


# A Chanukah Review for Those Not in School and for Those Who Are

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by Rabbi Yair Hoffman for 5tjt.com FEEL FREE TO PRINT AND REVIEW..

## CHANUKAH

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chanukah occurred during the time of the Second Beis HaMikdash approximately in the year 3596/165 B.C.E. The Seleucid Greeks (or Syrian Greeks) ruled and enacted decrees against Klal Yisrael, outlawing the Jewish religion. The Greeks forbade Torah study and the observance of mitzvos. Ironically, they knew what many Jews do not know: what makes Klal Yisrael unique is Torah and mitzvos. Without these, our spiritual existence would gradually disappear and we would no longer be the Am Hashem.

The Greeks took our money and violated our bnos Yisrael. They entered the Mikdash and desecrated it. They polluted that which was pure and caused Klal Yisrael much anguish. The Greeks placed such stress on Klal Yisrael that Hashem finally had compassion upon us and rescued us. The Chashmona'im, the family of the Kohain Gadol and those who joined them, were victorious in battle against the Greeks and saved Klal Yisrael from their hands.

The Chashmona'im installed a king from among the Kohanim, thereby restoring the monarchy to Klal Yisrael for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdash (3829/70 C.E.).

The underlying nature of the miracle of Chanukah in and of itself involves a renewal. The Nesivos Sholom explains (Ma'amarei Chanukah p. 35) that the Gemorah discusses the underlying principle of how we light the Chanukah lamps itself, according to Beis Hillel. It is called "Mosif v'holech – adding more and more as we go along.

This special power of Chanukah began with the Beis HaMikdash – where more and more holiness was added. It spread to the people.

Rav Dessler writes that every Yom Tov is actually the very same day that comes back to us year after year. Each Chanukah is the very same Chanukah that the Maccabees experienced. This light of Chanukah that increases as each day progresses is with us constantly.

The Nesivos Shalom further asks why the verse tells us Mechadesh kol yom b'tuvo. Why must Hashem re-create every day?

He answers that it was to give man hope as well. So that man can renew himself and say, “Today is a new day and I am newly created.” By the same token the nation of Israel is compared to the moon. Just as the moon renews itself, so too can we renew ourselves and reach our fullest. Perhaps it was because of this notion as well that Chanukah was made to also include a Rosh Chodesh – to remind us of our power of renewal.

## PRE CHANUKAH PREPARATIONS

Generally speaking regarding the other Yomim Tovim throughout the year, we should study them and give lectures in them for 30 days before the holiday (See Megillah 29b). This is not the case, however, regarding Purim and Chanukah (See Tosfos Megilah 4a “B’Mai”).

The Raavad’s son known as the Ri, however, writes that one should prepare the Menorah as well as the oil two days before the holiday (cited in Sukkas Chaim quoting Kovetz Moadim). The work entitled Orchos Rabbeinu about the Steipler Gaon zatzal writes that the Steipler would either prepare on the 18th of Kislev or the 22nd.

## THE MIRACLE OF THE OIL

The date on which Klal Yisrael was victorious over the Greeks and destroyed them was the 25th of Kislev. That day, they entered the Heichal and only found one flask of pure oil in the Beis HaMikdash with the seal of the Kohen Gadol.

That flask contained enough oil to burn only one day. They used it to light the lamps of the Menorah and it lasted for eight days — long enough for them to crush olives and extract pure oil.

Because of this neis (miracle), the next year, the Chachamim of that generation decreed that these eight days, beginning with the 25th of Kislev, should be days of simchah and Hallel.

These days are called Chanukah because “chanu” — they rested from their enemies — on “kah” — the 25th. Kah in gematria is 25.

The neis that we celebrate is about the oil and not about the military victories. The reason for this is that the Chachamim of the time were concerned that people would think the victory was because of the military tactics of the Chashmona’im and not because of Hashem’s Divine intervention. The Chashmona’im ultimately ended up assuming too much power. Because of this error, some of their descendants did not follow in the ways of Torah, and the country was divided by civil war. This is another reason why it is the oil that is commemorated.

Also, the miracle of the flask of oil hints to the continued existence of the Jewish people throughout the darkness of the Galus, a miracle in and of itself. No other nation in the world ever existed in exile for so long and eventually returned to its land.

This miracle is attested to in the first Rashi of sefer Bereishis, in which Rashi states that Hashem started the Torah with “Bereishis bara” so that in the future, when the gentiles accuse us of stealing their land, we can say that Hashem created the world and gave the land to us. This Rashi was written over 900 years ago. The continued existence of Klal Yisrael — particularly in the land of Eretz Yisrael, where the gentiles are now accusing us of stealing their land — is truly remarkable. This Rashi is an inspiring neis.

The Beis Yosef, Rabbi Yosef Karo, asks a famous question about Chanukah: Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days instead of seven? The miraculous extra burning was only for seven days! This question is known throughout the Torah world as “The Beis Yosef’s Question.” There is a book that has over 500 answers to this question!

One answer is that even though technically the miracle of the oil lasted for only seven days (since the flask contained enough oil for one day), we still celebrate Chanukah for eight days because the victory itself is deserving of its own special day, just like Purim has a day. It was also the day that they found the oil — so Chazal decreed that the Menorah be lit on that first day too.

