

# Menorah 101

*Some Laws of the Jewish Holiday  
In Clear, Simple, and Understandable Language*

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אשירה לד' כי גמל עלי

I am indebted to my wife for all the patience and support she continues to have for me.

Thank you my dear reader, for without your interest this pamphlet would not exist.

Much thanks as well to the Minneapolis Community Kollel for their resources.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to be a quick review of some pertinent laws relevant to this time of year.

It was formulated for those who do not have the opportunity or resources to study the laws in detail.

Some of these laws and sources have been adapted from the seforim:

Halachos of Chanukah by Rabbi Shimon D. Eider זצ"ל and הלכות חג בחג by R' Moshe Mordechai Karp שליט"א

If you have any feedback, positive or negative, please share it with me at: [yochanan.schnall@gmail.com](mailto:yochanan.schnall@gmail.com).

Feel welcome to make copies of this pamphlet for free dissemination

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Note: There is much dispute over the ideal timeframe for lighting the menorah. This pamphlet follows the opinion of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל.

## ❖ Finding the Right Menorah

- Menorahs come in all shapes and sizes. In order to fulfill the mitzvah, all eight lights must be the same height and in a straight row<sup>א</sup>.
- The shamash (candle used for lighting) should be positioned apart from the rest of the lights<sup>ב</sup>. The Ashkenazic custom is for the shamash to be placed higher than the rest of the lights<sup>א</sup>.
- The individual lights should not be positioned so close together that two of the flames could appear as one<sup>ג</sup>.
- It is not necessary to use a menorah to fulfill the mitzvah. One can line up independent candles or glasses and use them instead of a menorah provided that all the lights are uniform and comply with the above conditions<sup>ד</sup>.

### Fuel

- One must use a fuel that produces a consistent, clear flame. Today, we use olive oil or wax candles<sup>ה</sup>.
  - Olive oil is preferred since the miracle happened with it<sup>ו</sup>.
- The candles or oil must provide enough fuel in order to burn for the required time<sup>ז</sup>. (See 'Lighting Times')
- Using a gas or electric powered menorah does not fulfill the mitzvah<sup>ח</sup>.

### Wicks

- Each light should have no more than one wick<sup>ט</sup>.

## ❖ Setting It Up

- Set up your menorah earlier than you need it so that you will be able to light it immediately when the time to light arrives<sup>י</sup>.
- Set up the menorah near a public-facing window, if you have one<sup>יא</sup>. Otherwise, set it up in a prominent location of your house.
- Be wary of any drafts (such as from a doorway) that could extinguish the flames<sup>יב</sup>.
- If more than one menorah will be lit, distance them from each other (perhaps in separate windows) so that an observer who only sees the flames will not mistake them as one menorah<sup>יג</sup>.
- Once the menorah is lit, our custom is not to move it until after it has burned for the required time-period (see 'Lighting Times')<sup>יד</sup>. Be sure that the area you choose is one where the menorah can remain lit through this time.
- On the first night of Chanukah you will only be lighting one light (besides the shamash, of course)<sup>טו</sup>. Prepare it on the right end of the menorah- the right side when you are facing the window<sup>טז</sup>.
- With each successive night, add an additional light to the left of what was lit the previous night<sup>טז</sup>.

## ❖ Lighting Procedure

- Have all the members of the house present for the lighting<sup>יז</sup>.
- Find the blessings in your siddur and prop up the siddur so that you will be able to read from it while holding a lit shamash.
- Stand by the menorah so that you are facing the menorah and the window behind it.

- Light the shamash.
- Recite the two blessings that are found in your siddur: *“I’hadlik ner shel Chanukah”* and *“she’asah nissim la’avoseinu...”*<sup>23</sup>.
  - If it is the first night of Chanukah, or the first time you are participating in the mitzvah that year, recite the blessing of *“Shehechyanu”* as well<sup>23</sup>.
- Do not talk or otherwise unnecessarily interrupt between reciting the blessings and lighting all the lights<sup>23</sup>.
- When there is more than one candle, light the newest one (the one furthest to your left) and continue lighting towards the right<sup>23</sup>.
- Sing the two traditional songs of thanksgiving: *“Haneiros Halalu”* and *“Maoz Tzur”*<sup>23</sup>. These songs are found in the siddur after the blessings for the menorah lighting.

