transcendence that cannot be measured. Thus eight is the number for miracles, including the miracle of Hanukah.

### CHANUKAH, HANUKA, CHANNUKKA, HANUKKAH

#### Will someone please Spell-Check this Holiday?

The reason that Hanukah is spelled in so many different ways is that each version is an attempt to mimic the phonetics of the Hebrew language with the English alphabet. Although there are standard rules for transliteration, one should not be offended by the use of any or all of the versions.



The Editors of this publication decided to use the spelling "Hanukah" by consulting a Magic 8-Ball. (after all Hanukah has eight nights!)

# WE MAY NOT ROLL ON SHABBOS... BUT WE CAN ROLL ON HANUKAH!

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*A new spin on an ancient topic...*

*The roll of the dreidel, then & now...*

**WHAT IS IT?** The dreidel is a four-sided spinning top with a particular Hebrew letter corresponding to each side. The letters, *nun*, *gimmel*, *hay*, and *shin*, are often thought to stand for the Hebrew phrase “*ness gadol haya sham*” or “*a great miracle happened there,*” referring to the miracle of the oil.

**HOW DO YOU PLAY?** The game of dreidel is played throughout the 8 days of Hanukkah. Everyone begins with a certain amount of coins, candies, or the like, and places 1 into the pot. As each player spins the dreidel he/she makes a certain move depending on the letter facing up when the dreidel falls. The object of the game is to collect all the pieces!

- Nun ("nothing") = the next player spins
- Gimmel ("all") = the player takes the entire pot
- Hay ("half") = the player takes half of the pot
- Shin ("put in") = the player puts one or two pieces in the pot



## Did you know???

The letters on some dreidels were changed after the founding of the state of Israel in 1948? For thousands of years, Jewish children playing dreidel talked of the great miracle of Hanukah occurring in a foreign place. But after 1948, when the Jewish state became a reality, Israeli children were learning about a miracle that happened in their own backyard! Therefore, dreidel manufacturers in Israel had to change the phrase from the traditional “*a great miracle happened THERE*” to the updated “*a great miracle happened HERE.*”

# WE MAY NOT ROLL ON SHABBOS... BUT WE CAN ROLL ON HANUKAH!

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## WHAT DOES THE DREIDEL SIGNIFY TODAY?

The letters on the dreidel have, since their origin, been re-interpreted by many Jewish scholars and mystics. For example, one *midrash* (rabbinic interpretation) claims that the four letters on the dreidel stand for the four civilizations that tried, but failed, to destroy the Jewish people in ancient times. This explanation links the *nun* to Babylonia, the *gimmel* to Greece, the *hay* to Persia, and the *shin* to Rome. When we spin the dreidel fast enough, we can see all the kingdoms encircling the Jewish people.



## WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

Legend has it that during the time of Hanukah, when the Syrians outlawed the study of Torah, Jews used the game of dreidel as a decoy. They would gather in secret to study, and when they sensed the Syrians approaching, they would quickly change their activity to a harmless game of dreidel!

A more realistic theory about the dreidel comes from its similarity to an English and Irish game called *totum* or *teetotum*, from a Latin word meaning *all*. Played in the 1500's, this game required a four-sided spinning top with the letters *n* for "nothing," *t* for "take all," *h* for "half," and *p* for "put-in." The contemporary Jewish version of the game of dreidel probably came from our Eastern European ancestors, who adapted this game to their own language of German: *n* for *nicht* (nothing), *g* for *ganz* (all), *h* for *halb* (half), and *s* for *stell ein* (put in). When Jews played the game, they substituted Hebrew letters for the same German sounds.

# HANUKIYAH LIGHTING

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In memory of the miracle of oil in the Temple, Jews around the world light a Hanukiyah in their homes each night of Hanukah. In accordance with the ruling of Beit Hillel (the School of the Sage Hillel) we ascend in number. That is, we light one candle the first night, two the second night, and so on until the Hanukiyah is full with eight candles on the last night.



