



# Grades 9-12 Chanukah Activity Pirsum haNes...HUH?!

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## The #ShineALight Initiative

The #ShineALight Initiative is a national project to create a collective light of celebration spreading the Jewish joy of Chanukah and the beautiful traditions we honor in our homes with our families.

Sponsored in part by the UJA-Federation of New York, the initiative is designed as a counter-expression to antisemitism and other messages of hate acts towards Jews and Israel. The #ShineALight Initiative is leveraging education, community partnerships, workplace engagement, and advocacy among Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

The Jewish Education Project is a proud content partner of the #ShineALight Initiative and is delighted to provide these free materials to parents and other caring adults. We encourage you to utilize this education content in the week leading up to and through Chanukah (this year and in the future), and if applicable, at other times of the year.

## Parent/Adult Background Information

Review the content below which explains the ins and outs of a Chanukah as well as the background on *Pirsum haNes*.

A Chanukah menorah is called a Chanukiah. A Chanukiah is different from a traditional menorah which has seven branches, all of equal height. A Chanukiah is a nine-branched menorah which represents the miracle of the oil lasting for eight nights back in the time of the Maccabees. The ninth candle is called a shamash which means helper in Hebrew. The shamash is usually raised, lowered, or separated from the other eight candles.<sup>(16)</sup> The shamash is lit first and then used to light each of the other candles on the Chanukiah. It is customary to let the shamash burn along with the other candles, not to blow it out.<sup>(10)</sup>

Candles are placed in the Chanukiah from right to left, just as Hebrew is read. They are lit, however, from left to right, lighting the newest candle first. The Chanukah blessings are recited after candles are placed in the Chanukiah, but before the first candle is lit.<sup>(14)</sup>

Our most famous squabbling scholars, Hillel and Shammai, disagreed on how to light the Chanukiah. Beit [The House of] Shammai said that we should light all eight candles on the first night and then decrease one candle each night. On the last night of Chanukah, we would light only one candle. Beit [The House of] Hillel said that the number of candles should increase each night, with the last night ending in all eight candles burning. We follow Hillel's version today, according to Rabbi Yossi bar Zevida, a rabbinic sage from the third-sixth century, because as the number of candles increase each day, so too does the idea that holiness should increase and never decrease.<sup>(21)</sup>

And, have you ever heard of *Pirsum haNes*?! That is the Hebrew term for publicly showcasing the Chanukah miracle. According to Rambam's Laws of Hanukkah 3:3 and 4:5, 7 – *Pirsum haNes* 1 "Because of this, the sages of that generation ruled that the eight days beginning with the twenty-fifth of Kislev should be observed as days of rejoicing and praising the Lord. Lamps are lit in the evening over the doors of homes, on each of the eight nights, so as to publicize the miracle."<sup>(7)</sup> Scholar David Hartman, in an article entitled Hanukkah: Reflections on Courage and Particularity wrote, "Placing the Chanukah menorah near the window for all to see represents the great message which Jews convey to the world: we choose not to hide the flame of our spiritual tradition within the secluded confines of our people, our family, but rather we wish to have our flame radiate light in the market places of history."<sup>(22)</sup>

[Candle Lighting](#): [downloadable blessings sheet]

[There are few items on the Supply List included below that you may need/want to purchase.]



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**Social Media:** If you are comfortable, we would love for you to spread the joy your family is experiencing while participating in this activity. Please take photos and/or videos and share them to your social media platforms using the hashtag #ShineALight.



**Prep Time:** 15 minutes (shifting furniture to position Chanukah table in front of a window)

**Activity Time:** 30 minutes

### Supplies

- *Small table that can be placed safely in front of a window for Chanukah to sit on and be visible; depending upon the proximity to curtains, blinds, etc., an electric Chanukah may be desirable in the place of a real Chanukah with candles*
- *Optional: Printout of the texts (found below the activity) to share amongst family members*



### Activity Instructions

1. Prior to the first night of Chanukah, take a picture of the front windows of our home. Be sure to include any furniture or other items that are in front of those windows (you will be using this as a “before” picture.)
2. During this pre-Chanukah time, rearrange the space(s) near your front windows and move a display table up close to them so that neighbors and passers-by can visibly see the family’s Chanukah in the window each night. Consider how you might want to decorate the area on and near the table (again, be fire-safe in your plan).
3. As you prepare the table, learn about and discuss Pirsum haNes:
  - a. Read each of the two passages on the printables pages below that explain Pirsum haNes and discuss
    - i. According to Rambam’s Laws of Hanukkah 3:3 and 4:5, 7 – Pirsum haNes 1 “Because of this, the sages of that generation ruled that the eight days beginning with the twenty-fifth of Kislev should be observed as days of rejoicing and praising the Lord. Lamps are lit in the evening over the doors of homes, on each of the eight nights, so as to publicize the miracle.”(7)
    1. Discuss:
      - a. What is Rambam stating our ancestors did in celebration of Chanukah?
      - b. What does Rambam mean to “publicize the miracle?”
      - c. What might you guess is the reason why the “miracle” should be publicized? And, who is it being publicized to?
      - d. What might have prevented Jews hundreds of years ago to decide not to observe this mitzvah?
    - ii. Scholar David Hartman, in an article entitled Hanukkah: Reflections on Courage and Particularity wrote, “Placing the Chanukah menorah near the window for all to see represents the great message which Jews convey to the world: we choose not to hide the flame of our spiritual tradition within the secluded confines of our people, our family, but rather we wish to have our flame radiate light in the market places of history.”(22)
    1. Discuss:
      - a. Why does David Hartman believe that Jews must convey this to the world?
      - b. Do you think David Hartman believes that those who don’t have their Chanukah in the window are intentionally “hiding” their Judaism from the world? Why? Why not?
      - c. What might the light represent to David Hartman?
      - d. What are reasons that people may choose not to display their Chanukah (and/or Judaism) publicly?



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### Activity Instructions, continued

- e. What other ways can we shine a light on Judaism, in a visible way, throughout the year?
- b. Take your “after” photo of the space(s) near your front window(s).
- c. Record a short sharable video about why your family has decided to partake in this mitzvah this year and embed in the video your before and after photos. Share the final video to your social media platforms using the hashtag #ShineALight.



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### Texts

According to Rambam's Laws of Hanukkah 3:3 and 4:5, 7 – *Pirsum haNes* 1.(7)

Because of this, the sages of that generation ruled that the eight days beginning with the twenty-fifth of Kislev should be observed as days of rejoicing and praising the Lord. Lamps are lit in the evening over the doors of homes, on each of the eight nights, so as to publicize the miracle.

Scholar David Hartman, in an article entitled Hanukkah: Reflections on Courage and Particularity(22) wrote:

“Placing the Chanukah menorah near the window for all to see represents the great message which Jews convey to the world: we choose not to hide the flame of our spiritual tradition within the secluded confines of our people, our family, but rather we wish to have our flame radiate light in the market places of history.”