

# Hilkhhot Chanukah 5779

**Rabbi Isaac Attia**  
**Co-Director, OU-JLIC at Brandeis**

*The halakhot of Chanukah are discussed in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 670-684.*

*The following is a general overview and distillation.*

*For any specific questions please feel free to contact me at [JLICrabbi@brandeis.edu](mailto:JLICrabbi@brandeis.edu).*

## **Chanukah/Menors seaz wasr qah**

SAFETY IS KEY WHEN LIGHTING CHANUKAH CANDLES. For those on campus, you must register with the Department of Residence Life to be allowed to light candles for religious purposes. Please review their policies and guidelines. Here's the form:

[https://brandeis.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6Guonbj8gfSoycl](https://brandeis.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Guonbj8gfSoycl)

**It's quick and easy, and not filling it out may constitute halakhic theft.**

## **Fuel: Oil vs. Candles**

Any type of fuel may be used for fulfilling the mitzvah. Some prefer olive oil since the original miracle took place with oil, and you can measure out how long you want your lights to burn. Some prefer candles because the flame is prettier and setup is easier. Halachically, it makes no difference which fuel one uses. If using oil, extra care should be taken because some glass cups are prone to break. Water should be placed at the bottom of the cups.

*From hereon the term "Chanukah candles" refers to either wax candles or oil.*

## **Electric lights**

Unlike Shabbat and Yom Tov, where the essential mitzvah is to have candles lit in one's home to avoid sitting in the dark, the essential mitzvah of Chanukah is the action of lighting. One may not use electric lights.

## **How to light**

The essential mitzvah of Chanukah is ner ish u-v'eito – one candle per household. The Gemara then gives the option of mehadrin (beautifying the mitzvah) by lighting one candle for each member of the household. The Gemara gives a further option of mehadrin min ha-mehadrin (the most beautified way). The way that we fulfill this level is by lighting one candle on the first night and increasing one candle each subsequent night until there are eight candles on the last night. The universal custom is to follow the position of mehadrin min ha-mehadrin. If for whatever reason one does not have enough candles, one can fulfill the obligation by lighting only one candle per night.



Ashkenazim understand that mehadrin min ha-mehadrin also mean that every member of the household (who is at least of appropriate age, minimum: the age at which children are educated) lights Chanukah candles.

Women are fully obligated in lighting Chanukah candles. A married woman may opt to have her husband light for her or she may light her own Menorah.

Ashkenazi college students living independently of their parents should light their own Chanukah candles while at school, the way they would at home.

Sephardic college students need not light as long as their parents are lighting for them. If they wish, they may light but may not make a brakha.

Roommates **may not** fulfill the mitzvah together since they are not related.

### **Setting up the Menorah**

The candles should be placed in the Menorah starting at the right. Each night as we add an additional candle from right to left, we should light the newest candle -- moving from left to right.

### **Where to light**

The Menorah should be placed near a window. The goal in lighting candles is to publicize the miracle of the Menorah. This was originally achieved by placing the Menorah outside – next to the street. Nowadays, we light the menorah inside and the key audience of the mitzvah is members of the household. We still recognize the original goal of the mitzvah by placing the menorah near a window. If you light too high up, your Menorah is not visible to pedestrians and thus cannot accomplish the goal of *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle. That height is 20 amot: approximately 31 1/2 feet. Those who live on the third floor and up should use the following guidelines:

- If one has access to the ground floor (i.e., one lives in their own house or in an apartment/dorm where they can light on the ground floor) that is where they should light.
- If one lives in an apartment/dorm, etc. and does not have access to the ground floor they may light in their dorm room/apartment. If there are buildings of similar height it is preferable to light in the window, but the focus is for one's family/household. Lighting in the window is not necessary in that case.
- In such a scenario one may also choose to light by the door to their room, so people in the hall can see the Menorah. This last option should be done only if the Menorah will not cause a safety risk to those passing by.

Students who live in a **suite** can choose to either light by the windows of their bedrooms or in the common room.

Students living in **dorms** should optimally light **in their dorms**, as this constitutes your bayit. Make sure to fill out [this form](#). There is no halakhic problem with putting water in the tin when it comes to Chanukah candles.

