



Halachah Guide: Chanukah

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner – rabbi@ecdp.info, 516-456-1721

Materials for lighting

Fuel

The goal of our Chanukah candles is to commemorate the miracle with a clear, steady flame that burns for the appropriate amount of time (defined below). Any oil or wax fuel that can accomplish this goal is acceptable. Some prefer olive oil, because the original miracle involved olive oil, and because this mirrors the lighting of the menorah in the Beit HaMikdash.

One should avoid small candles which burn out quickly, and especially on the later nights of Chanukah, when the combined heat from many candles melts them faster.

Style

We light the candles in a straight line, all at the same height, enabling viewers to easily tell how many lights there are. Most halachic authorities rule that the candles need not be in a *chanukiah*, so one who is travelling and does not have access to a *chanukiah* may light separate tea lights, if need be.

When multiple people light in a home, the *chanukiot* should be placed such that onlookers will be able to differentiate between them and identify the number of candles clearly.

Shamash

We do not use the light of the Chanukah candles, to clearly identify the candles as mitzvah candles and to echo the menorah of the Beit HaMikdash which was not for our personal use. Therefore, we provide another light source by kindling an extra “*shamash*” candle. We also use that *shamash* to light the Chanukah candles. We place the *shamash* in a way that visibly distinguishes it from the Chanukah candles.

Candle Lighting

The earliest time to light

As with mitzvot in general, we light the Chanukah candles as early as we can, but there are different opinions regarding that earliest time. Opinions range from sunset to 20 minutes after sunset to *tzeit hakochavim* (when the stars emerge, approximately 5:10 PM on Chanukah this year). People should follow their family custom, while ensuring that the candles remain lit until at least half an hour after *tzeit hakochavim*, approximately 5:40 PM this year.

One who cannot light at the earliest time should appoint someone to remind them to light.

If you will not be home in the appropriate timeframe, and there is no one who can light in your home, you may light as early as *plag haminchah*, which is 3:30 PM on Chanukah this year. The candles must still burn until half an hour after *tzeit hakochavim*.

The latest time to light

Ideally, one should light the candles while there is traffic outside to view them. At least, there should be someone inside the house to view them. One who will not be home to light within that timeframe should ask someone else to light and have them in mind. In that case, the person who is not lighting should try to see a lit *chanukiah* and recite the berachah of “*she’asah nisim*.” If it is the first night, that person should recite “*shehechyanu*” as well.

Lighting on Friday

Ideally, one should daven minchah before lighting Chanukah candles on Friday; ECDP will have a 1 PM minchah at shul. One should then light the Chanukah candles before Shabbat candles, using extra-large candles or sufficient oil to ensure that the Chanukah candles will last until 30 minutes after the stars emerge, or approximately 5:40 PM this year.

Time is often short when lighting on Friday afternoon; one may wait to sing Maoz Tzur at the Shabbat table.

Lighting after Shabbat

Some people light the *chanukiah* after Havdalah, while others light it before. Either custom is fine, but one must either daven maariv or recite *Baruch Hamavdil bein kodesh l'kodesh*, "Blessed be the One who distinguishes between different sanctities," before setting up the Chanukah candles.

Placement

Since we accomplish the *mitzvah* immediately upon lighting, we must light with the *chanukiah* in the proper place and with sufficient fuel. We set up the candles in a space where the household will see them. Ideally, this should also be on a window sill facing the street, if possible.

One who is not lighting by a window should place the *chanukiah* between one and three feet from the floor, to demonstrate that this is not a lamp we are using for its light.

As noted above: When multiple people light in a home, the *chanukiot* should be placed such that onlookers will be able to differentiate between them and identify the number of candles clearly.

Procedure

We fill the *chanukiah* with oil or candles, starting from the right-hand side of the person facing the *chanukiah*. When lighting, we light the **newest** candle first, and then proceed to the right. After lighting the *shamash*, we recite all of the blessings before lighting any candles. (On the first night: "*lehadlik ner (shel) Chanukah*," "*she'asah nisim la'avoteinu*," and "*shehechyanu*". On the remaining nights, just the first two *berachot*.)

After we light the first candle, we begin to say "*HaNeirot Halalu*" while lighting the other candles. After all of the candles are lit, we sing "*Ma'oz Tzur*."

Some authorities believe that lights should be turned off in the room where the candles are burning, so that we appreciate the light of the candles.

If the candles go out before the minimum time has elapsed (see above), we re-light them with the *shamash*, without a *berachah*.

The person who lights the menorah in shul on the first night of Chanukah still recites *shehechyanu* when lighting at home, if the lighting at home is for people who have not yet lit Chanukah candles.

Lighting and leaving

From the perspective of fire safety: Having open flames in one's home, and particularly near windows with shades or curtains, is dangerous. One who will need to leave should take special precautions, perhaps by lighting anchored tea lights. If there is no way to safeguard the *chanukiah*, one should remain until the minimum time has elapsed and then extinguish the candles.

From the perspective of the mitzvah: Leaving the *chanukiah* while it is lit is not ideal; indeed, we emphasize lighting in rooms where we live and function. We wish to see the light and thereby commemorate the miracle we are publicizing, and to rejoice in the mitzvah. Therefore, one ought to remain in the room with the *chanukiah* for at least the minimum time, unless one is called away to perform a mitzvah.

One may extinguish the *chanukiah* that is lit in shul between minchah and maariv, if everyone is leaving the shul.

Special circumstances

A guest in someone else's home

One who is home for the first part of the evening, and then goes elsewhere to sleep, should light at home.

One who is in someone else's home for the entire night should light their own *chanukiah*. [Ideally, this should happen before anyone remaining at home lights their *chanukiah*.] If lighting is not possible, the guest should purchase a share in the fuel used by the host.

Students who are home in the first part of the night, but will return to their dormitory to sleep, may light in either location.

Hotel or Dormitory

One who lives in a building where fire safety concerns prohibit lighting in their own room should light in the dining room or lobby.

Chanukah Parties

Lighting at a Chanukah party outside one's home does not fulfill the mitzvah; one should light at home.

Airplane

One who must travel by airplane throughout the time for lighting should designate someone to light on their behalf in their home, at the proper time to light in the home's time zone. In addition, if possible, the traveler should turn on a battery-powered, incandescent bulb for 30 minutes at night on the airplane, without reciting a berachah.

Aveilut

An *onein* [one whose immediate relative has passed away, and has not yet been buried] does not light Chanukah candles. However, halachic authorities are concerned that people passing the *onein's* home may not know about the death, and might think that he is flouting the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles. Further, lighting Chanukah candles publicizes the miracles of Chanukah, which is valuable even without a halachic obligation. Therefore, an *onein* should make sure that someone else lights in the home. [If that person is not living in the house, they do not recite a berachah.] If no one else can light, then the *onein* should light, albeit without a *berachah*.

An *avel* sitting *shivah* lights Chanukah candles and recites all of the *berachot*, including Shehechyanu on the first night. However, an *avel* should not light the shul *chanukiah* on the first night of Chanukah.

It is generally accepted that one does not visit a cemetery during Chanukah, even for a *yahrtzeit*.

Holiday Presents for Non-Jews

We encourage the development of positive relations between Jews and their neighbors, for the sake of creating a healthy society. However, we are not allowed to strengthen our neighbors' loyalty to that which we consider idolatrous.

Because of these competing interests, a Jew may not send a non-Jew a gift on his holiday, but one may give end-of-year tips and bonuses before the holiday.

Thank you to Rabbi Efreim Schwalb for his Halachagrams, which informed this Guide.