

What is Chanukah and how do we observe it?

Chanukah is 8-day festival commemorating God's miracles for the Jewish people, especially the victories of the Jews in the Land of Israel against their Syrian-Greek oppressors, as well as the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. These took place around the year 165 BCE.

In the Jewish calendar, Chanukah runs from 25 Kislev to 3 Tevet which corresponds this year to starting from nightfall on Thursday 10 December 2020 to sunset on Friday 18th December 2020.

We light candles for each night of Chanukah, following the service on p. 732 in the green siddur. A video guide to lighting, with prayers available (including in transliteration) is at www.theus.org.uk/article/how-light-chanukah-candles.

The number of candles kindled corresponds to each particular night of Chanukah (plus an extra candle used for lighting, called a 'shamash'). We say special prayers such as 'Hallel' and 'Al Hanisim' during Chanukah to mark these miracles.

It is common practice to use a 'Menorah' (also known as a Chanukiah) to hold the candles. This replicates the practice in the Temple, ensures that the candles are in a straight line and at the same height. A Menorah is not required though since, alternatively, the candles can be lit on any other appropriate, safe, flat surface as long as they are lined up straight.

Ideally, the candles are lit as soon as possible after nightfall but if this is not feasible, such as on Friday afternoon before Shabbat, they may be lit from earlier as is indicated below. The candles need to burn for at least 30 minutes after nightfall which means that the candles lit on Friday in particular must be longer-lasting than those used on other nights. See the chart below for earliest candle-lighting times this year in London.

Night of Chanukah	Date 2020/5781	The Ideal time for lighting (nightfall)	Earliest candle lighting time if lighting at nightfall is not feasible
1 st	Thursday 10 th December	4.49pm	3.01pm
2 nd	Friday 11 th December	Light Chanukah candles first before Shabbat candles. The earliest time for lighting Chanukah candles followed by Shabbat candles is 3.01pm. Shabbat begins at 3.36pm, by which time all candles must be lit. Use longer-lasting candles, such as tea lights, rather than regular Chanukah candles if the later will not burn for long enough.	
3 rd	Saturday 12 th December	Shabbat ends at 4.45pm. At home, daven Maariv or say 'Baruch Hamavdil bein lechol', make Havdallah and then light Chanukah candles.	
4 th	Sunday 13 th December	4.49pm	3.02pm
5 th	Monday 14 th December	4.49pm	3.02pm
6 th	Tuesday 15 th December	4.50pm	3.02pm
7 th	Wednesday 16 th December	4.50pm	3.02pm
8 th	Thursday 17 th December	4.50pm	3.03pm

One of most popular Chanukah traditions is to eat doughnuts or other fried foods, such as latkes.

For more information about Chanukah and what is going on this year, please contact your local shul, visit www.theus.org.uk or look at the United Synagogue's social media feed.

The earliest times and dates for lighting are below:

Chanukah Sameach – Happy Chanukah!

All times are for London