## ❖ Lighting Times

- **The basic obligation to light the menorah is only fulfilled if the lights burn for a minimum of half an hour after “halachic nightfall” has begun**<sup>23</sup>. Here, “halachic nightfall” begins forty minutes after sunset<sup>17</sup>. For example: If sunset is at 4:00, halachic nightfall begins at 4:40. The lights must burn for half an hour sometime after 4:40
- The most appropriate time to light begins ten minutes after sunset<sup>17</sup>. When lighting at this time the candles must remain burning for sixty minutes- thirty minutes until “halachic nightfall” and then for the half hour minimum.
- If they become extinguished before the minimum time has completed, it is proper to relight them (except if it is Friday night and Shabbos has begun)<sup>23</sup>.
- One may deliberately extinguish the lights after they have burned for the sufficient time. If one intends to do so, it is preferable to verbalize this intent before lighting<sup>23</sup>.
- One fulfills the mitzvah by lighting any time throughout the night<sup>7</sup>.
  - If one is lighting late at night, it is better not to recite the blessings unless there are still Jewish people inside or outside the home that would see the lit menorah<sup>27</sup>. For more rules of this nature, see **‘When Away From Home’**.
- The earliest one may light is after “plag hamincha”. Speak to a rabbi for a definition of this timeframe in your area. When lighting at this time, a large amount of fuel is necessary since the flames must be able to remain lit through half an hour after nightfall<sup>27</sup>.
- One should light as soon as possible once the ideal lighting time has arrived (see **‘Lighting Times’**)<sup>27</sup>.
- To ensure that the mitzvah is not forgotten or delayed, once the ideal time to light has begun it is prohibited to begin a significant or involving activity before the menorah is lit<sup>27</sup>.
  - Some examples of an involving activity are: studying, eating a meal, or beginning a project.
  - It is permitted to snack during this time<sup>27</sup>.
- One who cannot leave work early enough to light at the ideal time (which unfortunately is often the case), should be sure to light as soon as he or she arrives home<sup>17</sup>.

## ❖ Who is Obligated?

- All Jewish adults over bar/bas mitzvah are included in the obligation to light the menorah<sup>77</sup>.
- Once children are of age to comprehend the concept of this mitzvah, (usually about five or six<sup>77</sup>), they are also obligated to perform it. They too must use a menorah and fuel that fulfills the mitzvah properly<sup>77</sup>.
- One can fulfill the obligation by being part of a group from which one representative lights. To be included in a group one must either:
  - Share the home with a group, such as a family living together or students sharing the same house<sup>78</sup>.
  - Own a share in the oil or candles<sup>82</sup>. In this case, before they are used, one should lift up the candles or oil with the intent of acquiring them.
- Most families with Sefardic ancestry and their communities light only one menorah per home and light as a group<sup>83</sup>.
- In families with Ashkenazic ancestry and those living in their communities, each member of the home lights independently<sup>82</sup>.
  - Wives may light independently, but the general custom is that they rely on their husbands' lighting<sup>78</sup>.

## ❖ When Away From Home

- The following laws apply to situations when a person cannot be home in order to light the menorah at a reasonable time. One who is not far from home and could return home to light at the appropriate time should do so<sup>79</sup>.
- Since a wife fulfills her obligation when her husband lights, a married woman who is away from home is never required to light on her own or appoint someone else to light for her<sup>80</sup>.

### Away the Entire Night

- Individuals who are not returning home at all during the night should have a member of the household who is above bar/ bas mitzvah represent them when lighting at the proper time at home<sup>78</sup>.
  - The traveler should preferably light where he or she is as well without reciting the blessings. If where he or she is staying someone else is lighting with the blessings, these should be listened to before the traveler lights<sup>78</sup>.
- Those without other members in their household or an entire household that is away for the night should light where they will be staying<sup>82</sup>.
  - One who will still be home when the earliest permissible time to light has begun (see '**Lighting Times**'), should light at that time at home rather than light somewhere else. It is even better not to leave home until after sunset in order to light then<sup>7</sup>.

### Away For Part of the Night

- An individual who is returning home late at night should light when arriving home only if other members of the household will still be awake, or if it is practical to wake them for the lighting<sup>82</sup>.
- If everyone else at home will be sleeping, and it is impractical to wake them, one should have a member of the household who is above bar/ bas mitzvah represent him or her when lighting at the proper time.<sup>82</sup>
- If all the members of the house are away for part of the night, they should light upon their return<sup>81</sup>.
- One who lives alone should only light with the blessings if there are still Jewish people inside or outside who are awake and about that would see the lit menorah<sup>72</sup>.

