



Laws and Customs of Chanukah: Dec 18-Dec 26, 5783-2022

Chanukah begins on the 25th of Kislev, which this year corresponds to Sunday night, December 18th. The last day of Chanukah is the 2nd of Tevet, beginning Sunday night, December 25th. These are days of *hallel ve-hoda'ah*, praise and thanksgiving, and of contemplating the role of miracles in our lives. We commemorate Jewish resistance and military strength as well as the miracle of long-lasting oil in rededicating the Temple, events which took place in the 2nd century BCE. We also celebrate retaining our Jewish identity against powerful forces of assimilation in those times.

The central ritual observance of these days is the lighting of candles in our homes and in public gathering places. Many laws and customs, from liturgical to gastronomical, have developed around these days as well. One of the central motivating values of the holiday's observances is *pirsumei nisa* – publicizing the miracles – to ourselves, our communities, and the broader world.

Chanukah Candles and Setting up the Chanukiah

While there are a few customs regarding who lights and how many candles, our widespread custom is to have every member of the household light, and light as many candles as the night of Chanukah that it is. If this poses a hardship, one may fulfill the mitzvah by having even one household member light one candle per night.

Candles or oil may be used for the lighting of Chanukah candles (an electric *chanukiah* should not be used unless there is no other choice. In that case, most agree that a blessing should not be said). Olive oil is recommended because the miracle of the oil occurred with olive oil. There is an element of *hiddur mitzvah*, beautifying the commandment, such as by using nice, tall candles that burn smoothly. The *chanukiah* is set up by adding each new night's candle to the left of the previous (ie. inserting candles from right to left), and lighting from left to right. A *chanukiah* is simply anything which can hold the candles – even a series of candle holders will do, although there is an element of *hiddur mitzvah* in having a beautiful *chanukiah*. The *chanukiah* should be arranged so that a viewer can see each light distinctly from the next (semi-circular or wave patterns may be allowed although not preferred – feel free to contact us if you need further guidance). In addition, multiple *chanukiot* in a row should be separated so that they can be seen as individual ones.

One may not derive functional benefit from the Chanukah candles. Therefore, a *shamash* (helper candle) is lit as well. This (together with overhead lighting) resolves many complicated questions that would otherwise arise.



Location of the Chanukiah

In Rabbinic times, the *chanukiah* was placed in the doorway (on the left side, opposite the *mezuzah*) facing the public domain in order to publicize the miracle to passersby. In those times, one who did not have direct access to the public domain lit in a window facing that area. If it was not possible to light in those places for reasons of danger, one simply brought the *chanukiah* to the table inside.

Nowadays, for those who have houses, lighting in the doorway is still a desirable option if it is safe and can be guarded from wind. However, most people with houses and those who live within 20 *amot* (~30 feet) of the ground, follow a widespread custom to light in a window. This fulfills the mitzvah of publicizing the miracle to those in their own home, and additionally to those who pass by. Because the rabbis estimate that people tend not to look up above 20 *amot*, those who live on higher floors of an apartment can fulfill their obligation of publicizing the miracle by lighting in the presence of members of their household. In that case, there is no need to light the *chanukiah* in the window, although the prevailing custom is still to do so.

For those lighting alone, it is recommended to light in the window even on higher floors, as the lights will be visible to surrounding neighbors from their windows. This fulfills publicizing the miracle to passersby according to some opinions.

Time and Duration of Lighting

There are many opinions about the preferred lighting time. Our custom is to light candles at sunset, which ranges from **4:30pm** (Sunday 12/18) to **4:33pm** (Sunday 12/25) this year. Most *poskim* recommend lighting at nightfall, which ranges from **5:15pm** (Sunday 12/18) to **5:18pm** (Sunday 12/25). Either way, the candles should remain lit until **30 minutes** after nightfall. If one cannot light at nightfall, one should light as soon as possible afterward. While technically, one may light until daybreak, it is strongly preferred to be sure to light only while people are still awake in the house in which one is lighting in order to perform the mitzvah of *pirsumei nisa* to those household members.

On Friday afternoon, the Chanukah candles should be lit first - **before** the Shabbat candles. Since this lighting is performed earlier in the day than usual and the candles need to burn past nightfall, we use candles or oil that will last about an hour and a half. (Larger candles are available at any Judaica shop and tea lights are also a good option.)

On Saturday night, Chanukah candles are not lit until after dark, when Shabbat is over. Regarding the practice of lighting the *chanukiah* after Shabbat, there are differing customs:

- Some recite *Havdalah* and then light Chanukah candles (preferencing to begin with the more common mitzvah - *Havdalah*)
- Others do the opposite (preferencing *pirsumei nisa*).

In synagogues, the custom is to light the Chanukah candles first.