Another interesting question that is often asked about Chanukah is: Why did the Chashmona’im wait until they got pure oil? There is a halachic concept called “tumah hutrah b’tzibbur” — if needed for the tzibbur, impure oil may also be used! They could have used the impure oil as well. Why didn’t they?

One answer that is often given is that the Chashmona’im were setting things up for the first time after a long period of disuse. In such circumstances, everyone is looking and observing. The Chashmona’im taught us not to settle for things that are impure, but to do mitzvos in the best possible manner. This is a lesson in chinuch, too, to teach that one should always strive for the highest level.

In tractate Shabbos (21b), the Pnei Yehoshua at first suggests that lighting the menorah perhaps may not be considered part of the Kohain’s avodah – but he dismisses this. The Pnei Yehoshua ultimately answers that this miracle just happened that year and it showed the world, publicly that now there is an *ais ratzon*, a period of Divine grace. It was a public declaration that the Shechina rests on Klal Yisrael – a renewal of a loving relationship between Hashem and his children.

The Pri Chadash says that there is a type of Tumah associated with promiscuity – that is not permitted and that is the tumah that the Greeks were known for. Although others disagree with this Pri Chadash, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank finds a Jerusalem Talmud (Perek kaitzad tzolin 7) that agrees with it.

Rav Eliahu Mizrahi in his comments on the Smag on Hilchos Chanuka says that the oil is only a *hechsher mitzvah* for the lighting and are not actually the *cheftzah* – the item of the Mitzvah. It is thus likened to a Bris Milah on Shabbos where only for the cutting itself is one permitted to violate Shabbos, but not for other violations.

## NO MENTION IN THE MISHNA

It is also quite curious why there is no mention of the obligation to light the Chanukah Menorah anywhere in the Mishnah. Indeed, the only mention of Chanukah in Chazal is in Megillas Taanis, which predates the Mishnah, and in the Gemara in Shabbos 21a. The Chasam Sofer explains that since Rabi Yehudah HaNasi, the compiler of the Mishnah (about 1800 years ago), was a descendant of David HaMelech, he left out the miracle involving the Chashmona'im since they should not have taken the malchus for themselves but should have left it for the descendants of David HaMelech. Indeed, the Ramban writes that Hashem punished the Chashmona'im for this act. We had a civil war amongst ourselves and eventually the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed.

## TIME OF HAPPINESS

There is a very ancient book in Torah sheb'al peh that was written even before the Mishnayos were written down. It is called "Megillas Taanis" and was written when the Beis HaMikdash was still in existence. This book listed many lesser holidays, both joyous days and sad days that we Jews celebrated. After the Second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, we stopped observing all of these other days because, Chazal teach, "there was no more joy." The Talmud Yerushalmi (2:12) tells us that all the special holidays were set aside except two holidays: Chanukah and Purim.

On these days we may not give a hesped (eulogy at a funeral). Eulogies make people sadder and we may not do that on Chanukah. An exception is made for eulogizing a talmid chacham if the aron of the deceased is present at the funeral.

It is also the custom during these times to greet each other with the expression "a lichtigen Chanukah – a light-filled Chanukah" or a "freilichen Chanukah – a happy Chanukah." It is interesting to note that in the expression Chanukah Sameach – a happy Chanukah, Sameach is the Notrikun (abbreviation) of Shabbos, Milah and Chodesh. These are the three areas in which the Seleucid Greeks limited Jewish religious practice. This was pointed out by the Gerrer Rebbe.

## FASTING ON CHANUKAH

We are also not permitted to fast on these days. Fasting makes one sadder, too, and this is not permitted on Chanukah. We may not fast, even if it is for the yahrtzeit of a parent. However, we are permitted to work and perform melachah.

## FASTING BEFORE CHANUKAH

What about fasting before Chanukah? In the Megilas Taanis it states that even on the day before a Yom Tov or after it, one is forbidden from fasting. The answer to this question is that it is permitted, even though it is a debate among the Rishonim.

Tosfos (Taanis 18a "Rav") writes that one may fast beforehand as these halachos were, in fact, negated even though Chanukah and Purim were not. This is the Rambam's opinion as well, and that of the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch.

The Rif (Megillah 4a ), Ran, and the RaZah (cited by the Bach in OC 686), however, are stringent. The Pri Chadash is also stringent, disagreeing with the Shulchan Aruch.

The Mogain Avrohom (686:1) does mention the custom of some who fast on Erev Chanukah instead of on Erev Rosh Chodesh. They should not change their custom, but he writes that it is not ideal.

## THIRTY MINUTES BEFORE CANDLE-LIGHTING

There is a prohibition to perform work within thirty minutes of candle-lighting time (See 672:10). What type of work or activity is forbidden?

It is forbidden to perform the type of work that is liable to continue, such as a haircut or bath, or doing business. Specifically, one may not wash dishes, iron clothing, among other things.

Rav Elyashiv explained (Kuntrus Hilchos Chanukah page 6) that even cooking or baking during this time is forbidden for someone who has an actual obligation to light. The reason why this is more stringent than Chol HaLoed is because the reason for this prohibition is on account of Pirsumei Nissa – publicizing the miracle.

