
Guide to Chanukah 5786

Chanukah is the Holiday where we celebrate the triumph of Torah and Judaism over the Hellenistic culture and ideology. It is no less relevant in our time – *bizman hazeh*, as it was in their time – *bayamim hahem*. Since the Holiday is approaching soon, it is appropriate for us to review the relevant laws and their significance:

I. LIGHTING CANDLES

In order to remember the miracles that occurred during the rededication of the second temple by the Hasmoneans, the Rabbis of that time enacted that we light candles on each night of Chanukah.

- This year, we light candles from the night of Sunday December 14th - the night of Sunday December 21st.

How Many Candles to Light

- The Talmud states that the basic requirement of lighting candles is *Ner Ish U'beito* – one lit candle per night per household. However, it has become widespread to follow the highest standard of lighting candles, known as *Mehadrin Min Hamehadrin*. This means that we light one candle on the first night and increase the number of candles that we light each night, so that on the eighth night, we light eight candles.
- There is also a slight difference in practices between Sefardim and Ashkenazim:
 - Sefardim** - The head of the household lights one menorah on behalf of the entire household (Shulchan Aruch OC 671:2).
 - Ashkenazim** - Each member of the household lights their own menorah (Rema OC 671:2). Although, classically the wife of the household did not light, as it was assumed that she was included in her husband's lighting (see Mishnah Berurah), it has become more common in some households for the wife to light as well.

Procedure of Lighting

- One of the main themes of Chanukah candles is *Pirsumei Nisa* – publicizing the miracle. Therefore, we place the menorah by our window or in a place where it can be seen by passersby.
- The candles in the menorah are arranged from right to left and are lit from left to right.
- The blessings “*Lehadlik ner shel Chanukah*” and “*She'asa nissim la'avoteinu*” are recited prior to lighting. On the first night, the blessing of “*Shehechiyanu*” is also recited.

Time of Lighting

- The ideal time to light is at *Tzeit Hakochavim* (nightfall). This is when 3 medium sized stars are visible in the sky, and is this year at **5:14pm**. Some have the practice to light earlier, at sunset.
- One should use enough fuel to burn for at least half an hour (Shulchan Aruch OC 672:2 and Mishnah Berurah).
- One who did not light at *Tzeit Hakochavim* can still light for the rest of the night until dawn (Ibid.)
- One who is pressed for time may light as early as *Pelag Haminchah* (around 3:45pm), as long as one uses enough oil to burn for half an hour after *Tzeit Hakochavim*.

II. SHABBAT CHANUKAH

Friday Night

- On Friday night, the practice is to light Chanukah candles before lighting Shabbat candles. Since one is lighting earlier, it is appropriate to use enough oil for the candles to continue burning until half an hour after *Tzeit Hakochavim* (nightfall).

Motzaei Shabbat (Saturday Night)

- In Shul, the lighting of the candles is performed before *Havdalah* (Mishnah Berurah 681:3).
- At home, there are differing practices as to whether to light first or perform *Havdalah*; the more prevalent one is to perform *Havdalah* first.

III. TEFILLAH AND OTHER PRACTICES

Al HaNissim

- During the eight days of Chanukah, the prayer of “*Al Hanissim*” is recited during *Shemoneh Esrei* and during *Birkat Hamazon*. In both cases, if one forgot to recite it, one need not repeat their *Shemoneh Esrei* or *Birkat Hamazon*.

Hallel

- The full *Hallel* with a Berachah (blessing) is also recited during all eight days of Chanukah.

Eulogies and Fasting

- On the eight days of Chanukah we do not eulogise or fast.

Feasting

- It is customary to eat a little more than usual on Chanukah and to sing songs of praise to Hashem during the meals.
- It is a widespread custom to eat foods fried in oil to remember the miracle of the oil.
- Some also have a custom of eating dairy foods on Chanukah, in memory of Yehudit who fed cheese to the general of the Syrian-Greeks, which enabled her to eliminate him (Rema OC 670:2).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me: rabbirubin@nhbz.org

Leia and I wish you all a happy and meaningful Chanukah,

Rabbi Rubin