Halachos of Chanuka for RIETS Alumni Chevrusa Magazine

Chanuka Gifts

Rav Hershel Schachter explains that since Chanuka is the holiday of Torah Shebaal Peh the old minhag was to give the children money to give their teachers of Torah on Chanuka. Then the minhag became that the children kept the money for themselves. Furthermore, the American practice of giving presents on Chanuka is based on the Christian practice surrounding Santa Claus and is problematic.

Chanukia

The Maharal (Ner Mitzvah ch. 2) explained that the reason we light the Chanuka candles in a Chanukia is because we want to commemorate the lighting of the Menorah in the Bet Hamikdash where the candles were lit in a vessel. See the Maharal who compares the candle to the Neshama and the vessel to the body. Rav Schachter reccomends that a person should follow the Maharal. Rav Soloveitchik wasn’t concerned for this opinion and would sometimes light wax candles on an aluminum foil when he was away from home when he forgot to bring his Chanukia with him.

Wax Candles

Although all oils are kosher for lighting the chanuka candles, the Rama writes that it is preferable to use specifically olive oil because the miracle of Chanuka happened with olive oil. While some poskim say that lighting with wax candles is unacceptable, Mishna Brura writes that it is acceptable just not preferred. (S”A and Rama 673:1, Mishna Brura 673:4) On the other hand, the Baalei Hatosfot held wax is preferred because it is neater.

Electric Lights

If a person is on an airplane one of the nights of Chanuka and one can’t light at home, Rav Schachter holds that one should light with an incandescent electric light on the plane without a bracha. Since some opinions hold that one can fulfill one’s obligation with an electric light it is proper to do so, however, since others hold one can not make a bracha since it isn’t similar to the lighting in the Bet Hamikdash one shouldn’t recite a bracha. Rav Willig (Pre Chanuka Q&A min 18-20) based on many poskim believes that a person should not use electric lights. Rather he should have a family member or neighbor light for him at his home.

Earliest Time for Lighting

One shouldn’t light Chanuka candles before sunset (S”A 671:1). If one did and it was after Plag Mincha, one should relight it at the proper time of the mitzvah without a bracha. (Torat HaMoadim 4:3) In a situation where one needs to leave for a wedding or the like and will not be home at sunset, one should light after Plag mincha with a bracha (S”A 672:2, oral communication with Rav Schachter).

Lighting Late at Night

If a person is in the middle of a [seder](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Seder) of learning, many poskim hold that one should wait until the end of the [seder](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Seder) to light [Chanukah](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Chanukah) candles. (MPeninei HaRav pp. 188-9) Similarly, If a person is in middle of a class one may wait until the end of the class in order to light [Chanukah](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Chanukah) candles so that one will have time to sit by the candles. (oral communication from Rav Schachter)

If a person is going to come home from work after the first time to light Chanuka candles and his wife will be home earlier some poskim hold that the wife should ideally light without her husband and then the husband will light later. That is the position of Rav Schachter. However, Rav Willig feels that it is important for Shalom Bayit that a family light together and they should wait until the husband comes home.

If a person came home so late that no one is up and he is lighting inside, Rav Schachter recommended in the name of achronim that he should wake some of the family members up, otherwise he should light without a bracha.

Sh’asa Nisim

The practice is to light [Chanukah](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Chanukah) candles in Shul between [Mincha](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Mincha) and [Mariv](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Mariv) with a bracha since it’s a very old Minhag so there’s Pirsumei Nisa to those in Shul during [Mariv](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Mariv). (S”A 671:7) One doesn’t fulfill his obligation with the lighting in Shul even if one did the lighting and so one can light at home for his family with the [Brachot](http://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Brachot) besides for Shehechiyanu. (Mishna Brurah 671:45) Rav Soloveitchik held that one shouldn’t repeat SheAsa Nissim either since the bracha was made upon the chefsa of a mitzvah even though one didn’t fulfill one’s mitzvah. (Nefesh HaRav p. 225)

Leftover Oil

If there’s leftover oil and wicks from the eighth day, it is forbidden to benefit from them and they should be burned. That only applies if the oil and wicks were leftover before the mitzvah was fulfilled, meaning that the candle went out within the first half hour. (S"A 677:4, Bei'ur Halacha 677:4 s.v. Min) Rav Schachter quoted that Rav Schwab permitted to discard the leftover oil in a “respectful” way even if the candles did not last for a half hour and it doesn’t have to be burned specifically.

A Guest on Chanuka

Someone who is a guest at someone else’s home on Chanuka according to the Mishna Brurah has two options; either they can join together with the homeowner and they will exempt them or they could light themselves. The poskim debate when the second option is applicable. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach held that it is possible to light in someone’s house as long as one was there for one day. However, Rav Schachter based on Rav Soloveitchik’s opinion holds that one would need to be a guest at the person’s house for all the days of Chanuka in order for it to be considered his house. Otherwise it is like lighting in the middle of the street since it isn’t his house. Rather he should join together with the homeowner.

Lighting at a Wedding or Chanuka Party

Many poskim hold that one can not fulfill Chanuka candles when one isn’t lighting at one’s home since the mitzvah was established upon the house (*ner ish ubayto*). Therefore, at a wedding or Chanuka party one couldn’t fulfill one’s obligation with lighting Chanuka candles there. Even though some would like to light at the wedding in order to publicize the miracle, Rav Schachter expressed that in his opinion one should not light at the wedding in order that people don’t get the misconception that they fulfill their obligation with the lighting at the wedding.

Twenty Amot

If someone is in an apartment building with a window above twenty amot, he can fulfill his obligation by lighting by his door. If the apartment building is facing another building such that people could see it from across the street Rav Schachter held that one should light in the window even though it is above 20 amot from the ground.

Women

Rav Schachter said that the principle that a woman is treated like her husband, *Ishto Kgufo*, is relevant to the cases that the gemara applies it to such as Edut and Hatarat Nedarim. However, it doesn’t apply to mitzvot. Therefore, a wife should light her own Chanuka candles in order to fulfill the mitzvah Mehadrin Min Hamehadrin.

Having the Lights Off

Rav Schachter explained that Chanuka candles are only meaningful if they add light to a dark room. This principle is known as “*shraga betiyhara ma ahani*” - a candle in daylight is useless. If a room is already well lit by electric lights, a person shouldn’t light the Chanuka candles. He should first turn them off, then light the Chanuka candles, and leave them off until thirty minutes. He turns on the lights within thirty minutes it could be that he doesn’t fulfill the mitzvah since it is like a person who intentionally extinguished the candles.