According to this, Rav Elyashiv has ruled that a store-owner must literally go home and light when the time for Chanukah candle lighting has arrived. If, however, his living is dependent upon his store being open during those hours, he should leave someone that is not obligated in lighting in the store. If this is not possible, then he may delay going home until 50 minutes after sunset. If this is not possible, then he should appoint a Shliach to light on his behalf.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt”l writes that if the wife is working, however, the father should not light before she comes home from work on account of Shalom Bayis (Emes L’Yaakov page 254). The rationale is that if one does not have enough money for both Chanukah candles and Shabbos candles, the Chanukah candles are set aside for Shalom Bayis. Rav Yakov zatzal held that there would be a Shalom Bayis element here as well.

Many Yeshivos in the United States do not dismiss the married Kollel Yungerleit until well after candle lighting. The rationale for this may be based upon the Meiri (Shabbos 21b) who mentions this Minhag for the Yeshiva students in France during his time.

Many of the Yeshivos that have secular studies during this time, however, do dismiss early in order to fulfill this Mitzvah in a timely fashion.

## WORKING WHILE THE MENORAH IS LIT

Women have the special custom not to do work while the menorah is still lit. Although some write that this is for the entire time that the candles remain burning, the Mishna Brurah rules that this is only until 30 minutes after nightfall – Tzeis HaKochavim. The reason why women have this custom is because a woman — Yehudis, the daughter of Yochanan the Kohen Gadol — brought about a miracle.

Yehudis was very attractive and told the persecuting king that she would be intimate with him. She fed him dairy products so that he would be thirsty. He drank wine and got sleepy. She was able to kill him and cut off his head. This caused the army general and his soldiers to all run away.

## CHANUKAH FOODS, GAMES, AND GELT

Since the miracle of Yehudis' victory occurred by means of dairy foods, we have the minhag to eat dairy foods on Chanukah. When eating dairy, we should have in mind the miracles that Hashem did for us.

There is a minhag to eat latkes on Chanukah. This is because they are fried in oil in order to commemorate the miracle that happened with oil. This custom is mentioned by the Rambam's father. In Eretz Yisrael, doughnuts are eaten for the same reason.

There is also a minhag to play with a dreidel on Chanukah. This commemorates the mesirus nefesh of the children for Torah study. The Greeks forbade the study of Torah. When they checked up on the young students who continued to study Torah despite the decree, the children pretended to be playing games. The dreidel also signifies that during the time of Chanukah, help came from Hashem Above; therefore, the spinner is on top. On Purim, the move toward teshuvah came from Klal Yisrael down below, which is why we use the grogger, whose handle is on bottom.

It is customary to distribute Chanukah gelt (money; today, coin-shaped chocolates are also used) to family members and children. This is to create the joy that will enhance the appreciation of the nissim Hashem did for us.

Many poskim (including the Vilna Gaon) are of the opinion that there is a slight mitzvah to increase feasting on Chanukah —because on these days the work for the Mishkan in the midbar was also completed. If we add zemiros to these meals they would be considered a seudas mitzvah. If there are no zemiros, they are not considered a seudas mitzvah.

The Ramban in Bamidbar (8:2) quotes a Midrash on the passuk "When you kindle the lamps": The Torah here is hinting to the events of Chanukah. When the Levi'im saw that the Nesi'im of each tribe were bringing dedication offerings and the shevet of Levi did not

[and were sad), Hashem said, “There will be another Chanukah [dedication] where there will be a lighting of lamps when I will perform miracles.. for Israel.. The sacrifices are brought only as long as the Beis HaMikdash will exist..but the lamps [Chanukah] give light forever..”

Chanukah is a time in which we give greater tzedakah (Magen Avraham) because it is a time of geulah — redemption.

## GENERAL ASPECTS OF LIGHTING

On the eight days of Chanukah, during the evening, we light Chanukah menorahs to publicize the miracle of the oil.

These lamps may be lit in the doorway to our homes, but nowadays most people light by the window because there is more *pirsumei nissa*, publicizing of the mitzvah, when the flames are visible in the window rather than at the doorway. All this points to the idea that a small measure of light can push away much darkness.

One must be very careful in regard to lighting the Chanukah menorah. If one is careful, the reward is children who are *talmidei chachamim*. According to the *Shulchan Aruch*, even a poor person supported through charity should collect money or even sell his clothing in order to light. This is the only Rabbinic mitzvah that has such a requirement. Indeed, even many Torah mitzvos do not have such a requirement!

Why is this so necessary? Because the Chanukah menorah does two things:

- 1) It publicizes the great miracle that occurred.
- 2) It serves to increase praise and gratitude to Hashem for the miracles He has done for us.

With the lighting of the menorah we reinforce the concept that all of Creation, and the life force of every living thing, exists because of Hashem's Will. We state that Hashem will, at times, intervene with His laws of nature. We acknowledge that Hashem is the true source



of salvation and we express our sincere gratitude for the miracles He performed on our behalf in the time of the Chashmona'im.

Since the Chanukah menorah acts in such a capacity, it is important to focus on increasing our praise and gratitude toward Hashem. The gratitude extends to our own lives as well, not just during the time of the Chashmona'im.