## ❖ Importance of the Mitzvah

- We do not take fire from any of the eight Chanukah lights -even in order to light another candle in the menorah<sup>71</sup>.
- No personal benefit may be derived from the eight Chanukah lights<sup>72</sup>.
  - According to some opinions, even mitzvah activities may not be done relying on their light<sup>71</sup>.
- Women customarily do not do domestic activities such as sewing or laundry during the main half hour that the lights burn (see "**Lighting Times**"). This is in commemoration of the heroine Yehudis who played a significant part in the miraculous defeat of the Greeks<sup>71</sup>.
- One may reuse the leftover oil, wicks, or candles from one night to the next for the eight lights but not for the shamash. Other than that, no use or benefit- mitzvah or mundane- is allowed from them<sup>73</sup>.
  - Once Chanukah is over the leftovers must be burned out or thrown away in a respectable fashion in order to avoid using them by mistake. <sup>74</sup>
  - Oil or candles that were not actually used in the menorah are permitted for benefit<sup>75</sup>.

## ❖ Lighting When Chanukah and Shabbos Coincide

- The menorah is lit before the Shabbos candles<sup>76</sup>.
- Since Shabbos candles are lit approximately eighteen minutes before sunset and the menorah that precedes it must remain lit for half an hour after nightfall, the menorah's lights will have to remain lit for at least 88 minutes! (Regarding Chanukah, the time between sunset and nightfall is 40 minutes: 18 + 40 + 30 = 88.) Be sure that the menorah contains enough fuel to last that long<sup>76</sup>.
  - **Regular Chanukah candles will not last long enough for this lighting.** Practical alternatives are using oil, extra-long lasting candles, or tea lights without a menorah. Light them in accordance to the rules set out above in "**Setting Up- Menorah Styles**".
- Be aware that the menorah and Chanukah lights are muktzah and cannot be moved the entire Shabbos<sup>77</sup>. The stand or table that it is placed on usually becomes muktzah as well<sup>77</sup>.
- At the conclusion of Shabbos, there are varying opinions regarding the order of havdalah and lighting the menorah. One should follow his or her family custom<sup>78</sup>.
  - If one does not have a specific custom, havdalah should be recited first<sup>78</sup>.

## ❖ Changes in the Daily Prayers

- Throughout the holiday, the prayer *al hanisim* is added. In Shemoneh Esrei it is inserted after *modim* and in Birkas Hamazon after *nodeh lecha*<sup>79</sup>.
  - If one forgot to say *al hanisim*, no prayers are repeated<sup>80</sup>.
    - One who is still in the middle of reciting the Birkas Hamazon and realizes that *al hanisim* was omitted can still mention it in the "*harachamons*". The specific text for this can be found in a siddur near the other "*harachamons*" mentioned on holidays<sup>81</sup>.
- Every day of Chanukah we recite hallel and read the Torah<sup>82</sup> There is no mussaf (unless it is also Rosh Chodesh). Expect shacharis to last slightly longer than a typical Monday or Thursday.

- Between mincha and ma'ariv, the menorah is lit in shul with its blessings and the traditional songs<sup>צב</sup>.
- When Chanukah coincides with Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh, prayers are said as usual just with the additional insertions of *al hanisim*. The full hallel is recited and an additional Torah is taken out and read from with the Chanukah reading.
- We do not say *tachanun*, *kel erech apayim*, or *lamnatzayach* throughout Chanukah<sup>צב</sup>. At the end of shacharis, many communities say the psalm "*Mizmor shir chanukas habayis*" (this is the psalm recited every day before *Boruch she'amar*).

<sup>א</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"א סעיף ד'

<sup>ב</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ג סעיף א'

<sup>ג</sup> רמ"א סימן תרע"ג סעיף א'

<sup>ד</sup> שולחן ערוך ורמ"א סימן תרע"א סעיף ד'

<sup>ה</sup> כף החיים סימן תרע"ג סעיף קטן ג' וסימן תרע"א סעיף קטן ל"ב

<sup>ו</sup> רמ"א סימן תרע"ג סעיף א'

<sup>ז</sup> רמ"א סימן תרע"ג סעיף א'

<sup>ח</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ה סעיף ב'

<sup>ט</sup> Halachos of Chanukah II note

<sup>י</sup> רמ"א סימן תרע"א סעיף ד'

<sup>יא</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן א'