- ◆ Everyone in the household can light candles. In some households each person lights their own Hanukiyah, and in others, the head of the household lights one Hanukiyah for everyone.
- ◆ It is ideal to light at nightfall, and the candles should burn for at least a half-hour. It is customary to place the Hanukiyah near the window in order to “make the miracle known to all.”
- ◆ The candles are placed into the Hanukiyah from **right-to-left**, but are lit from **left-to-right**. The shamash (service candle) is used to light all of the other candles on the Hanukiyah.

# BLESSINGS OVER THE HANUKKAH CANDLES

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There are two blessings that are recited each night, the first before lighting and the second while lighting.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,  
וְצַוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

*Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, asher kidshanu bemitzvotav  
vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel Hanukah.*

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with  
God's commandments and commanded us to kindle the lights of Hanukah.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ,  
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה.

*Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, sheasah nisim laavoteinu  
bayamim hahem bazman hazeh.*

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who performed miracles for  
our ancestors at this season in days past.

On the first night the additional blessing of *shehechyanu* is added, signifying that  
this is the first time this year that we are lighting the Hanukah candles.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּי נֹו וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה.

*Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, shehechyanu vekiy'manu  
vehigianu lazman hazeh.*

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who gave us life and  
sustained us and helped us to reach this time.

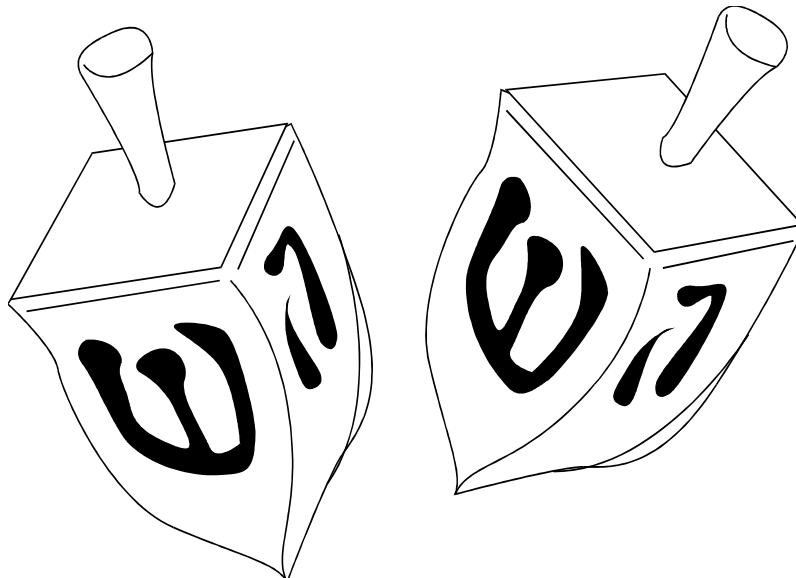
# HANUKAH SONGS

## ROCK OF AGES

Ma'oz Tsur Yeshu'ati  
Lecha Na'eh L'sha-bay-ach  
Tikon Beit T'filati  
Ve'sham Todah N'za-bay-ach  
L'at Tachin Mat-bay-ach  
Me-tsar Ham'na-bay-ach  
Az Egmor  
B'sheer Mizmor  
Chanukat HaMiz-bay-ach

מְעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי  
לְךָ נִאֶה לְשַׁבְּחֶךָ,  
תִּכּוֹן בַּיִת תְּפִלָּתִי  
וְשָׁם תּוֹדָה נִזְבֶּה־ךָ,  
לְעֵת תִּכְיֶן מִטְּבֶךָ  
מִצָּר הַמְּנַבֵּךָ,  
אֲז אֶגְמֹר  
בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר  
חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּי־ךָ.

Rock of Ages, let our song, praise Your saving power.  
You amidst the raging foes, was our sheltering tower.  
Furious they assailed us, but Your help availed us,  
And Your word broke their sword,  
When our own strength failed us.



# The Hanukah Song

Put on your yamukah, here comes Hanukah  
So much funnukah, to celebrate Hanukah  
Hannukah is: the festival of lights. Instead of one day of presents. We have eight crazy nights

When you feel like the only kid in town without a Christmas tree. Here's a list of people that are Jewish like you and me:

David Lee Roth lights the menorah  
So do Kirk Douglas, James Caan and the late Dinah Shore  
Guess who eats together at the Carnegie Deli?  
Bowser from Sha-Na-Na and Arthur Fonzarelli!