## FULFILL A TORAH MITZVAH

One can fulfill a Torah obligation when lighting the Chanukah menorah. The Torah mitzvah one fulfills is "V'nishmartem me'od l'nafshoseichem" (Devarim 4:15) which stipulates that one must take safety precautions and protect oneself and others.

Fire is extremely dangerous and many people have been injured or killed, R"l, when proper safety measures were not taken regarding Chanukah flames. The other mitzvos of Chanukah are d'Rabbanan.

The obligation to light is called "chovas habayis"; the obligation is upon the house, not the individual. Homeless people not staying in a house are technically exempt. Even though the obligation to light is on the house, the main obligation falls upon the baal habayis.

A person should attempt to be home during the time of the lighting and to light the candles himself. This is because of the concept of "mitzvah bo yoser mi'b'shlucho" — it is better to perform a mitzvah oneself than through a messenger.

If the wife knows that the husband will be coming home, she should not light for him until midnight, because he is the main householder and the mitzvah is greater for him than for her. Once midnight has arrived, however, she should light the candles.

If someone must undergo surgery, however, there is no obligation to avoid doing so immediately before Chanukah in order that he be home to light the candles (ruling of Rav Elyashiv, Chashukei Chemed Brachos 101). He should, however, appoint a messenger

to light on his behalf at home. If no one else will be at home then there is no obligation for him to light since he may not do so in a hospital setting. He is also not obligated to rent a private hospital room for him to light.

#### GATHERING ENTIRE FAMILY

It is also appropriate to gather the entire family around to light the menorah, even if in waiting for them there will be somewhat of a delay in lighting (See MB 672:10). If most family members are home, then one or two children who arrive later should light on their own and not delay the rest of the family.

It is interesting to note that the Steipler Gaon (Orchos Chaim p. 17) would even gather his married daughter who would fulfill her Mitzvah later on in her own apartment. Such is the importance of the Pirsumei Nisah of Chanukah.

#### PROHIBITION OF DERIVING BENEFIT

It is forbidden to derive any benefit (hanaah) from the Chanukah lamps or candles. One cannot read next to them or use the light for any other purpose. There are two reasons for this prohibition of hanaah.

1) Rashi explains that everyone must see that these lights are only for one purpose — to publicize the miracle.

2) The Ran explains that since these lights commemorate the Menorah that was in the Beis HaMikdash, the same halachos which pertain to the items of the Beis HaMikdash still apply: no benefit may be derived from these items.

It is for this reason that we make sure to also light a shamash in addition to the candles or oil lamps. If one did inadvertently use the menorah's light for any other purpose, we assume halachically that the light came from the shamash. The shamash should be placed in a different area than the regular Chanukah lights so that it is not confused with the Chanukah lights themselves.

The candles or the oil placed in the lamps must be enough to last ½ hour. If someone lit a menorah that did not have enough oil in it, he or she should relight the menorah, but without a new blessing. Most authorities hold that there is no extra hiddur—beautifica- of the mitzvah — in putting a lot of oil in the lamp. However, some say that nowadays, since people are out until very late at night, there is an extra beuatification in having more oil in the lamp.

There is a debate in the Gemara as to whether the placing of the menorah does the mitzvah (hanachah osah mitzvah) or the lighting does the mitzvah (hadlakah osah mitzvah). We rule that hadlakah does the mitzvah. Therefore, if one lit the menorah in a place that one would not have fulfilled the mitzvah (such as above twenty amos) and then moved the menorah later, the mitzvah has not been fulfilled and he must relight.

## THE PROCEDURE OF LIGHTING

The basic obligation of Chanukah is just to light one lamp for the entire household each night of Chanukah. The mehadrin — those that go above the basic obligation — have everyone in the household light one lamp each night of Chanukah. The mehadrin min hamehadrin — those that go above and beyond — have everyone in the household light two lamps on the second night, three on the third night, four on the fourth, etc. The custom all over is to light like the mehadrin min hamehadrin.

How do we actually light? The Chanukah menorah is set up in the place that provides maximum pirsumei nissa, publicizing of the miracle, but is still safe. The entire family gathers around for the lighting so that there is more pirsumei nissa. The candles or lamps are arranged from right to left on each night, but they are lit from left to right.

There is a debate between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel as to how we light. According to Beis Hillel we light one candle on the first night, two candles on the second night, three on the third, etc.

According to Beis Shammai, we light eight candles on the first night, seven on the second night, six on the third night, etc. Even though we conduct ourselves like Beis Hillel, when Mashiach comes the halachah will be in accordance with Beis Shammai and we will light eight on the first night.

## WICK OR OIL FIRST?

The Mishnas Yaakov (Vol. II 673) writes that since the lighting of the Chanukah lamps is to commemorate the lighting in the Beis HaMikdash, the same pattern should be followed in regard to Chanukah as in the Beis HaMikdash. T

he Gemorah (Yuma 24b) indicates that in the Beis HaMikdash the wick was placed first, followed by the oil. Rashi on Shmos (25:37) seems to indicate that the order is reversed (i.e. oil first and then the wick) as does Tosfos in Sanhedrin (82b). However, the Maharsha on Sanhedrin writes that Tosfos was not being exacting in his wording.

