

THE HALACHAH SHEET

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Chanukah

Lighting the Menorah

- **Significance.** The Rambam writes regarding the mitzvah of *neiros Chanukah* that it is "חביבה היא מאד" — very beloved to Hashem.¹ The purpose of this mitzvah is to publicize the miracles that Hashem did for us in the times of the Chashmona'im, and to bring us to feelings of gratitude toward Him. As emphasized in the *tefillah* of Al Hanisim, the main miracle that we're thanking Hashem for is the Jews' miraculous defeat of the Greeks despite the disproportionate numbers. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach writes that the *kavanah* one should have when lighting the menorah is *hoda'ah* specifically for this miracle, and that this is of the essence of the mitzvah.² The open miracle of the פך שמן — the single remaining jug of oil — was a means of clarifying that our victory against the Greeks and all other hidden miracles are equally from Hashem.³

The Mitzvah

- **Obligation.** The basic requirement of the mitzvah of menorah is to light one menorah per household, one candle each night. However, the Ashkenazic custom is to beautify the mitzvah by having everyone light their own menorah, and to add an additional candle on each night of Chanukah.⁴
- **Women.** Only a woman living on her own is required to light her own menorah; otherwise she is *yotzei* with her father or husband.⁵ Nevertheless, in many households women also light. There is a minhag for women to avoid doing serious *melachah* (e.g. sewing, mopping, washing a lot of dishes) for the first thirty minutes that the candles are lit.⁶ Cooking during this time is permitted.

When

- **Chutz la'Aretz.** Outside of Eretz Yisrael, the minhag is to light at *tzeis hakochavim*.⁷ Many daven *maariv* first, and light immediately afterward. Ideally, you should set up your menorah beforehand so it will be ready to light right away.
- **Eretz Yisrael.** In Eretz Yisrael, the main custom is to light at *shkiah*.⁸ (In Yerushalayim around 4:40).
- **Deadline.** If you didn't light on time, try and light as soon as possible, especially within a half hour of the *zman. B'dieved*, the latest time to light the menorah is *alos hashachar*.⁹
- **Erev Shabbos.** On Friday, the earliest possible time that one may light is at *plag haminchah*.¹⁰ However, it is correct to light closer to Shabbos. The minhag in Yerushalayim is to light twenty-five minutes before *shkiah*, followed by the lighting of the Shabbos candles.¹¹
 - **Minchah gedolah.** Ideally, you should daven *minchah* early on Erev Shabbos Chanukah.¹²
 - **Duration.** The candles must be capable of burning until a half hour after *tzeis hakochavim*.¹³ Therefore, you should make sure use enough oil (or candles that are long enough) for the flames to last that long.

- **Motza'ei Shabbos.** You should light as early as possible after Shabbos. You can light either before or after Havdalah, they are both acceptable customs.¹⁴

Where

- The original *takanah* of *neiros Chanukah*, which is still practiced by many in Eretz Yisrael, is to light the menorah outside, at the entrance to one's house, facing the public.¹⁵ However, many people in *chutz la'aretz* (out of concern for inciting hatred among non-Jews), and in Eretz Yisrael (for various technical reasons), light indoors.
 - **Considerations.** There are various factors that must be taken into account to determine where exactly to place your menorah. They include (in order of importance):
 1. Maximum visibility (פרסומי ניסא)
 2. The distance of the flames from the doorpost (ideally within a *tefach*, three inches).¹⁶
 3. The distance of the flames from the ground (ideally between three and ten *tefachim*, 9–31 inches, and not above twenty *amos*).¹⁷
 4. The position in relation to the mezuzah (ideally opposite it).¹⁸
 - A *rav* should be consulted to prioritize these factors in each person's specific scenario.
- **Sleeping out.** If you sleep away from home on any night of Chanukah, light the menorah where you sleep¹⁹, **unless** you are still at home at the time of lighting, in which case you should light at your house.
 - **Motza'ei Shabbos.** If you slept out for Shabbos, on Motza'ei Shabbos you can either **(a)** leave immediately after Shabbos and light at home, or **(b)** light at your host's home, provided that you remain there for at least a half hour after you light.²⁰