*(Pro Tip: in Rav Moshe Feinstein's yeshiva, he required roommates to draw lots and take turns attending the lights, and forbade leaving the lights alone.)*

### **Shamash**

There is a prohibition against deriving any benefit from the Chanukah lights and against using them for any practical purpose (this includes using their light to read and also includes using one candle to light another). To protect against this, we light a Shamash – a helper candle in addition to the candles corresponding to the night of the holiday. The shamash is also used to kindle each candle. The shamash should be noticeably set aside as the shamash and not confused with the other candles being lit.

### **Berachot/Blessings**

The following Berachot are said when lighting the Menorah:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר (של) חנוכה  
*Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha-Olam Asher kidshanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu  
 le-hadlik ner (shel)' Chanukah*

Blessed are You, Hashem, Sovereign of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light candle/light of Chanukah.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה  
*Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha-Olam She-asah nisim la-avoteinu ba-yamim ha-heim  
 ba-z'man ha-zeh*

Blessed are You, Hashem, Sovereign of the universe, Who has wrought miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

(the first time performing the mitzvah this year)  
 ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגעיענו לזמן הזה  
*Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha-olam she-hechyanu ve-kiymanu ve-higyanu  
 la-zman ha-zeh.*

<sup>1</sup> In general, Ashkenazim include “shel” while Sefaradim exclude it.

Blessed are You Lord our God, sovereign of the world, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

One should light the Shamash, then recite all the Brachot and then light the candles. The paragraph of *ha-nerot halalu* is recited either while or immediately after lighting the candles. Maoz Tzur generally follows.

### **When to light**

*Weekday* – There is some ambiguity over when the ideal time to light candles is. The gemara says *mi-she-tishka ha-hama*, when the sun sets. Most authorities understand this to mean that the ideal time to light is at *tzeit ha-kochavim* (when the stars come out; which is approx. 5:00pm in Waltham) because the candles are fully visible once it is fully dark. Others feel that *shekiah* is the optimal time to light (approx. 4:12pm in Waltham) because then passers-by will know that the lighting is for a mitzvah, since it is not yet fully dark. **All agree that the candles must burn for a minimum of 30 minutes AFTER tzeit, regardless of when one lights them.**

We generally strive to fulfill mitzvot as early as possible to show our eagerness and zeal to perform God’s commandments (*zrizim makdimim le-mitzvot*). On Chanukah this should be balanced with the goal of *pirsumei de-nisa* – publicizing the miracle to the members of one’s household and passers-by on the street. It is totally appropriate for a family to wait for all the members of the house to be home before lighting. **One may light Chanukah candles as long as there are people to see them – members of the family, roommates and/or passers-by on the street.** If no one else is awake to see the candles, then after the fact one may still light (with a *brakha*) until dawn.

If one will not be able to light candles after *tzeit ha-kochavim* (eg: traveling) and cannot find a proxy to light for them, then they may light as early as *plag mincha* (approx. 3:15pm in Waltham) as long as there is enough wax/oil to burn one half-hour past *tzeit*. **Most poskim agree that it is halakhically preferable to light via proxy (*shaliach*).**

The candles must burn for at least one half-hour after darkness (*tzeit ha-kochavim*). They should be long enough to burn for such an amount of time. If they extinguish on their own before that time, one need not relight them, though one is certainly allowed to relight them without saying a *brakha*. (If you light them in a situation where it is possible they will blow out, like next to an open window, then you might relight with a *brakha*.) Generally, once a candle or oil is lit for the sake of the mitzvah of *nerot Chanukah* attains a level of *kedushah* (holiness). It may not be used for any purpose other than *nerot Chanukah*. Candles or oil that are not fully burned should therefore be used the subsequent night of Chanukah. If one has candles or oil that have not fully burned at the end of holiday they should be

burned to ensure they won't be used for any other purpose. However, when lighting candles one may stipulate that he/she only intends to consecrate the wax or oil that will actually be burned. Any remaining oil may then be discarded. (None of this applies to the candles still in the box or the oil still in the jug -- they are permissible for all uses).

