

SAMCHAINU GUIDE TO THE HALACHOS OF CHANUKAH

A SELECTION OF LAWS & CUSTOMS WITH A FOCUS ON SINGLE MOTHER FAMILIES

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The Shela Hakadosh writes that learning and properly observing the laws of a Chag infuse the Yom Tov with tremendous blessing. Please note that the laws and customs in this article follow the Ashkenazi custom.

The verse in Mishlei tells us that the mitzvos and Torah are compared, respectively, to a candle and light. The Gemara tells us that being careful with the mitzvah of lighting candles for Chanukah and Shabbos is a merit to increase your children's success in Torah learning. This demonstrates the great power of the mitzvah of lighting menorah, and the extent to which it can impact ourselves and our children. We are taught that the time that the menorah is lit is a special opportunity for prayer. Many tzaddikim would utilize this time to pray.

Some opinions hold that it is a mitzvah to make seudos (Yom Tov meals) on Chanukah. All agree that if the theme of the meal is thanking Hashem and commemorating the miracles, it is a mitzvah.

THE OBLIGATION OF LIGHTING ON CHANUKAH

The letter of the law requires that only one primary household member light just one candle on each night of Chanukah. Since the mitzvah of lighting menorah is considered "very beloved", we observe this mitzvah in an elevated manner, above the minimum requirement. This includes the custom that each male member of the household over Bar Mitzvah (and even younger boys old enough to understand) light his own menorah, as well as lighting one new candle for each night of Chanukah.

Someone who is a guest at another's home and will be sharing meals with the host is considered part of the household for the time being and is included in the lighting of the household. However, it is best for guests to light their own menorah or participate in the host's lighting by contributing monetarily.

A WOMAN WHO IS THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

As stated above, every house requires one candle to be lit by the head of household which fulfills the obligation for all members of the home. A woman who is the head of house may light menorah and in doing so fulfill the obligation for all members of her family. (Though it is ideal that sons over Bar Mitzvah and those old enough to understand light their own.) However, if she prefers that her son (over Bar Mitzvah) light for the house, she may instruct him to do so.

WOMEN'S OBLIGATION IN THE MITZVAH OF MENORAH

Although women are generally exempt from time-bound positive mitzvos, women are obligated in the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles, for two reasons. Firstly, women were also included in the decrees of the Greeks, and therefore must commemorate the salvation. Additionally, women are obligated because the miracle that led to our victory over the Greeks came about through a woman, Yehudis, the daughter of Yochanan Kohen Gadol.

Because of the unique role that women had in the miracle, women have the custom not to do heavy household work (such as washing clothing by hand, sewing, etc.) for half an hour after lighting menorah.

SAMCHAINU GUIDE TO THE HALACHOS OF CHANUKAH

Lighter housework, such as cooking and sweeping, is not considered "work" for the purpose of this custom.

THE PROPER WAY TO LIGHT

The best way to fulfill the mitzvah is with pure olive oil and cotton wicks. Candles may also be used. Any candles or oil used must be sufficient to burn for at least half an hour after nightfall.

Candles are placed on the right side of the menorah, and are lit from left to right. On each night of Chanukah, we add one new candle to the left of the previous candles, and begin lighting with the new candle on the left.

It is forbidden to have any benefit from the flames. To avoid inadvertently benefitting from the light of the menorah, an extra candle, the shamash, should be placed in the menorah. One should take care not to use an already lit Chanukah flame to light remaining candles; the shamash or other candle should be used.

Leftover oil, candles, or wicks (that have been placed in the menorah but have not completely burned out) should not be used for any other purpose, but should be either burned or disposed of in a respectful manner (i.e. placed inside a bag within the garbage).

THE BLESSINGS ON THE MENORAH

Before lighting the menorah, the following 2 blessings are said (see siddur for full text):

1. *Lehadlik ner shel Chanukah*
2. *She'asa Nissim L'Avoseinu*

On the first night of Chanukah, the blessing of "*Shehechyanu*" is added.

THE CORRECT TIME TO LIGHT

There are different opinions regarding when to light the menorah. Rav Moshe Feinstein holds that the time begins 10 minutes after sunset. There are opinions to light at sunset, others hold that one should light 20 minutes after sunset, and still others hold one should light at nightfall. Each person should follow their own custom.

