

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I spent Chanukah in Jerusalem this year, and noticed that most people lit their Menorahs outside in glass boxes at their doorways or at the entrance to their courtyards. I've never seen that done back home, we have always lit inside in the window or just on the dining room table. Why the discrepancy between Israel and the Diaspora?

Sylvia P.

Dear Sylvia,

The rabbis say: "The light of Chanukah; its mitzvah is to (light) it at the doorway, outside the house. If one lives on a higher floor, he places it in the window which faces the public thoroughfare. In times of danger place it upon the table and that is sufficient." (Talmud, Shabbos 21b)

The basic principle of this teaching is "*pirsumei nisa*", the candles were enacted in order to publicize the miracles of Chanukah. That is why we are to place the lights in the location in or adjacent to one's home which would best publicize the miracle, to the most people. Hence the lighting outside the home, such as in a glass box, as this attracts far more attention than lighting inside, even at the window. Only one who lives on a higher floor, and doesn't have a doorway which faces the public thoroughfare, was allowed to light in his window. (One fulfills the mitzvah only when the lights are in some way connected to the home or place of residence; to light in the street or in a public place fulfills no mitzvah, although that may be the place of greatest publicity).

The final statement is ; "in times of danger place it upon the table and that is sufficient". In the Diaspora, to light outside in such a public way may cause danger to the Jewish community. This practice may incite some to inflict bodily harm, or to destroy the Menorahs lit outside. For this reason, the rabbis enacted that one could fulfill the mitzvah of lighting in a different way – without exhibiting the lights publicly. This is by putting them on the table and publicizing the miracles to the members of one's own household only.

The question arises, if one lives in the Diaspora in a place where there is no danger to the community or to the candles, should one light outside? After all, that's the proper way to fulfill the enactment of Chanukah, and no danger exists to compel us to do otherwise. This question has been discussed by authorities of Jewish law for many generations.

Most authorities maintain the following: Although lighting outside in the Diaspora may be safe in one locale, there are always places that danger still exists. Dallas may be perfectly safe as we're surrounded by friendly neighbors, but I wouldn't recommend lighting outside in much of France, or many other places in Europe. There may even be neighborhoods in the USA which are not that different. Since there was a separate enactment for times of danger, all of the Diaspora is as one: if it's dangerous in one place, the "danger enactment" applies to the next place as well, despite its relative safety.

This explains the discrepancy: In Israel, most continue the principle Talmudic ruling of lighting outside. In the Diaspora, we all adopt the custom of lighting outside.

We await the final miracle of the Messianic redemption when we will all return to joyously publicize G-d's miracles in the proudest and most ideal way.