



Increasing the Joy: ***Creating Handmade Hanukkah Candles***

Topic

Illuminate the holiday with handcrafted beeswax Hanukkah candles

Grade Level(s)

All

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will be able to:

- Explain why the Hanukkah candles are lit in increasing numbers, corresponding to each night of the holiday
- Create Hanukkah candles for their own candle lighting
- Increase the splendor of the mitzvah of candle lighting

Materials needed

- Sharp knife or pizza cutter
- Scissors
- Beeswax Sheets*
- Flat braid wicking*
- Plastic wrap and ribbons for wrapping up the candles

*Candle making supplies can be purchased at craft stores or ordered online. If ordering beeswax sheets online, be aware that wax can become brittle and susceptible to breaking when shipped in cold weather—request extra bubble wrap!

Background for Teachers

According to the Talmud (Tractate Shabbat 21b), the basic *mitzvah* of Hanukkah is for each household to light a single candle. Also recorded in the Talmud is a debate between Beit (The House of) Shammai and Beit Hillel about how to light the Hanukkah lamp in the most beautiful way possible. According to Beit Shammai, people should light eight candles on the first day, seven on the second day, and so on until they light one on the eighth day. The rationale for lighting in descending order is that Hanukkah candle lighting should mirror the number of bull sacrifices brought to the Holy Temple on each day of Sukkot*. Beit Hillel, though, asserts that people should light one on the first day, two on the second day, and so on until they light eight on the eighth day. This order of candle lighting is meant to reinforce the idea that as the number of candles lit increases, so does the holiness and joy associated with the holiday. Beit Hillel's opinion is followed to this day.

*There is historical evidence that the first Hanukkah celebration might have been a delayed celebration of Sukkot, which also lasts for eight days in the land of Israel.



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Hanukkah begins at sundown on the 25th of the Hebrew month of Kislev and lasts for eight full days. Each night candles are lit and prayers are recited. Over the course of the eight nights a total of 44 candles per *hanukkiyah* (Hanukkah menorah) are kindled. Depending on time allotted and supplies available for this project, students may fashion a complete set of handmade Hanukkah candles, create a festive set of nine candles to burn on the last night of the holiday, or roll a few candles to give as gifts.

Description of Activities

Discuss the history/background for lighting Hanukkah candles as explained in the *Background for Teachers* section of this lesson. You might also review the manner in which candles are placed into the *hanukkiyah* (right to left, just like we read Hebrew) and the order in which they are lit (*Shamash*, then newest night first, then continuing to light the remaining candles from left to right).

Instructions for making rolled beeswax candles:

- **Pre-cut wax rectangles:** Using a ruler and either a utility knife or pizza cutter, cut the wax sheets into 2-inch by 4.5-inch rectangles. Tip: Start with wax sheets that are at room temperature—they will be more flexible and easier to cut.
- **Prepare wicks:** Cut the wicks into 5.5-inch lengths. You will need one wick per candle.
- **Making each candle:** Position the rectangle so that the 4.5-inch side is parallel to your body. Warm wax with a hair dryer until just flexible. Lay the wick on top of the long edge closest to you, making sure that 3/4 inch of wick is hanging off the edge. Firmly press the wick into the wax. Once the wick is secured in place, slowly roll the wax sheet away from you. Take care to roll each candle as tightly and as evenly as possible. Seal the candle by gently pressing the edge into the candle roll.
- **Sending the candles home:** Gather the candles together and secure with saran wrap. Tie ribbons around the bundle to decorate.