<sup>יב</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"א סעיף קטן ל"ח

<sup>יג</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תר"פ סעיף א'

<sup>יד</sup> רמ"א סימן תרע"א סעיף ב'

<sup>טו</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ה סעיף קטן ו'

<sup>טז</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"א סעיף ב'

<sup>יז</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ו סעיף ה'

<sup>יח</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ו סעיף ה'

<sup>יט</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י'

<sup>כ</sup> שולחן ערוך ורמ"א סימן תרע"ו סעיף ב'

<sup>כא</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ו סעיף ב'

<sup>כב</sup> ככל הברכות

<sup>כג</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ו סעיף ה'

<sup>כד</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ו סעיף ד' ושם הזכיר רק הנרות הללו

<sup>כה</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ב סעיף ב' ומשנה ברורה סעיף קטן ה'

<sup>כו</sup> משמעות של אגרות משה אורח חיים חלק ד' סימן ק"א אות ו'

<sup>כז</sup> אגרות משה אורח חיים חלק ד' סימן ק"א אות ו'

<sup>כח</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ג סעיף קטן כ"ז

<sup>כט</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ב סעיף ב' ומשנה ברורה סעיף קטן ז'

<sup>ל</sup> שולחן ערוך ורמ"א סימן תרע"ב סעיף ב'

<sup>לא</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י"א

ועיין בשער הציון שם אות י"ז

<sup>לב</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ב סעיף א'

ובמשנה ברורה סעיף קטן ג' כתב שהיא שעה ורביע קודם צאת הכוכבים

אבל לגבי ערב שבת כתב ר' שמעון איידער (דף 21 הערה י"ג) ששמע מר' משה זצ"ל שהיא פלג המנחה הקודמת

<sup>לג</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י'

<sup>לד</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י'

<sup>לה</sup> Halachos of Chanukah III A 10 (כמו שמצינו בבדיקת חמץ)

<sup>לו</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י'

<sup>לז</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ה סעיף ג'

<sup>לח</sup> משנה ברורה סימן רס"ט סעיף קטן א'

<sup>לט</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ז סעיף ב' ורמ"א סימן תרע"ה סעיף ג'

<sup>מ</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ז סעיף קטן א'

<sup>מא</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ז סעיף א' ומשנה ברורה סעיף קטן א'

<sup>מב</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תר"א סעיף ב'

<sup>מג</sup> רמ"א סימן תר"א סעיף ב'

<sup>מד</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"א סעיף קטן ט'

<sup>מה</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י"ב

<sup>מו</sup> משום אשתו כגופו

<sup>מז</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 2

<sup>מח</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ז סעיף קטן ט"ז

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- <sup>מט</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 8  
<sup>י</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 5  
<sup>נא</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י"א  
<sup>בב</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 2  
<sup>גג</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 8  
<sup>דד</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן י"א  
ועיין בשער הציון שם אות י"ז  
<sup>הה</sup> רמ"א סימן תרע"ד סעיף א'  
<sup>וו</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ג סעיף א'  
ועיין במשנה ברורה סימן תרע"ב סעיף קטן ח'  
<sup>זז</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ג סעיף א'  
<sup>חח</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תר"ע סעיף א' ומשנה ברורה סעיף קטן ג'  
<sup>טט</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ז סעיף ד'  
<sup>י</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ז סעיף קטן י"ט  
<sup>יא</sup> ביאור הלכה סימן תרע"ז דברי המתחיל "הצריך"  
<sup>יב</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרע"ט סעיף א'  
<sup>יג</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרע"ט סעיף קטן ב'  
והחשבון לזמנים היא מ אגרות משה אורח חיים חלק ד' סימן ק"א אות ו'  
<sup>יד</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן רע"ט סעיף א'  
<sup>יה</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן ש"ט סעיף ד'  
<sup>יו</sup> משנה ברורה סימן תרפ"א סעיף קטן ג'  
<sup>יז</sup> בערוך השולחן תרפ"א ב' כתב שכן מנהגינו  
<sup>יח</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרפ"ב סעיף א'  
<sup>יט</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרפ"ב סעיף א'  
<sup>י</sup> רמ"א סימן תרפ"ב סעיף א'  
<sup>יא</sup> שולחן ערוך סימן תרפ"ג סעיף א'  
<sup>יב</sup> שולחן ערוך ורמ"א סימן תרע"א סעיף ד'  
<sup>יג</sup> רמ"א סימן תרפ"ג סעיף א'