



# **Why Eight Lights?**

## **Topic**

Yosef Karo and the Miracle of Hanukkah

## **Grade Level(s)**

4<sup>th</sup> and up

## **Goals for the Lesson/Activity**

### **Students will:**

- Delve into Yosef Karo's Hanukkah miracle question
- Explore ideas about the miracle(s) of Hanukkah
- Dedicate, or re-dedicate, themselves to an ideal in honor of Hanukkah's theme of rededication

## **Materials needed**

- Printed images for polling questions ([download support materials](#))
- Paper candles (image included in support materials download)
- Writing implements

## **Technology needed**

- Optional: Devices for responding to questions on [Poll Everywhere](#) (free app available on iOS and Android)

## **Prepare in Advance**

- If using [Poll Everywhere](#), set up your polling questions.
- Tape the answers to the polling questions on opposite sides of the room
- If you choose, cut out paper candles (you can also have students write inside the outline without cutting it out).



# Why Eight Lights?

## Background for Teachers

We learn from the Talmud:

Tractate <i>Shabbat</i> 21b	מסכת שבת כא :
When the Greeks entered the Temple, they impurified all the oils in the Temple, and when the Hasmonean monarchy overcame and defeated them, they checked, and they found but one cruse of oil that was set in place with the seal of the High Priest, but there was in it only [enough] to light a single day. A miracle was done with it, and they lit from it for eight days..."	שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים

This is a well-known basis for the tradition of lighting the Hanukkah for eight days.

Rabbi Yosef Karo was a prominent 16<sup>th</sup>-century scholar and kabbalist. He is sometimes referred to as the Beit Yosef after the commentary that he wrote on the *Shulhan Aruch*, the Jewish legal code that he wrote which became the main source for Jewish law. In response to the above explanation about the Hanukkah miracle, the Beit Yosef asked:

<i>Beit Yosef, Orah Haim</i> , 670:1	בית יוסף, אורח חיים תער: א
"Why did they establish Hanukkah as eight days? After all, the oil in the container was enough to light for one night [without any miracle]. This means that the miracle was only for seven nights!"	למה קבעו ח' ימים דכיון דשמן שבפך היה בו כדי להדליק לילה א' נמצא שלא נעשה הנס אלא בז' הלילות

The Beit Yosef himself gave a few answers (including that only 1/8 of the oil burned each night so that even on the first night there was a miracle of the oil); but the question so captivated scholars that, over the years, hundreds of answers were formulated.

The answer that will be explored further in this lesson is that having the opportunity to rededicate the Temple is the miracle of the first day of Hanukkah, and the remaining seven days are a reminder of the miracle of the oil. Keep in mind that, while the rededication itself happened on the first day, the rest of the miracle could happen only after that rededication occurred. Thus, one could see the entire holiday as an opportunity for personal rededication.



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If this lesson encourages curiosity on the part of the students, here are a few other explanations given in answer to Karo's question. These would be especially helpful for those who need extension opportunities:

Explanations of the first miracle:

- Winning the battle by which the Maccabees regained control of the Temple (See the *Al Hanisim* prayer.)
- Having the faith to search for oil
- Finding oil with the seal of the high priest (this was unheard of previously) (*B'nei Ysoscher, Kislev-Tevet*, Discourse 4:15)

Other reasons given for why Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days, including:

- It took eight days to clean the Temple and bring it back into usable shape. (*Megillat Ta'anit, Kislev*)
- It took four days each way to go get the oil and bring it back to the Temple. (*Meiri, Beit Habehirah, Shabbat 21b*)
- While they were fighting, the Hasmoneans were unable to celebrate Sukkot/Shemini Atzeret, so this holiday lasted eight days in commemoration. (2 Maccabees 10:5 – 9)
- *Brit Milah* was among the rituals banned by Antiochus, so the holiday lasts eight days to remember our freedom to celebrate as we choose. (*Sefer Kol Bo 34 et al.*)
- Hannah and her seven sons were martyred by Antiochus' army. Each day serves as a memory for one of them. (2 Maccabees 7:1 – 42)

### Description of Activities

Invite students to participate in a series of quick polls related to Hanukkah. Choose a few from the following:

- Would you rather eat: *latkes* or *sufganiyot*?
- Do you prefer: sour cream or applesauce?
- Do you light your menorah with: wax candles or oil and wicks?
- Do you play dreidel with: chocolate *gelt* or real coins?

**Note:** If not using technology, you may want to make signs signifying the choices and hang them on opposite sides of the room, so that students can move to the answer they have chosen. If using Poll Everywhere, students can remain in their seats.

After each round, invite a few students to explain their choices.



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Ask the following as the **final** polling question: How many days was the miracle of the oil: 7 or 8?

Once again, have students back up their claims.

Let students know that a famous rabbi, sixteenth century scholar Rabbi Yosef Karo, wondered about the same thing. He questioned the account of the miracle of oil which comes from the Talmud. He asked:

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"Why did they establish Hanukkah as eight days? After all, the oil in the container was enough to light for one night [without any miracle]. This means that the miracle was only for seven nights!"	למה קבעו ח' ימים דכיון דשמן שבפך היה בו כדי להדליק לילה א' נמצא שלא נעשה הנס אלא בז' הלילות

If students have been standing, invite them to take their seats. Let them know that many people have thought about Rabbi Karo's question; that there have been hundreds of responses compiled over the years. Many people agree that the miracle of the oil lasted only seven days but that an additional miracle, related to Hanukkah, also occurred, giving us reason to celebrate for eight days. Ask students to think about and share aloud some of these possible miracles. After they have shared, feel free to add ideas from the "Background for the Teacher" section above.

Remind students that one of the other themes of Hanukkah is rededication, in honor of the rededication of the Temple after it was defiled by the Seleucid-Greeks.

Ask students to take a moment to think back to Rosh Hashanah and the commitments they made for how they might change or try to do better in the coming year. (**Note:** Though the miracle of the rededication of the Temple is connected to the first day, there is never a wrong time during the holiday to rededicate ourselves to the values and ideals which our ancestors fought so hard to preserve.)

Hand out candle templates and writing implements. Invite students to use the template to write or draw one of the commitments they made on Rosh Hashanah and their vision as to how they might rededicate themselves to this task.

Invite students to share their work. Encourage them to bring the candles home to reflect on as they light candles for the final night of Hanukkah.



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### **Differentiation Options**

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

#### ***For learners who need more assistance***

- Allow students to dictate the task to which they will rededicate themselves to a *madrich/a* or teacher.
- Invite students to use their candle to illustrate a miracle in their lives.

#### ***For learners who need extension opportunities***

- Invite students to research some of the other answers to Yosef Karo's question.
- Invite students to learn more about Yosef Karo.
- Invite students to learn more about the historical aspects of Hanukkah.