

# The Hanukkah Menorah -- Background Information And Directions For Making Home-Dipped Candles

With the start of Hannukah on December 8, windows in Jewish homes throughout the world will be enhanced by the glow of Hanukkah Menorahs. The Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York offers some background on the traditions of lighting the Menorah.

Each year, on the 25th of Kislev on the Jewish calendar, the Menorah or Hanukkah is brought out, polished and cleaned, and placed on the window sill for the neighborhood to see. As twilight approaches and the first star appears, Jews around the world say blessings and light the first candle. Hanukkah has then officially begun.

On each of the next seven nights, the number of candles lit is increased by one, kindled right to left, so that at the end of the holiday, eight candles, plus the Shammash, stand aflame. The Shammash is a "helper" candle which stands above the rest, either in the center or to one side of the Menorah -- and is used to kindle the flame of the other candles.

The lighting of the Menorah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by Judah Maccabee and his followers, who, against overwhelming odds, fought to practice their religious beliefs. The Hanukkah Menorah is the most important symbol of Hanukkah. Originally, Hanukkiot were oil candlesticks of all shapes. Eventually, however, the familiar shape of eight branches plus a Shammash became popular.

Although the original Menorahs were kindled with oil and wicks, today's candles are the more familiar source of light. The lighting of the Hanukkah Menorah, which is such a treat for

children, will be even more of a treat when the candles are homemade. This candle-dripping recipe, which parents and children can make together, comes from the Department of Early Childhood Education of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York.

For the candle-dipping you will need:

- paraffin
- cotton string or store-bought candle wicks
- newspaper
- cooking pot
- tall tin can (should fit comfortably in pot)
- fork
- scissors

1. Candle dipping can be messy. Spread newspaper around where you will be working.
2. Fill the can about 2/3 full of water and place it in the pot. Fill the pot about 1/2 full of water and put over medium heat.
3. As the water in the pot and can begins to boil, add chunks of paraffin to the can until it is nearly full. Wax is lighter than water, and as it melts, it will form a layer on top of the water.
4. For candle-dipping, the melted wax must be at just the right temperature -- not too hot, or the wax will slide off the wick; not too cool, or it will be too thick for dipping. You'll have to find the right temperature by trial and error. In general,

turn the heat down to a low setting once the wax has melted, or else turn it off. (If you turn the heat off, make sure the wax does not begin to thicken.)

5. Cut a piece of cotton string or wicking material at least twice as long as the can is high, and weave it between the prongs of a fork, leaving the ends dangling.

6. Holding the fork handle, dip the dangling wicks into the can until they touch bottom. As the wicks pass through the layer of the molten wax, the wax will be deposited on them. Pull the wicks out of the can and wait for the wax to harden. Be sure to keep the two wicks separated.

7. Continue to dip, always letting the wax harden between dippings. After a few dippings, the wicks may need to be straightened, but as the wax builds up, the candles will become quite stiff and straight on their own. Dip the wicks quickly in and out of the wax until the candles are the thickness you want. It takes many dippings -- sometimes 50 -- before the candle is fat. (You may speed up the process by filling a tall pitcher with cold water and alternately dipping the candles between the wax and the water.)

8. When your candles are complete, they will have the connecting wick between them. Snip the loop with a scissor and trim the wicks to about half-an-inch.

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