Talmudic Sources

When reading the following Talmudic sources, consider these questions:

1. What role does the home play in the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles?
2. Do we light Chanukah candles for the people inside the home or those outside the home?

Our rabbis taught: the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights is one candle for his entire household. The scrupulous (mehadrin) light one candle for each member of the household and those who are very scrupulous (mehadrin min hamehadrin) … Beis Hillel say that the first day, one candle and each day, one candle is increased.

Shabbos 21b

Our rabbis taught: the Chanukah candle should be placed at the doorway of one's home on the outside. If one lives on the second floor (or higher), one places it in the window closest to the public domain. During times of persecution, it is sufficient to place it on one's table.

Shabbos 21b

Our rabbis taught: a guest is required to light Chanukah candles. R. Sheshes said: A guest is required to light Chanukah candles. R. Zeira said: in the beginning, when I was studying at yeshiva, I would purchase a small portion of my host's oil and join with him. Once I got married [when I was away at yeshiva], I said, now it is no longer necessary to [purchase a portion of my host's oil] because [my wife] is lighting for me in my home.

Shabbos 23a

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think there is such an emphasis on the home? Why didn’t the rabbis institute that the mitzvah should be like matzah, in which each person is obligated to perform the mitzvah individually?
2. Does the mehadrin option focus on the household or on the individual? Explain.
3. Nowadays, when there are many places where there is no persecution and it is safe to light at the doorway, should we light outside?
Halachic Sources

It is permissible to light Chanukah lights on the train, I didn’t find any explicit discussion about this, but if one paid for the entire night, it is as if he rented a home to eat and sleep there and is obligated to light Chanukah lights. Although Rashi mentions someone on a boat as being exempt, one can argue that in those days, the boats had no roofs and were exposed to wind and this is not considered a home at all. Even though the train is not stationary, and ordinarily, riding is considered like walking, there is no evidence that one needs a permanent home for Chanukah lights since the purpose of the mitzvah is to publicize the miracle. This is my opinion based on logical analysis.

R. Shalom Schwadron, Teshuvos Maharsham 4:146

Aggadic Sources

One candle for his entire household — One can explain that reason why rabbis of the Chashmonaim instituted that the candles be lit in each home and not in the synagogue, like they did regarding Megillah (on Purim), is because they wanted to teach us the power of Torah. Even if G-d forbid, the Torah were to be forgotten by most Jewish people and remained in the hands of a select few, the way it was in the times of the Chashmonaim, those few can, with the help of G-d, raise the yoke of Torah. That is why the mitzvah of Chanukah is one candle for the entire household — because each family has the ability to raise the candle of Torah. Nevertheless, scrupulous individuals say that this can even be done by individuals, without an entire family, and therefore, one candle is lit for each person.

R. Chizkiyah Feivel Plaut, Likutei Chaver ben Chaim, Vol 11, Shabbos 21b

Concluding Questions:

1. Has the pandemic changed the way you think about the importance of the home? If so, how?

2. During various stages of the pandemic, there were mitzvos that we ordinarily perform in shul (i.e. the public domain) but had instead do in the privacy of our homes. How did that change of venue affect the way you performed those mitzvos?