The Rambam (Tmidim uMusaffim 3:12) writes clearly that the wick was placed first. When the author of Sukkas Chaim posed the question to Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlita, he responded that the order did not matter in the Beis HaMikdash. However, it would seem from both the Maharsha and the Mishnas Yaakov that it would matter, at least lechatchila. It is also interesting to note that no other authority cites this requirement other than the Mishnas Yaakov.

## WHEN WE LIGHT THE CANDLES

The Gemara tells us that we light the candles “from the time the sun sets.” There is a debate as to whether this means the beginning of what we call sundown or whether it means when three medium stars appear. Practically speaking, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt”l, held that we light 13–18 minutes after sunset. Rav Aharon Kotler held that we light 25–30 minutes after sundown.

When one will be unable to light later, one may light as early as plag Minchah which is  $\frac{1}{4}$  halachic hours before sunset. Generally, in New York City, this is sometime between 3:30 PM and 3:37 PM.

## WHERE WE LIGHT THE CANDLES

In the time of Chazal, the minhag was to light the menorah outside by the entranceway facing the street. However, when Jews started living among the gentiles, the minhag changed to light in the house on account of danger. Now the main pirsumei nissa is for the family members. The question arises as to why we do not go back to the original custom in situations where, baruch Hashem, there is no longer danger. The Aruch HaShulchan answers that the wind or rain would extinguish the menorah and Chazal did not go so far as to demand that we enclose the menorah in glass. In Eretz Yisrael today many people do light outside in a glass-enclosed case.

One may not light the menorah above twenty amos (28 feet 4 inches according to Rav Feinstein, zt"l). If a person lives on the first, second or third floor of an apartment building, it is ideal to place the menorah by the window because there is still pirsumei nissa for passersby on the street.

If one lives on the fourth floor or above, it is preferable to place the menorah next to the entrance of the apartment.

Remember, for people who live below the fourth floor, including in a house, it is preferable to place the menorah next to the window, rather than next to the entrance. When we do place the menorah next to the entrance, we place it on the side opposite the mezuzah so that we are surrounded by mitzvos. It is placed next to the doorway so that people will realize that the owner purposefully placed it there.

Ideally, the menorah should be at least three tefachim (handbreadths) above the ground and below ten handbreadths. The reason it should be above three tefachim is because some people place things on the floor and it may not be recognizable that it was done for pirsumei nissa.

The reason it should be below ten handbreadths is that lights used for seeing purposes are usually placed above three feet high.

Three handbreadths amount to 10.62 inches and ten handbreadths are 35.4 inches. The ten tefachim requirement is measured from the flame, not the menorah. The three handbreadth requirement is from the base, not the flame.

If there are any safety issues involved in placing it below or above these recommended heights, safety precautions should be followed first. If there are little children (including grandchildren!) in the house, access to the menorahs should be blocked. Couches and or other things that are easily flammable should be placed at a far distance from the menorah.

## WHO IS OBLIGATED?

Everyone is obligated in lighting: men, women, and children who have reached the age of instruction. Women are obligated because they, too, were involved in the miracle. Unless they have a minhag otherwise, however, married women and single girls should preferably fulfill their mitzvah with the lighting of the baal habayis.

The Chasam Sofer explains that in previous times everyone lit outside. Back then it would have been a breach in tznius for women to go outside and light. Even though nowadays we light indoors, most women still maintain the original practice and rely upon the lighting of the baal habayis.

If, for some reason, the man cannot light, a woman may light for him and be motzi him thus be his agent in fulfilling the Mitzvah.

The Chida writes that women have a special Mitzvah of preparing the Chanukah Menorah that the husband will be lighting (Moed L'Kol Chai 27:25). He derives this from the fact that Chazal tell us that a person who is careful in Ner Chanukah will merit children who are Torah scholars.

Since this segulah is specifically mentioned by Chazal in regard to women, this Segulah is also applicable in regard to them. Furthermore, the very miracle of Chanukah in regard to the war happened through a woman. In Sefer Ohr Yisroel (cited in Sukkas

Chaim) it mentions that Rebbitzen Kanievsky would prepare the mMenorah for her husband, Rav Chaim Shlita.

## CHILDREN

What is considered the age of instruction? The Pri Megadim writes in his preface that for most mitzvos other than Krias Shema and tefillah, the age of instruction is 5 or 6, depending upon the sharpness of the child. If the child understands things earlier, then he should be given a menorah to light.

The Mishnah Berurah notes that one does not have to give a child more than one candle to light on any given night. Common custom nowadays is to let the child light the full amount of candles.

## WITH WHAT TO LIGHT

The ideal method of lighting is with olive oil — even though one may light with any type of oil or candles.

Olive oil is ideal because the miracle actually happened with olive oil. If at first someone did not have olive oil and set up the menorah with wax candles, and then the olive oil arrived, one should use the wax candles and not the olive oil.

One may reuse the wicks used during the previous night. This is not a bizayon to the mitzvah at all; it actually makes it easier to light the menorah.

It is important to beautify our mitzvos because of the passuk “Zeh Keili v’Anveihu — This is my L-rd and I shall glorify him.” This applies to Rabbinic mitzvos as well. One should therefore try to purchase a nice menorah. Many people use a silver menorah for this reason.