Materials

- **Menorah.** Having a menorah, although not essential, enhances the mitzvah.²¹ The candles should be in a straight line, all at the same height, and with at least two centimeters between the flames.²²
- **Oil.** The ideal way to light is using olive oil, as the miracle of Chanukah occurred with oil.²³ (Solidified oil that melts when it burns is equally acceptable.)²⁴ The next best option is any other oil that produces a clear flame, followed by wax candles. One should not light a combination of both oil and candles on the same night.²⁵ Leftover oil that didn't burn can be used for the following nights.²⁶
- **Wicks.** Any type of wick may be used, but the most ideal is one made of cotton or linen.²⁷ You can reuse wicks from a previous night.²⁸

1. רמבם (הל' תוכנה ד:ב) 2. הליכות שלמה (ט:ז) 3. מהר"ל (נר מצוה ח"ב ד"ה ועוד י"ל)
 4. רמ"א (תרע"ב) 5. מ"ב (תרע"ב:סק"ט) 6. שו"ע (תרע"א) 7. מ"ב (תרע"ב:סק"א) 8. מעשה רב אות
 ר"ה 9. מ"ב (תרע"ב:סק"א) 10. מ"ב (תרע"ב:סק"ב) 11. לוח א"י 12. מ"ב (שם) 13. שם 14. ע"ס
 תרפ"א והל' שלמה (ט:טו) 15. שו"ע (תרע"א) 16. שו"ע (שם:ז) 17. שו"ע (שם:ו) 18. שו"ע
 (שם:ז) 19. מ"ב (תרע"ב:סק"ז) 20. הליכות שלמה (י"ד:ט) 21. מ"ב (תרע"ב:סק"ח) 22. רמ"א
 (תרע"ג) 23. שם סקי"ח 24. שו"ת שבט הלוי (ח"ט ס' קמג) 25. מ"ב
 (תרע"ב:סק"ב) 26. מ"ב (שם:סק"ז) 27. מ"ב (שם:סק"ב) 28. שו"ע (שם:ד) 29. שו"ע (תרע"ד)

- **Disposal.** Wicks that were used for the mitzvah, and oil left over in the cups from the last night, should either be burned,²⁹ or put into a bag before being thrown away in the garbage.

Lighting

- **Restrictions beforehand.** Certain activities are forbidden before lighting the menorah in order to prevent one from getting distracted and subsequently missing out on the mitzvah.
 - **From a half hour before the time to light,** one should not: **1)** start anything that tends to continue for a lengthy amount of time or which is hard to stop in the middle of;³⁰ **2)** eat a *k'beitzah* of bread or baked goods (*pas haba b'kisnin*);³¹ or **3)** sleep.
 - **Leniency.** Appointing someone to remind you to light, or setting an alarm, would permit the above activities.
 - **From the time of lighting,** one should not learn Torah³² (it is permitted, however, to learn *hilchos Chanukah* then).³³
- **Setup.** On the first night of Chanukah, many follow the opinion that the candle is placed on the right end of the menorah. As we add additional candles each night, the newest one, which will always be on the left end, is lit first.³⁴
- **Shamash.** The *shamash* should be lit **before** reciting the berachos, or after lighting all of the candles. It should be placed in a position that clearly distinguishes it from the other candles.³⁵
- **Hand washing.** The *poskim* mention that one should wash his hands before lighting the menorah, similar to the way the *kohen gadol* did so before lighting in the Beis Hamikdash.³⁶ If your hands are dirty from preparing the candles, you must wash in order to be permitted to make the berachos.
- **Procedure.** Position your hand in front of the left-most candle that you are about to light (so that you don't pass over the other candles after the berachah).³⁷ Recite the berachos, and only after finishing the last berachah light the candle.³⁸ Proceed to the next candle once most of the wick catches fire.³⁹ Continue lighting the candles from left to right.
- **Duration.** Your candles must be capable of burning for a half hour after nightfall.⁴⁰ Remaining lit beyond that is praiseworthy but not required.⁴¹ Therefore, if necessary (for example, you don't want to leave the fire unwatched), you can extinguish your candles after they have burned for a half hour.⁴² If you plan on doing so, it's preferable to stipulate beforehand that you will be putting out your candles.⁴³
- **Shehecheyanu.** On each night we recite two berachos before lighting the menorah, *שעשה ניסים* and *להדליק נר של חנוכה*. Only on the **first night** of Chanukah, we add the berachah of *shehecheyanu*. If you forgot to say it on the first night, say it on the following night or on whichever night you remember.⁴⁴
- **Interrupting.** You should not speak until after you've finished lighting all of your candles.
 - **Between the berachah and the lighting.** If one spoke, he must repeat the berachos, unless the interruption was

concerning the mitzvah.⁴⁵ You may not answer amen to someone else's berachah at this point.⁴⁶

