

Shine a Light 2022 December Decisions

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**SHINE
ALIGHT**
on Antisemitism

Educator Background Information/ Knowledge

The #ShineALight Campaign

The #ShineALight Campaign is a national initiative to create a collective light of celebration spreading the Jewish joy of Chanukah. Sponsored by two NY-based funders and the UJA-Federation of NY, the campaign is designed as a counter-expression to antisemitism and other messages and acts of hate towards Jews and Israel. The Jewish Education Project is a proud content partner of the #ShineALight Campaign and is delighted to provide these materials to Jewish educators. We encourage you to utilize this education content in the weeks leading up to and through Chanukah (this year and in the future), and if applicable, at other times of the year.

Educator Notes:

In 2022, Chanukah begins at sundown on December 18. On this night, Jews all over the world light their first Chanukah candle to celebrate the Maccabean triumph over [forced] Greek religious and cultural assimilation and the rededication of the Second Temple in 167 BCE. This year, the eighth night of Chanukah and Christmas Day overlap. In some houses, this is cause for worry and fret. In others, it is a cause for celebration. Multi-faith families in particular are challenged to find meaningful and respectful ways to honor each family member's diversity of religious, cultural, and historical traditions

Might we collectively reframe this challenge and look at it as an opportunity to engage in learning and engaging with each other differently than in years past? What if this year, we removed the word "dilemma" from the overused phrase "December Dilemma" and renamed it "December Delight!?" What if rather than focusing on the differences between faiths, we instead made an effort to explore and embrace our similarities?

Chanukah, also known as the 'festival of lights', provides a unique opportunity for us to shine a light on the significance of light in many religious traditions. Since the beginning of time, "and God separated the light from the darkness (*va-yavdayl Eloheem bayn ha'or u-vayn ha'hoshekh*)" (Gen. 1:4), light has played a central role in our collective human existence. Metaphorically, light brings us out of and separates us from darkness. Practically, light allows us to see, to cook, and to provide warmth. Spiritually, light provides even more!



Using light as our connecting point, let's set aside a few moments to explore its symbolism across religions:

- In celebration of Chanukah, the chanukiah is an important symbol. A chanukiah is a nine-branched menorah which represents the miracle of the oil lasting for eight nights. This dates back to the time of the Maccabees. In addition to representing the miracle of the oil, the light of the candles also symbolizes overcoming the darkness of [forced] assimilation to the freedom of Jewish culture and practice.
[Learn more here.](#)
- In celebration of the Hindu, Sikh, and Jain holiday of Diwali, also known as the 'festival of lights', the diya (clay) lamp is an important symbol. Thirteen diyas are lit, in various places throughout the house, to symbolically usher into the home protection, harmony, wisdom, prosperity, energy, happiness, and luck. A diya's flame burns upward with the goal of learning things that will lead worshippers to greater ideals.
[Learn more here.](#)
- In celebration of the African American holiday, Kwanzaa, the kinara is an important symbol. The kinara, the Swahili word for candle holder, is symbolic of the roots of the African American people – continental Africans. The kinara has seven candles, mishumaa saba, which are symbolic of the seven principles or values that African people are encouraged to live by.
[Learn more here.](#)

December Decisions

Educator Notes, Continued



- In celebration of the Muslim holiday, Ramadan, the Ramadan lantern is an important symbol. The lantern, fanoos in Arabic, has many historical stories. One describes Ramadan lanterns being used to light the way to the mosque at night. Another story tells of Ramadan lanterns being used as a visual reminder to worshippers to wake up and eat before the fast begins.
[Learn more here.](#)
- In celebration of the Christian holiday, Christmas, candles were traditionally lit on the holiday tree to signify the 'light of Jesus'. With the invention of electricity, candles on the tree were replaced with strings of electrical lights. Now lights can be seen leading up to the holiday; adorning streets, houses, and businesses.
[Learn more here.](#)
- In celebration of the Buddhist holiday, the Chinese New Year, the Chinese lantern is an important symbol. The Chinese lantern initially served as light and for purposes of worship. Today, lanterns, in a variety of representative colors, serve as a symbol of national pride.
[Learn more here.](#)

In the sage words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks^{z"l}, "For though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we are each free to light our own flame, together we can banish some of the darkness of the world." Looking at one aspect of a holiday celebration opens the door for an appreciation and understanding of another's religious traditions. Some additional areas to explore are: seasons, candles, light/dark, hope/promise, and harvest festivals. While this exercise won't diminish all of the challenges that may arise, it will hopefully create opportunities for new perspectives and a greater appreciation for the blessings we all share.



A few new resources for multi-faith families:

- For those looking to explore additional understanding of the term multi-faith, a history of intermarriage, and a few real-life stories of compromise, read this article entitled, [To Tree or Not to Tree: How Jewish Christian Families Navigate the December Dilemma.](#)
- For those struggling with meeting the expectations of one's family and community, often allowing others opinions cast a shadow over decision making, check out this article entitled, [Everyone's December Dilemma.](#)
- For those wanting more suggestions of ways to have intentional, healthy conversations around holiday observance, read this article entitled, [Dealing with the December Dilemma.](#)