It is proper to make sure that the flames of each of the Chanukah candles are the same height.

A metal or glass menorah is preferable to other types of menorah because of hiddur mitzvah — beautifying the mitzvah. Many poskim write that metal is preferable to glass. A candelabra, although technically permitted for Chanukah menorah use, is not considered a hiddur mitzvah for Chanukah.

An electric menorah has neither a wick nor oil and may not be used as a Chanukah menorah. If a person is a patient in a hospital and cannot light any other way, some poskim hold that the patient should not light with an electric menorah. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef writes that in such circumstances one should use an electric menorah but should not recite a blessing.

## IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO LIGHTING

The Kaf HaChaim (675:15) writes that before we light we should look at each lamp of the Menorah to ensure that there is a sufficient amount of oil in it so that his blessing will not be considered a Bracha l’vatala. He writes that he should not rely upon others for this.

## THE BERACHOS WE RECITE

On the first night of Chanukah, three blessings are recited immediately prior to the lighting:

- 1) L’hadlik ner shel Chanukah
- 2) She’asah nissim l’Avoseinu



3) Shehecheyanu. The third berachah is not recited on the other nights. However, if one forgot to recite Shehecheyanu on the first night, s/he should recite it on the next night that it is remembered.

There are three versions of the blessing of L'hadlik. Some say, "L'hadlik ner Chanukah." Others say, "L'hadlik ner shel Chanukah." The third option, which is the one recommended by the Mishnah Berurah, is that "shelchanukah" is one word. After the lighting the Minhag is to recite haneiros hallalu and then to sing maoz tzur.

## EREV SHABBOS & MOTZAEI SHABBOS

On Erev Shabbos we light the Chanukah candles before the Shabbos candles. Enough oil must be placed in the menorah to ensure that the lights last ½ hour into the night. Regular Chanukah candles will not work unless they are frozen for at least 4 hours beforehand.

It is preferable to daven Minchah before lighting the Chanukah candles but a man should not miss minyan on this account.

The candles cannot be lit before plag Minchah which, at its earliest, is 3:30 PM in New York and may go until 3:37 PM.

On Motzaei Shabbos, the general minhag in our homes is to say Havdalah first and then light the Chanukah candles. The reason is that Havdalah is more tadir — common — than Chanukah candles. In shul, however, the Chanukah candles are lit first and then Havdalah is recited. The person who lights in shul does not fulfill his obligation to light at home, neither on Motzaei Shabbos nor during the week.

## WHEN NOT AT HOME

Sometimes the halachos of where one lights can get very complex and a Rav should be consulted when a person is not at home. The issue revolves around one's kvius. The rule of thumb is that if one will return home that evening, one lights when one gets home. If

one had spent the night before at that place, then one may light there even if one will return home later. Lighting at a bar mitzvah or wedding is not acceptable and is considered a berachah l'vatalah.

## PUTTING OUT AFTER 30 MINUTES

Is one permitted to extinguish the Chanukah candles after they have been lit for thirty minutes? The Shulchan Aruch (672:2) rules that it is permissible to do so. The Mogain Avrohom writes that one should avoid doing so. This is also the view of some other authorities as well (Bach, Chayei Odom).

However, it is cited in the name of both the Chofetz Chaim (Meir Einei Yisroel Vol. I p. 62) as well as the Chazon Ish (Orchos Rabbeinu Vol. III Chanukah #45) that they did put out the Chanukah candles after 30 minutes.

Certainly, if one must leave, then one should extinguish it on account of the danger involved in leaving burning candles as well as the Torah Mitzvah of taking safety precautions.

Another situation where, according to all opinions, one may extinguish the Chanukah lights after thirty minutes is when there is only one Chanukah lamp available and another person needs to light. The Sefer Mekadesh Yisroel (Siman 125) writes that this is permitted according to all opinions.

## TEFILLOS ON CHANUKAH

We add the special tefillah of Al HaNissim to every Shemoneh Esreh of Chanukah. We also add it to our bentching throughout Chanukah. If it was left out, however, it is not repeated; neither in Shemoneh Esreh nor in bentching.

We recite the complete Hallel each day of Chanukah because a miracle occurred each and every day of Chanukah.

Since the Mishkan was completed on the 25th of Kislev, we read the parashah of the gifts of the Nesi'im each day of Chanukah from the Torah during Shacharis. This also alludes to the promise that Hashem made to Aharon and the Levi'im about the Chanukah lights lasting forever.

Chanukah comes out on the following days in these years:

2022: December 18-26

2023: December 7-15

2024: December 25- January 2

2025: December 14-22

## EATING BEFORE LIGHTING

By the time most people usually get home from work, the time to kindle the Chanukah lights has already arrived. And by the time the whole family gets together to actually light, another ten to fifteen minutes may have elapsed. What's the story with sneaking in a quick taste of those latkes before dinner?

The source of the prohibition of eating before the performance of certain Mitzvos is a Gemorah in Sukkah (38a). From there we derive that the prohibition exists not only for Biblical Mitzvos but also for Rabbinic Mitzvos. The Poskim extend the various prohibitions from the discussion found there. Our interest now, of course, is Chanukah.

