

# Laws and Customs for Chanukah

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"Why did the sages decide on 8 days [of Chanukah]? Since the jar of oil had within it enough to light for one night, thusly we find that the miracle only occurred for 7 nights"

(Tur Orach Chayim chapter 670, Beis Yosef ” ).



# Laws and Customs for Chanukah

(Translated from Rebbe Shmuel Pinchas Slita"h Kihilos Bne Torah 5775 – all additions are cited)

- A. The time to light the candles is immediately at nightfall (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch chapter 139, section 10). And from that time it is forbidden to eat and to do the all other types of Melacha (work related activities), [until one has lit the candles]. There is a side to be stringent and not to eat a half hour before this candle lighting time, however it is permissible to eat a small snack [before lighting the Chanukah candles] which means; to eat less than a kabetzah (41 cubic cm, 57.6 cubic cm, or 100 cubic cm) of bread or to eat fruit, or to drink non-alcoholic drinks. A women waiting for her husband to come home to light the Chanukah candles is permitted to eat and do work while she waits for him.
- B. All oils are kosher (acceptable) to use to light the Chanukah candle. Yet the best oil to use is olive oil and it is good to beautify the mitzvah of the Chanukah candle by lighting with olive oil that is fitting to be eaten. If a person does not have any oil at all he should do the mitzvah with setarin or wax candles or the like.
- C. All wicks are kosher to use to light the Chanukah candle and it best to do the mitzvah of lighting with a wick made of cotton or linen.
- D. The "floating wicks" are kosher and it is ideal to use them for lighting [however the best wicks are cotton or linen as mentioned above in section C].
- E. The [minimum required to do the] mitzvah of Chanukah; it should be that every house lights one candle (Rambam Yad Chazakah Zamanim hilcos Chanukah chapter 4 halacha 1). And the simple custom in our countries is to do the mitzvah in its most complete adornment, like mehadrin min hamehadin, that each member of the house, except for the wife, lights. On the first night each person lights one candle, and likewise on the second [night] two candles and thusly we add until the eighth night, on which each person lights eight candles (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch chapter 139, section 6).
- F. When the husband of the house lights the Chanukah candle his wife and children should stand during the blessing and lighting of the candles. The husband, when lighting should have intent to do the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candle for his wife and she should have intent to do the mitzvah through her husband. Therefore in the case where a husband is lighting and his wife cannot be present (or the opposite) then the wife should hear the

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blessing at the time of the lighting [for example the husband should call her and have her hear the blessing by phone].

- G. When lighting, one should place himself opposite the Chanukah candle farthest to his left side so that his hand firstly [and directly] meets with this candle. [By lighting in this fashion] he will not need to pass over the mitzvos (Mishneh Brurah Vol. 6 siman 676 Mishneh Brurah sayif katan 11).
- H. One needs to be careful not to remove his hand from the time the blessing is said until the majority of the wick has been light. It is not right what most people do when they immediately remove their hand after the head of the wick has been light.
- I. Right after the first candle has been light and while the rest of the candles are waiting to be lit the song "HaNeros Hallou" should be sung as he lights the rest of the candles.
- J. The candles should be placed 3 tefachim (24cm or 30cm) above the ground and ideally it is proper to be precise and not place them 10 tefachim (80cm or 1 meter) above the ground. These measurements of 3 tefachim and 10 tefachim should be measured from the flame of the candle and not from the place of the menorah.
- K. The mitzvah of the Chanukah candle is to light it in the doorway opening to the public domain to publicize the miracle of Chanukah and this is how Jews lit during the time of the Mishnah and Gemara. And in today's age since we live amongst non-Jews the candle is lit inside the home in which one lives. And if one has a window that is seen from the public domain he should light there [in this window]. If he does not have this type window he should light by the doorway. And it is a mitzvah that he should place it [the menorah] in the tefach closest to the left side of doorway so that the Mazuzah should be on the right side and the Chanukah candle should be on the left side and he is found to be surrounded by mitzvos. And it is better to place them [the Chanukah candles] in the opening of the doorway [as opposed to the left side]. (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch chapter 139, section 7)
- L. Also in one's house ideally he should be careful to light between 3 and 10 tefachim unless he has small children and he worries that the small children may knock over the candles.
- M. If one lives on a high floor and he only has one window that is higher than 20 tefachim he should light there [in that window].
- N. In the time when Jews had a custom to light inside and all the publicizing of the miracle was only for the wife and children in the house, and the miracle is publicized in every place in the house, there is no obligation to light specifically in the doorway of his room in order for him to be surrounded by

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 mitzvos because [being surrounded by mitzvos] is a weak reason and therefore Jews [who light inside] are not careful with this except for those who do the mitzvah with extreme precision (Shut Egeres Moshe Ohr Chayim, Vol. 4 siman 125, Mishneh Brurah – Dirshu - Vol. 6 siman 671 Mishneh Brurah sayif katan 37 no. 68).

