Guide to the laws and customs of

Chanukah

Congregation Beth Abraham-Jacob

5784/2023

CHANUKAH

Sundown, Thursday, December 7 – Sundown, Friday, December 15

What follows is a basic summary of the most common laws. For any further questions, please contact Rabbi Kean.

The name "Chanukah" translates as "dedication." The Mishkan - Tabernacle - was originally completed on the 25th of Kislev. Additionally, following the war between the Maccabees and Seleucid Empire (one of the states that succeeded Alexander the Great), the Jewish nation rededicated the Beit Hamikdash – the Temple - by building a new altar and relighting the Menorah.

The Talmud (Shabbat 22B) states that the purpose of the Menorah in the Mishkan was: עדות היא לבאי עולם שהשכינה שורה בישראל*—It is a testimony to all of creation that the Divine Presence rests upon Israel. By lighting candles for Chanukah, we recall the splendor and miracles of the Menorah which stood in the Temple. We attest that though our Temple lays in ruin, the Divine Presence still rests upon Israel.*

I. LIGHTING THE CHANUKAH CANDLES (also called a *"menorah" or* a *"chanukiah")*

A. Why do we light Chanukah candles?

- To remember the miracles that occurred during the rededication of the second Temple such as the oil lasting for 8 days and winning the war against the Greek-Seleucids.
- One of the core themes of Chanukah is *pirsumei nisa* – publicizing the miracles of Chanukah – which is accomplished by lighting the candles.
- Because the goal of lighting Chanukah candles is *pirsumei nisa,* the Chanukah candles must be lit in such a way that other people will see them.

B. What material should I light with?

- Most people light with olive oil or wax candles, both of which are acceptable.
- Some prefer to use olive oil because the Chanukah miracle took place with olive oil.
- Whichever material is used, it should be enough to last at least half an hour.
- On Friday night, there must be enough oil or a big enough candle so that the Chanukah candles last half hour after nightfall.

C. Where should I place my Chanukah candles?

- The Chanukah candles should be placed by a window or in a place where it can be seen by people passing by.
- If this poses a fire hazard *or* there is no window where the Chanukah candles will be visible from outside, the Chanukah candles may be placed in any area in the house where it will be seen by those in the home.

D. How many candles should I light?

- The minimum is to light one candle per person per household. However, it has become widespread custom to follow the highest standard of lighting candles known as *Mehadrin Min Ha-Mehadrin* – the most beautiful way. Accordingly, we light one candle on the first night and add one more candle each night such that on the 8th night we light eight candles.
- In addition to these candles, there should be another candle lit each night, known as the *shamash*.

E. How do I arrange and light the candles?

- We place the candles in the Menorah from right to left.
- We then light the candles from left to right (the newest candle being lit first).
- The candles should be in a straight row with separation between each one.
- They should ***not*** be arranged in a circle.
- The candles should all rest at the same height while the *Shamash* – the extra lighting candle - should be higher or lower than all the other candles.

F. Who lights the Menorah?

- ***Ashkenazim*:** Each member of the household lights their own Menorah. While a wife may be included in her husband's lighting, some have the custom for the wife to light her own Menorah.
- ***Sefardim*:** The head of the household lights one Menorah on behalf of the entire family.

G. When do I light the Menorah?

- The ideal time to light is within 30 – 40 minutes after sunset.
- If you did not light at this time, you can still light the rest of the night.
- If some members of one's family are not home at the ideal time to light, one may delay lighting the Menorah until all family members are able to be home.
- On **Shabbat Chanukah:**
  (a) Friday Night – the practice is to light Chanukah candles **before** lighting Shabbat candles (Chanukah candles may not be lit after Shabbat begins).
    (i) The candles must be large enough or have enough oil to last half an hour after nightfall.
  (b) Saturday Night – There are differing opinions whether to light Chanukah candles before or after *Havdalah*. Many make *Havdalah* first and then light the Chanukah candles.

H. The blessing recited for lighting the Menorah.

- The following three blessings are recited upon lighting the Chanukah candles on the first night. The final blessing ("*she-hechiyanu*") is omitted after the first night.

BARUCH ATAH A-DONAI E–LOHEINU MELECH HA'OLAM ASHER KID'SHANU B'MITZVOTAV V'TZIVANU LEHADLIK NER SHEL CHANUKAH.

BARUCH ATAH A–DONAI E–LOHEINU MELECH HA'OLAM SHE'ASAH NISIM LA'AVOTEINU BAYAMIM HAHEIM BAZMAN HAZEH.

FIRST NIGHT ONLY: **(*BARUCH ATAH A–DONAI E–LOHEINU MELECH HA'OLAM SHE'HECHIYANU V'HIGIYANU V'KIYIMANU LA'ZMAN HAZEH.)***

I. Must I relight my candles if they blow out?

- It is customary to relight them if they blow out within the first half hour. After that time has passed, you do not need to relight the candle.

J. Can I use the Chanukah candles for their light or other purposes?

- The Chanukah candles are holy and designated for the purpose of *pirsumei nisa* – publicizing the miracle. As such, one should not use the light from the Chanukah

candles to do work, such as reading, relighting the Chanukah candles (or any other fire), or other activities.
- One purpose of the *Shamash* is that this light NOT holy and MAY be used for other purposes (i.e. lighting other flames, reading, etc.).

K. What if I am traveling and can't light candles?
- If it is an option, another family member should light on your behalf at home with all the blessings (however, if you will return later that night, you can light then; see G above).
- It is best to avoid a situation in which the entire household is traveling and unable to light candles on Chanukah.
- One should NOT light candles on an airplane or in another dangerous situation.
- If it is an option, one can turn on an electric light (such as a flashlight) for at least half an hour, but one does not recite any of the blessings on this.

L. If I am a guest at someone's house, do I still light Chanukah candles?
- ***Ashkenazim*:** You should light your own Chanukah candles with your own blessings.
- ***Sefardim*:** You should give your host a *prutah* (a few cents) to join with his/her lighting and blessings.
- If you are away for a meal, but sleeping at home, you should light in your own house.

II. ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

A. Al Ha-Nisim
- The prayer of *Al Ha-Nisim – for the miracles* – is added to the *Amidah* and *Birkat Ha'Mazon – blessing after meals.*
    i. If you forgot to recite Al Ha-Nisim, you do not repeat the *Amidah* nor *Birkat Ha-Mazon.*

B. Hallel and Torah Reading
- Full Hallel is recited with a blessing all eight days of Chanukah.
- We read the Torah every day of Channukah.

III. FESTIVE FOOD

A. Should I eat a festive meal every day like on Holidays and Shabbos?
- It is customary to have festive meals on Chanukah and to sing songs of praise during the meals, though it is not obligatory.

B. Which customary foods are eaten on Chanukah?
- Some have the custom to eat dairy foods in commemoration of the miracle that happened with Yehudit who tricked and killed the head Greek commander by feeding him cheese and wine to make him fall asleep so that she could assassinate him.
- Many have the custom to eat foods fried in oil, such as latkes and donuts, because of the miracle of the oil which lasted for eight days.

May we soon merit to kindle the light of the Menorah once again in the rebuilt Beit HaMikdash. Wishing you a happy and meaningful Chanukah!
– Rabbi Ben & Miriam Kean