## THE THREE CATEGORIES

Before we get to Chanukah lights, let's create some categories. There are some Mitzvos where it is both forbidden to eat and even to taste before we perform them. We will call these Category One No Pre-Food – Mitzvos. (We don't want to call them Category One Mitzvos because the issue of eating before them is not synonymous with the type or level of the Mitzvah per se).

There are also Mitzvos where, it is forbidden to sit down to a meal before you do them, and ideally, one shouldn't taste anything, but there is room to be lenient if one is feeling weak or one is sick. We will call these Mitzvos Category Two No Pre-Food – Mitzvos.

Finally, there are some Mitzvos where the halacha is not to sit down and eat before we perform them, but we are allowed to taste something before we perform them, and there is, in fact, no problem in tasting. We will call these Category Three No Pre-Food Mitzvos.

And as in many issues of halacha, where exactly each Mitzvah fits in is often either a Machlokes or has not been clearly defined. Another aspect that leads to much of the confusion is what are the general guidelines for how we are to categorize these Mitzvos? Why are some of the Mitzvos okay to taste something beforehand, but it is not okay to eat beforehand?

## EXAMPLES OF CATEGORY THREE

What are some Category Three No Pre-food Mitzvos?

One example is the Mitzvah of davening Mincha (SA OC 232:4) where it is forbidden to eat a meal but it is permitted to taste. Another example is the Krias Shma of Maariv (SA OC 235:1) or of Mussaf (SA OC 286). These are all Category Three.

Before Sfiras HaOmer one can taste as well according to the (Kaf HaChaim 689:46). Many shuls allow it before Tkiyas Shofar too, thus categorizing it as a Category Three. It is somewhat strange that the Mishna Brurah makes no mention of the issue in regard to Hilchos Shofar. He does mention it in passing in Hilchos Megillah of all places (692:15). There, he equates Megillah to both shofar and lulav.

Eating before Lulav is technically forbidden (SA OC 652:2) as a category three. The Mishna Brurah in his Shaar haTziyun writes that this is only for eating[1] – tasting is permitted according to the strict halacha. He explains, however, that one should only be lenient, for a great need (citing the Bikureei Yaakov and the Chayei Odom). This would put it possibly in a Category Two.

There are some Poskim who are Machmir on some of the earlier one's and would put them in a Category Two as well. But most don't.

## EXAMPLES OF CATEGORY TWO

What are some of the more full-blown Category Two No Pre-Food Mitzvos? Reading the Megillah is one, according to the Mishna Brurah (692:14).

So what are some of the guidelines? The Trumas HaDeshen (#109) explains that if a Mitzvah has an extended period of time in which it can be performed there is a concern that we might push it off further and perhaps forget about it completely.

## EXAMPLES OF CATEGORY ONE

What are some examples of Category One No Pre-Food Mitzvos? Kiddush on either Friday night or Shabbos morning are the classical examples (See SA OC 271). This is also true of Havdallah. What is interesting to note is that the Rav Shulchan Aruch, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, gives us an explanation as to why Kiddush is a Category One and not a Category Two or Three (RSA 271:9).

In this explanation we may find tremendous insight into Chanukah. He writes that in regard to these Mitzvos their main Mitzvah is at the very beginning of the time period. Although the Mitzvah of Kiddush continues throughout Shabbos – its main Mitzvah is at the beginning. This is also true with Havdallah. The Mogain Avrohom writes this distinction as well (OC 235).

## CHANUKAH LIGHTS – WHICH CATEGORY?

So let's get back to Chanukah candles. From the aforementioned Mogain Avrohom and Rav Shulchan Aruch we might have thought that the main Mitzvah of Chanukah candles is at the very beginning – so the criterion of Kiddush and Havdallah may apply too. However, the Mishna Brurah himself distinguishes between Biblical main start and Rabbinic main starts in regard to Bdikas Chometz 271:11). Perhaps one can make an argument that the Pirsumei Nissah aspect of Chanukah makes it like a deoraisah (the Turei Even says such a thing in regard to reading the Megillah), but the Poskim do not mention this.

Nonetheless, the Mishna Brurah does treat Chanukah like a Category One in some way.

According to the Mishna Brurah's Shaar HaTziyun 672:15, once the actual time for lighting has arrived – then we should not be tasting food. Why? Because there are some Poskim that hold that the time to light the Chanukah lights only lasts for the first 30 minutes. Since we are concerned for this opinion ideally, once that time has arrived we should not mess around and do it right away. Hence – no tasting.

What about before that time? One half hour before the time to light actually starts? Well, the idea of curtailing activity a half hour before is a Rabbinic Mitzvah, and according to the parameters of the Mogain Avrohom (regarding hilchos Minchah) we are not so stringent in regard to this.

Our conclusion?

There might be three separate time periods in regard to the laws of tasting before Chanukah light. Within one half hour before the time to light candles one may taste. Once the time of candle lighting has arrived – one should not be tasting anything ideally, but if very necessary one can. This period lasts until 30 minutes after candle-lighting time. After this period is over, then one may taste again.

[1] Indeed, even in eating one doesn't have to wait more than the half day mark and the Chsam Sofer writes that if one is expecting that the lulav is going to be brought to him, he does not have to wait.

