

NINE BRANCH MENORAH

The most familiar menorah is usually the one used during Hanukkah celebrations. Although it is not really a biblical type menorah, it is the most widely used menorah globally.

Hanukkah Customs

The most visible aspect of the observance of Hanukkah is lighting of the special Hanukkah Menorah, also called a Hanukkah. As opposed to the seven candlesticks of the Menorah, the Hanukkah has nine candles (or sometimes oil lamps), one of which always stands out from the others, usually higher, or off to one side. (Other than this there are no restrictions on the shape of a Hanukkah, so Jewish artists can exercise a great deal of creativity in designing them. You can find Hanukkah menorahs made of practically every material and in every shape and style you can imagine!) The lamp which stands out is called the Shemash/Shamash in Hebrew, or Shamus in Yiddish. The shamash is lit first and used to light the remaining lamps, one for each day that the temple menorah miraculously stayed lit. The light is supposed to be displayed prominently -- in a window or on the stoop -- where all who pass by will see it and be reminded of the Miracle.



On the first night of Hanukkah it is customary to light the middle candle and an outside candle of the menorah. Each night afterwards one more candle is lit along with the central candle. On the eighth day all nine candles are brightly burning for all to see.

It is worthwhile, if you ever find yourself in Jerusalem over the holiday, to take an evening stroll through the religious neighborhood of Mea Shearim, where you will find such lights beckoning from every home. It is from this practice that the Feast of Hanukkah derives its second name -- the Festival of Lights!

(Mar 22/16) Jerry Hennig