At home, one who lights Chanukah candles first should be careful to end Shabbat in one of two ways:

- Recite the *Maariv* prayer, including the *Atah Chonantanu* (*Havdalah* formula) in the *Amidah*
- Recite the *Havdalah* phrase “*Barukh Hamavdil bein kodesh le-chol*” before lighting

Each night of Chanukah, when the time has come for lighting, one should refrain from other activities (business, study, eating, and the like) until one has lit. In general, one should **try** to come home to light candles as close as possible to nightfall. If that is not possible, one should light as soon as possible upon arriving home. A strong recommendation is to leave a reminder such as a note or alarm. One may also wait until the whole family has gathered for the value of *pirsumei nisa* as long as there is a designated way to remember to light the candles.

It is customary for women to refrain from (house)work for the first half hour after the lights have been lit in commemoration of their critical role in the miracles of Chanukah.

Travelers/Guests/Dormitories

The situations of one who is not in one's own home at night are diverse and complicated. A few brief guidelines are given here; don't hesitate to ask if you have more questions.

- If one will not return to one's home until after everyone has gone to sleep, one should have a representative light for them at home.
- If someone lit for you, you may still light when returning home, without a blessing.
- One staying in a motel/hotel should try to light there.
- Those who cannot light in their location should strive to have a representative light for them in their home.
- A guest in someone else's home should strive to light in the host's home or to acquire a share in the host's lighting with a minimal financial contribution.
- One who lives in a dormitory should light in one's room where possible and safe. Otherwise, if there is a common dining hall, one may light there.

The Blessings

Before lighting on the **first** night (but after the *shamash* has been lit) we recite three blessings, found on page 897 in the Koren siddur:

- 1) *Lehadlik ner shel Chanukah* (to light the light of Chanukah)
- 2) *She'asah nissim la'avoteinu* (Who performed miracles for our ancestors), and
- 3) *Shehechyanu* (Who gave us life).

On all subsequent nights we only recite the **first 2 blessings**.

Once the blessings are recited, we light the candles and it is customary to sing the songs *Hanerot Hallalu* and *Maoz Tzur* found in the siddur. Some are careful to begin saying *Hanerot Hallalu* as soon as the first candle is lit, since that is the basic fulfillment of the commandment to light, and others say it after all lights have been lit.



Liturgy

Full *Hallel* is recited all eight days of Chanukah in recognition of each day representing a unique miracle.

Al Hanisim (for the miracles) is recited in the *Modim* (Thanksgiving) blessing of the *Amidah* and the *Nodeh* (Thanksgiving) blessing of *Birkat Hamazon* all eight days. If forgotten, it need **not** be repeated. However, if one remembers that one did not recite it before saying God's name in the conclusion of the blessing, one can return to the insertion point, insert it, and complete the blessing. If one did not remember until after the blessing, one can insert it in the concluding supplication paragraph of the *Amidah* or in the *Harahaman* section of *Birkat Hamazon*. There is no mention of Chanukah in the *Al Hamichya* after-blessing.

As with many other joyous occasions, *Tachanun* is omitted along with other small changes to the prayer service. We add *Mizmor Shir Chanukat Habayit L'David* (Psalm 30) as an additional *Shir Shel Yom* at the end of *Shacharit*. The Torah portions of the tribal princes' Tabernacle gifts are read daily.

On the 1st day of *Rosh Chodesh Tevet* (Friday night 12/23 - Shabbat 12/24), in addition to *Al Hanisim*, we add the following:

- *Ya'aleh V'Yavo* to the *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace After Meals) and the *Amidah* prayer
- An additional *Sefer Torah* is removed from the Ark and the *Rosh Chodesh* portion is read after the *Parashah* of *Miketz* and before the Chanukah reading.
- In the *Musaf Amidah* we recite *Atah Yatzarta* (under the line) for *Rosh Chodesh*

On the 2nd day of *Rosh Chodesh Tevet* (Saturday night 12/24 - Sunday 12/25) we add the following:

- *Ya'aleh V'Yavo* to the *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace After Meals) and the *Amidah* prayer
- An additional *Sefer Torah* is removed from the Ark and the *Rosh Chodesh* portion is read in 3 Aliyot before the Chanukah reading.
- The *Mussaf* prayer for *Rosh Chodesh* is recited

Gastronomy

It is customary to consume dairy in commemoration of a heroine of Chanukah – Yehudit - who fed an oppressive Greek tyrant dairy to tire him, and then was victorious over him. A widespread custom is to eat foods with oil to commemorate the miracle being taking place with oil. *Sufganiyot* (jelly donuts) and *latkes* (potato pancakes) are two prime examples.

Safety is a major concern on Chanukah. Please do not leave your home with candles unattended (unless they are protected in a way where there is no chance of fire). The candles need only burn for a half an hour, therefore if one needs to leave their home they may blow out the candles after half an hour.

We wish you a bright and happy Chanukah!