## **RULINGS OF RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY ZT" L ON CHANUKAH**

Recently, a new Sefer entitled "Siach Chaim" by Rav Yitzchok OhevTzion was published containing letters back and forth between the author and Rav Chaim Kanivsky Shlita. What distinguishes this work from that of many others of the same genre is that this two volume work contains an approbation from Rav Kanievsky. Many of the halachos found in the work that pertain to Hilchos Chanukah are discussed below.

Q: The Mishna Brurah in 671:9 writes that a woman does not light Chanukah candles because "Ishto k'Gufo" – a man's wife is like his own self. Yet in 675:9 he cites the Olas Shmuel that if she desires to light – she recites a bracha!

A: She is like his own self – if she so desires to be.

Q: I once heard in the name of a certain Gadol that a Kollel member who is learning Torah in the Beis HaMidrash – it is preferable that he not stop his learning [See my own article on this subject matter in this publication on page. ], and his wife should light at home in his stead. Should one conduct himself in such a manner?

A: One should NOT conduct himself such.

Q: On Shabbos Chanukah – when it is already 30 minutes after Tzeis HaKochavim is it permitted to utilize and benefit from the Chanukah lights? Or do we say that since it was Muktzah during Bein haSHmashos one cannot benefit?

A: One may not benefit.

Q: What was the custom of the Chazon Ish's house on Motzei Shabbos Chanukah? Did Havdallah come first or did he light first?

A: He did Havdallah first and then he lit.

Q: According to the custom of those who light first then do Havdallah, should the wife also recite Boruch HaMavdil before her husband's lighting?

A: It is worthwhile that she do so.

Q; May one light the Chanukah lights with oil that is Shviis?

A: It is forbidden.

Q: Is there any inyan to light the Chanukah candles with edible oil?

A: Some say that there is.

Q: It has been publicized in the name of Rav Chaim that if a person is in the hospital during Chanukah Rachmana litzlan, and he wishes to light Chanukah candles where he is, but the hospital policy is to forbid it, that he light with a battery operated flashlight. Is this statement accurate that one can do so with a battery-operated electric flashlight?

A: This is what they say in the name of the Chazon Ish zatzal.

Q: The new floating wicks that exist in our times that the wick is covered with wax – does this lower the quality of the lighting with olive oil, since when the wicks are lit – it is fueled by the wax , and only afterward is it fueled by the olive oil and the essence is during the time of the lighting? Or is there no concern here.

A: It does not lower the lighting quality

Q: Why is the Mitzvah of Chanukah different than other Mitzvos – where there are different levels of observance – such as Mehadrin min haMehadrin – something we do not find regarding the other Mitzvod?

A: It is because the entire miracle happened because of a hidur – a higher level of observance – since Tumah is permitted for a public use. (In other words, the Maccabees could technically have used the flask of impure oil, they just wanted to go the extra yard, since they were setting things up for the first time after a long period of disuse. In such circumstances everyone is looking and observing. The Chashmonayim taught us not to settle for things that are impure – but to do it in the best possible manner. This is a lesson in Chinuch too, to teach that one should always strive for the highest level. So, explains Rav Chaim, the Mitzvos of Chanukah were established in that manner as well – YH).

Q: The Gemorah tells us in Shabbos 23b: Rav Huna says that a person who is ragil b'ner will get children who are Torah scholars. Yet we see many good and proper people who are careful in every aspect of the laws of Chanukah and even do mehadrin min

hamehadrin, and yet they do not merit sons who are Talmidei Chachomim!

A: The person should have exerted more oversight on his child's Chinuch than he did. He is himself [a bit] at fault.

Q: In the matter of giving Chanukah gelt, it is said that the Steipler zatzal (Rav Chaim Kanievsky's father) only gave it on a certain day of Chanukah. Is this true? What day was it and why did he do so?

A: He gave it on the fifth day of Chanukah. The reason is that it never falls on Shabbos.

Q: Is there an inyan to study for himself and to teach his children on the days of Chanukah, the miracles and marvelous events that happened to our forefathers in the times of the Maccabees that are cited in the book of Yossifun etc. or should he continue in his normal method of learning.

A: We learn the halachos of Chanukah.

Q: In the Chassidish Sforim the custom is discussed of playing with dreidel during these times. Is it proper to do so with one's children or should one refrain from doing so?

A: Whoever does so, does so.

## **THE CHASHMONAYIM**

The Chashmonayim lasted for 5 generations.

Matisyahu Ben Yochanan KOHEN GADOL was the first who repeated the statement of Moshe Rabbeinu, Mi Lashem Ailie. His five sons took over for him.

Yehuda Maccabee, Elazar Maccabee, Shimon KOHEN GADOL, Yochanan Maccabee, Yonasan KOHEN GADOL

Shimon's son was Yochanan KOHEN GADOL also known as John Hyrcanus. He was the nephew of Yehudah Maccabee. This coin was minted during the 31 year reign of Yochanan Hyrcanus

His son was Shetach, his son was Shimon and daughter ShlomTzion. ShlomTzion married Alexander Yannai whose sons were Aristobulus and Hyrcanus II.

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