If you don't want to stay with your candles the entire time that they burn, after the half-hour-post-tzeit-ha-kochavim mark one may blow them out.

## **Shabbat**

**Erev Shabbat** – Shabbat creates a bit of a conundrum when it comes to Chanukah candles. On the one hand, we begin Shabbat before the designated time of lighting Chanukah candles. On the other hand, once Shabbat candles have been lit, one may not light the Chanukah candles since lighting fires is prohibited on Shabbat. One should therefore light Chanukah candles before lighting Shabbat candles, and ensure that the candles are long enough or that there is enough oil that they will burn for at least ½ hour after tzeit ha-kochavim (approximately 90 minutes after Shabbat begins). Special “Shabbat Chanukah” candles are available, or one may shave down normal Shabbat candles to fit in one's Menorah. (If using oil, simply put enough oil in each cup to ensure it will burn for long enough.)

While it is usually ideal to light where you will be sleeping, there are also valid shitot that allow you to light where you will be eating. If you will be leaving to Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat, you can light in Sherman before davening so as not to leave candles unattended in one's dorm.

**Motzaei Shabbat** – In one's home, one should first say Havdallah and then light Chanukah candles. In our synagogue we reverse the order in order to maximize the pirsumei nisa (publicizing the miracle).

## **Travel**

If one is traveling and will not have the chance to light Chanukah candles at the appropriate time, a few options exist:

1. The most preferable is appointing someone to light for you by proxy, ie your parents
2. You can light once you arrive so long as it is still dark and someone is still awake.
3. You may light with a brakha from plag ha-mincha onward. Plag ha-mincha is 1 ¼ halakhic hours prior to tzeit ha-kochavim (approx. 3:15pm in Waltham). Attention must be paid to ensure that the candles will last until ½ hour past tzeit ha-kochavim. One may attain the exact time from <http://www.ou.org/holidays/zmanim>.
4. If you are traveling the entire night (i.e., on a plane), there is much conversation as to whether you are obligated in candle lighting at all. Bottom line: have your parents have you in mind, and you needn't light at all. If you choose to “light” on a flashlight (a viable option suggested by R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach), don't make a berakha, and make sure not to benefit from the



light. You can use this handy website to obtain flight-appropriate zmanim:

<http://www.myzmanim.com/airdemo.aspx>

### **Guests**

Guests (sleeping at someone else's house; not just eating over) may light a chanukia at their hosts' home or may pay their host a nominal sum of money and fulfill their obligation in the host's lighting.

### **Shul**

The custom has developed to light Chanukah candles in Shul in order to achieve the goal of *pirsumei de-nisa* – publicizing the miracle. For this reason a special allowance is made to light in Shul between Mincha and Ma'ariv, even though this is before the appropriate time for lighting in one's home.

Whoever lights in

shul does so with a *brakha*, and lights at home with a *brakha* as well.

There is also a *minhag* to light the Menorah in the morning in shul without a *brakha*.

**To be clear, it is a custom to light in shul, but no one discharges their personal obligation through the shul lighting or any public candle lighting.**

Shul lighting will be at 10pm in Berlin, followed by Maariv.

### **Hallel/Al ha-Nisim**

On Chanukah we add Al ha-Nisim in the Amidah and Birkat ha-Mazon. If one forgot to recite al ha-Nisim in the amidah one need not repeat the amidah.

If one forgets it in Birkat ha-Mazon, if he/she realizes their mistake before reciting the next bracha it can be recited at any point. If they have already said the next bracha, they may recite it during the ha-Rahamans at the end of Birkat ha-Mazon.

There is no mention of Chanukah in al ha-Michiya.

A full Hallel is recited on all days of Chanukah.

The *minhag* is to recite Psalm 30 (*mizmor shir chanukat ha-bayit...*) at the end of Shacharit each day of Chanukah. Tachanun is not said.

### **Foods**

There are many traditional foods eaten on Chanukah. These include latkes, jelly donuts (*sufganiyot*) and anything else fried in oil. There is also a tradition to eat cheese and dairy products to commemorate the story of Judith (See Rema in OH 670:2).