Paul Newman's half Jewish and Goldie Hawn's half, too  
Put them together, what a fine looking Jew!  
You don't need to Deck the Halls or Jingle Bell Rock,  
'Cause you can spin the dreidel with Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock!

O.J. Simpson [not a Jew!] but guess who is?  
Hall of Famer Rod Carew [He converted]  
We got Ann Landers and her sister Dear Abby,  
Harrison Ford's a quarter Jewish, not too shabby

Some people think Ebenezer Scrooge is  
Well, he's not, but guess who is? All three Stooges!  
So many Jews are in Show Biz,  
Tom Cruise isn't but I think his agent is...

Tell your friend Veronica, it's time to celebrate Hanukah. I hope I get a harmonica, on this lovely lovely Hanukah

So drink your gin and tonica, and smoke your marijuanica  
If you really really wannika, have a happy, happy, happy, happy, Hanukah!



# HANUKAH FOOD

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## Recipe for Jelly Doughnuts—*Sufganiyot*

1 teaspoon dried yeast	2 tablespoons sugar
1/4 cup lukewarm milk or water	1 whole egg
3 tbs. sour cream or vegetable oil	1 egg yolk
2 or 3 drops of vanilla extract	A pinch of salt
1 2/3 cups (250 g) flour, plus a little more if necessary	
Oil for deep-frying	
Apricot, red-currant, or raspberry jam	
Confectioners' sugar to sprinkle on	

Dissolve the yeast in the warm milk or water with 1 teaspoon of sugar and leave for 10 minutes, until it froths.

Beat the rest of the sugar with the egg and the yolk. Add the sour cream or oil, the salt, vanilla, and yeast mixture, and beat very well. Fold in the flour gradually, and continue beating until you have a soft, smooth, and elastic dough, adding more flour if necessary. Then knead for 5 minutes, sprinkling with a little flour if it is too sticky. Coat the dough with oil by pouring a drop in the bowl and turning the dough in it. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and leave in a warm place to rise for about 2 hours, or until doubled in bulk.

Knead the dough again for a few minutes, then roll out on a floured surface with a floured rolling pin to 1/4-inch (1/2-cm) thickness. With a pastry cutter, cut into 2-inch (5-cm) rounds. Make a ball out of the scraps so as not to waste them, roll out, and cut into rounds. Put a teaspoon of jam in the center of a round of dough, brush the rim with a little water to make it sticky, and cover with another round. Press the edges together to seal. Continue with the rest of the rounds and arrange them on a floured tray. Leave them to rise for about 30 minutes.

Heat 1-1/2 inches of oil in a saucepan to medium hot. Drop in the doughnuts, a few at a time. Fry in medium-hot oil for 3-4 minutes with the lid on until brown, then turn and fry the other side for 1 minute more. Drain on paper towels. Serve sprinkled with confectioners' sugar.

# HANUKAH FOOD

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## Recipe for Potato Latkes

It is a custom to eat foods cooked in oil on Hanukah in memory of the miracle of the oil. Such foods have traditionally included *Latkes* (potato pancakes) and *Sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts).

4 large potatoes  
¼ teaspoon pepper  
3 tablespoons matzah meal  
1 teaspoon onion powder  
3 eggs, beaten  
oil for frying  
1 teaspoon salt



Grate the potatoes, squeeze out as much water as possible. Mix the grated potatoes, matzah meal, eggs, salt, pepper, and onion powder. Heat oil in a frying pan. When oil is hot, drop the potato mixture by tablespoons into the pan. Fry on both sides until brown. Remove from oil, and drain on paper toweling. Makes about 6 servings. Great if served with applesauce or sour cream.