- **After lighting the first candle.** At this point, you should say amen if you hear someone else's berachah on their menorah. Many have the custom to recite *Haneiros Halalu* after they've lit the first candle (be sure to wait until the wick has fully caught fire).⁴⁷
- **Benefiting from the flames.** It is forbidden to get personal benefit from the light of the menorah.⁴⁸ Therefore, you cannot light another candle from their flames (but you *can* from the *shamash*), or read by their light. It's preferable not to benefit from the lights even after they've been lit for a half hour, as an onlooker would not be aware of that.⁴⁹
- **Candle went out.** If your candles went out within a half hour of lighting them, you have still fulfilled your mitzvah, provided that you had the sufficient amount of oil in your menorah when you lit.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is proper to relight them.⁵¹
- **Staying by the candles.** It is customary, but not an obligation, to stay by your candles for the first half hour.⁵²

על הניסים

- Al Hanisim is added into Modim (in *Shemoneh Esrei*) and into *Nodeh Lecha* (in *bensching*) on Chanukah, as an expression of *hoda'ah*.
- **Forgot.** If you mistakenly omitted Al Hanisim, you do not need to repeat *Shemoneh Esrei* or *bensching*.⁵³
- **Caught yourself.** If you forgot Al Hanisim and realized **before** saying Hashem's name in the concluding berachah, return to Al Hanisim and resume from there. If you catch yourself only **after** you've said Hashem's name in the concluding berachah, do the following:⁵⁴
 - **In Shemoneh Esrei:** At the end of *Elokai Netzor*, before the words "*yihiyu l'razton...*" say, *יהי רצון מלפניך שתעשה לנו ניסים ונפלאות כשם שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה*, and then recite "בימי מתתיהו"⁵⁵
 - **In bensching:** Where you would usually recite a "*הרחמן*" specifically for *Shabbos* or *yom tov*, say, *הרחמן יעשה לנו נסים ונפלאות כשם שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה*, and then recite "בימי מתתיהו"⁵⁶

Minhagim

- **Seudah.** Unlike *Purim*, there is no requirement to have a *seudah* on Chanukah. We feast on *Purim* because *Haman's* decree was to physically wipe out the Jewish nation, so therefore we celebrate the miracle of our victory with physical festivities. However, on Chanukah, the Greeks weren't trying to kill us but rather to spiritually contaminate and assimilate us. Therefore, we celebrate their defeat in a spiritual way, namely with *hallel* and *hoda'ah*.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, a meal on Chanukah can be transformed into a *seduas mitzvah* through singing *zemiro*s, praising Hashem, and recounting the miracles.⁵⁸
- **Foods.** In commemoration of the miracles that occurred with *dairy*⁵⁹ and oil, it is customary to eat foods made with these ingredients (e.g., doughnuts and latkes).⁶⁰

30 מ"ב (רלב:סק"ט) 31 מ"ב (שם:סק"ל) 32 שעה"צ (תרעב:סק"ד) 33 גר"ח קניבסקי 34 שו"ע (תרעו:ה) 35 שו"ע (תרעג:א) 36 מהר"ל 37 מ"ב (תרעו:סק"א) 38 רמ"א (תרעו:א) 39 ביה"ל תרעג ד"ה הדלקה 40 שו"ע (תרעב:ב) 41 ע' ביצחק יקרא (תרעב:א ד"ה עד) 42 הליכות שלמה (טו:ט) 43 מ"ב (תרעב:ז) 44 שו"ע (תרעו:א) 45 מ"ב (תלב:סק"ה) 46 הל' חג בחג עמ' קח' 47 מ"ב (תרעו:סק"ח) 48 שו"ע (תרעג:א) 49 מ"ב (תרעב:סק"ח) 50 שו"ע (תרעג:ב) 51 מ"ב (תרעו:סק"ז) 52 ע' ביצחק יקרא (תרעא:א) 53 שו"ע (תרפב:א) 54 שם 55 מ"ב (שם:סק"ד) 56 רמ"א (שם:א) 57 מ"ב (תרע:סק"ו) 58 רמ"א (שם:ב) 59 שם 60 מנהג ישראל תורה (תרע:ג)