It is universally accepted that no matter what time you light, the candles must remain lit for at least half an hour *after* nightfall. After that time one may put out the candles if necessary.

THE LOCATION OF THE MENORAH

An important part of the mitzvah of menorah is publicizing the miracle by lighting in a location where the menorah will be noticed. Traditionally, the primary "publicity" was for the purpose of the passersby outside. Therefore, the menorah was lit outdoors, where it could be seen prominently outside the home. In those days, the menorah could only be lit until the time that people were still outside in the streets, which is a half hour after nightfall. However, due to the dangers in exile, our Rabbis decreed that today, the primary publicity should be for the residents of the home, and the menorah should be lit indoors. Today, in order to publicize the mitzvah both among the home's residents and the passersby outside, most people outside of Eretz Yisroel light indoors, but at a window, so that the lights are visible outdoors as well. It is preferable to light within the timeframe of when passersby will be outdoors to notice. However, if you missed this time, you can rely on the people who will see the menorah from within your own home, and subsequently may light throughout the night with a blessing, as long as there are people in the house who are awake. Even a young child can count towards this publicity, as long as he or she is of the age to understand.

SAMCHAINU GUIDE TO THE HALACHOS OF CHANUKAH

Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that even if the time of passersby outside passed (half hour after nightfall) and no one is awake at home, one may still light with a blessing.

If the only window at home facing the street is in a room that the family does not usually enter, it is better to light the menorah in a prominent location within the home, to ensure there is publicity among the members of the home. Some say to light the menorah by the front door, on the left side, with the mezuzah on the right of the door, in order to surround oneself in mitzvos.

Someone who lives in an apartment that has windows higher than 30 feet from the ground cannot achieve publicity from the outside street. In such a household, the menorah should be lit in a prominent location within the home (some say on the left side of the front door,) to maximize the publicity inside. If, however, the windows of the apartment are the same height as the windows in neighboring apartment buildings, publicity to the outside is possible, and one should light at the window.

The menorah should be placed at least 12 inches from the floor. It should be no higher than 40 inches.

SHABBOS CHANUKAH

On the Friday of Chanukah, the menorah is lit first, followed by the Shabbos candles. If the Shabbos candles were accidentally lit before the menorah, you may not light the menorah since you have already accepted Shabbos. In such a situation, ask someone else to light menorah and have you in mind with the blessing of "Lehadlik Ner", and then you can make the blessing of "She'asa Nissim".

On Friday afternoon, the menorah is lit significantly earlier than the normal lighting time. Therefore, it is important to take extra care when lighting menorah on Friday to ensure that the candles or oil used will burn for at least half an hour until after nightfall, a span of more than an hour and a half from when the candles will be lit.

On motzei Shabbos following Shabbos Chanukah, there are different opinions regarding whether to first make havdalah or to first light menorah. Each person should follow their own custom.

There are different Halachic opinions regarding someone who is a guest for Shabbos Chanukah and will be leaving after Shabbos to return home. Some opinions hold that one should light immediately after Shabbos at one's host, while some say to wait and light later at home. Either of these options can be relied on.

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

On Chanukah, we say "*Al Hanissim*" and "*Byemei Mattisyahu*" in bentching and in Shemone Esrei.

If someone omitted it in Shemone Esrei, one need not repeat it. However if one remembers before saying the name of Hashem in the blessing "*Hatov Shemcha*", go back and say it in the proper place. If one becomes aware of the omission later, but before concluding Shemoneh Esrei, add "*Al Hanissim*" before "*Yehyu L'ratzon*" in *Elokai Netzor*.

If someone omitted it from bentching, one does not have to bentch again. In this case as well, if one remembers before saying the name of Hashem in the blessing of "*Al Ha'aretz v'al hamazon*", he should go back and recite it in the proper place. If he only realized his error prior to completing bentching, he should insert an additional "*Harachaman*" after "*Bamarom Yelamdu*", followed by "*Byemei Mattisyahu*". (See siddur for full text)

The complete Hallel is said daily on Chanukah. There is an opinion that women are obligated in Hallel on Chanukah.