## **WHEN DID JEWS FIRST GIVE GIFTS ON HANUKAH?**

**Before the influence of commercialized Christmas made gift giving a widespread custom in America, Jewish children were given only Hanukah *gelt* ("money" in Yiddish).**

**The practice seems to have grown out of the custom of providing gifts to support poor *yeshivah* [seminary] students and teachers, an appropriate response to the Hellenists' attempt to obliterate Judaism by destroying Jewish texts and outlawing Jewish learning. It became common to give money to the children who, in 17th-century Poland, distributed money to teachers. It was often a way of rewarding them for past studies and encouraging them to learn more.**

# GLOSSARY

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**Apocrypha:** Known in Hebrew as a “hidden” work, this term refers to a collection of inter-testamental literature dating from 200 B.C.E. - 200 C.E. that was primarily of Jewish authorship. They are called “hidden” because they were excluded from the Hebrew Bible. Our main historical witness to the Hanukkah story are the The Books of the Maccabees which are included in the Apocrypha.

**Hanukah** (Dedication, Consecration): The Festival of Lights. Hanukah begins on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Kislev and lasts for 8 days. It commemorates the victory of Judah Maccabee and his followers over the forces of the Syrian tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes (165 B.C.E.) and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem.

**Hanukiyah:** This term refers to the nine-branched Hanukah candelabra. Also known as a “Menorah.”

**Hasmonean:** Refers to the priestly family, from the rural town of *Modi'in*, which led the revolution against the Syrians who are commonly referred to as the Maccabees.

**Latkes:** Potato pancakes traditionally served during Hanukah.

**Maccabee:** The name given to Judah and the entire movement against the Syrian-Greeks. It is also the name given to the books written about the revolt.

**Menorah** (Candelabra): The name given to the seven branched candelabra, which was a prominent feature in the Tabernacle as well as the Jerusalem Temple. Also one of the names of the nine-branched Hanukah lamp (Hanukiyah). Scholars believe that the Menorah is a stylized representation of a sacred tree (think Garden of Eden and the Tree of Knowledge).

**Shehechyanu** (Who has kept us alive): The name of a blessing of gratitude recited on holidays and occasions of joy.

# GLOSSARY

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***Sufganiya*** (Doughnut): Jelly doughnut served on Hanukah.

***Tabernacle***: Also referred to as the *Mishkan*. It was the portable place of worship for the children of Israel during their 40 years of wandering in the desert.

***Sukkot***: The Feast of Booths. This is a fall harvest festival whose major symbols are the *Sukkah* (the temporary booth-like dwelling), the *Luluv* (bundle of branches from the myrtle, palm and willow trees) and the *Etrog* (lemon like fruit).

***Midrash*** (Interpretation): This term refers to a large collection of rabbinic interpretations of biblical texts, Jewish holidays and rituals.

***Book of the Maccabees***: Our main source of historiographic information for the story of Hanukah. These two books are preserved in the Apocrypha.

***Beit Hillel***: School of interpreting Jewish oral law that was active in the first and second centuries C.E.

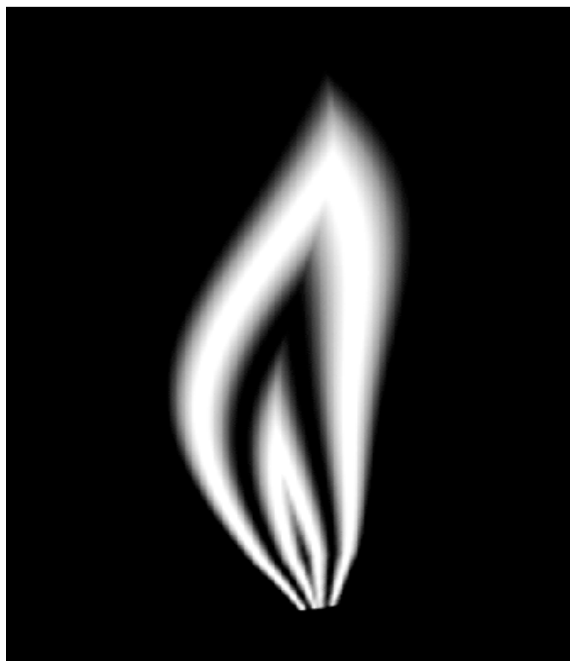
***Shamash*** (servant candle): The Shamash acts as a utility candle to light the eight other lights that are considered holy and cannot be used except for their intended ritual purpose.

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# JEWISH RENAISSANCE PR★JECT

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**[mikeuram@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:mikeuram@pobox.upenn.edu)**