- O. If someone leaves his house while the Chanukah candles are lit and he worries about leaving the candles unsupervised, if the candles were already lit for 30 minutes [from nightfall] it is permissible to put them out, and likewise it is permissible to put out the candles for any reason once they have been lit for 30 minutes from nightfall.
- P. Store owners [meaning all those who work into the evening] need to return to their home to light the candles on time [at nightfall]. In the event that that he cannot close his store and he cannot have someone replace him during that time, he should request from his wife or from one of the members of his household to light in his house at the correct time and through this lighting the store owner fulfills his obligation. Yet if possible the store owner should hear the blessings during this lighting by phone.
- Q. Women should not do Melacha (work related activities) 30 minutes from when the candles have been lit. After those first 30 minutes Melacha is permitted. Here, Melacha refers to complete Melachos like laundry, sowing, and knitting. However cooking, baking, washing dishes, and organizing the home are permissible during those first 30 minutes after candle lighting.
- R. A guest eating at someone else's home during candle lighting time, yet plans on returning to sleep in his home that night, does not fulfill his obligation by the host's candle lighting. And this guest needs to return to his house while there is still time to light candles [and light in his home]. In the event that one did not light immediately at nightfall he can still light with a blessing [all night] as long as members of his home are awake (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch chapter 139, section 10).

**"Why did the sages decide on 8 days [of Chanukah]? Since the jar of oil had within it enough to light for one night, thusly we find that the miracle only occurred for 7 nights" (Tur Shulchan Aruch chapter 670, Beis Yosef ד"ה ואיכא).**

## **So, why do we celebrate 8 days of Chanukah?**

### **Here are 8 answers, one for each night:**

1. The Jews apportioned the oil found in the jar into eight equal amounts and each night they put one portion into the Menorah. And each portion even though it was only one eighth of the jar stayed lit until the morning. Thusly each night a miracle was preformed including on the first night (Beis Yosef ibid).
2. After the Jews poured the oil into the Menorah the jug stayed full, and therefore the miracle was seen already on the first night (ibid).
3. Finding the jar of oil was a miracle to itself. And the sages added a day for finding the jar of oil (Meiri, Maseces Shabbos).
4. One day of Chanukah is a remembrance for the Mitzvah of Circumcision (Bris Milah). Because the Greeks banned the Mitzvah of Circumcision which is done on the eighth day and once the Jews conquered the Greeks and ended their wicked decrees the Jews made Chanukah eight days as a remembrance (Shiltey Giborim).
5. The jar of oil had exactly enough oil in it to last for one day however when the Jews poured the oil into the Menorah they saw some of the oil stuck to the walls of jar. Therefore there was not enough oil on the first day to last an entire day so the miracle was already seen on the first day since all the candles burned the whole day (Birke Yosef).
6. The Rambam holds that the Cohanim (Jewish Priests) would light the Menorah in the evening and in the morning. The jar of oil that was found was meant to light one time in the evening. A miracle was preformed and they lit the Menorah from the same oil also in the morning therefore also on the first day there was a miracle (Birke Yosef).
7. After the Jews defeated the Greeks the Jews found the Hechal (sanctuary) of the Temple filled with idols and other abominations and it was impossible to light the Menorah inside the Hechal until all the idols and abominations were removed and the Temple was purified. In the meantime the Menorah was lit in the "Chatzros Kodshecha." The Chatzros Kodshecha had a strong wind blowing in it and the

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candles needed a larger amount of oil from what was usually needed and present in the jar. Therefore also on the first day there was a miracle because in this windy place this jar of oil was not enough for one day and thus we say "and they lit candles bichatzros kodshecha" and therefore Chanukah has 8 days and not seven (Chatam Sofer).

8. Preparing for a mitzvah is a part of the mitzvah and on the first day the Jews prepared themselves for the Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah and preparation is the most important part of doing the mitzvah. Therefore the first day of preparation is thought of as part of the miracle of Chanukah (Tiferes Shlomo).