

The Laws and Customs of Chanukah

A Brief Overview

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*Chanukah commemorates the spiritual and military victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks and Hellenized Jews. The eight night celebration begins on the eve of the 25th of Kislev, corresponding (this year) to **Thursday night, December 10, 2020 through December 18, 2020**. The following is a list of important laws to help fulfill the beautiful mitzvot of Chanukah in the optimal manner.*

Lighting the Menorah

1. Ideally, every member of the household, including younger children capable of understanding the concept of Chanukah, should light his or her own menorah. Married women may fulfill their obligation to light through their husbands, but may also light the menorah individually.
2. Those sleeping at the home of another over Chanukah should furnish their own Menorah and candles/oil. In the event that they cannot do so, they may join in the kindling done by the household members and should contribute a small amount of money to become a partner in the lighting.
3. Often, people are invited out for a Chanukah party, wedding or similar event into the evening hours. If they plan on returning home later in the evening, they should light at home even if the hour is late. A visitor away from home should light in the place where he is sleeping, even if all his or her meals are eaten elsewhere and even if one will arrive home late.
4. The menorah should be lit at *Tzeit HaKochavim* (nightfall) and should continue burning for 30 minutes. *Tzeit HaKochavim* is approximately 42 minutes following sunset- for the week of Chanukah in New York City, at about 5:15 P.M. Ideally, one should not become involved in any activity within a reasonable amount of time before sunset, including eating. It is preferable to daven Maariv before this time as well.
5. If one has to leave the house, it is permitted to extinguish the candles after they have burnt for half an hour after *tzeit hakochavim*. Upon returning, there is no need to rekindle the lights though it certainly is permitted to do so. If the flames die out before the proper amount of time has elapsed, they should be rekindled without any additional blessing.
6. In the event that one is unable to light at the optimal time, candles may be lit until later, even if one arrives home after everyone has gone to sleep, and there is no need to wake anyone up for candle lighting.
7. *Shalom Bayit* is a paramount value in Halacha, and therefore it is permissible (and even encouraged) to delay lighting Chanukah candles until one's spouse arrives at home even if that will not take place at the halachically optimal time.
8. Traveling during Chanukah can present issues regarding lighting Chanukah candles, depending on when the travel takes place and for how long, to where and whether anyone is still at home. Each situation is unique, so if this applies to you, please contact the JC Clergy and we look forward to discussing it with you further.
9. Do not leave the candles lit if no one will be home.

The Candles and the Blessings

1. All oils and candles are permitted for use in the Menorah; however it is preferable to light with olive oil, ideally with wicks made of cotton or linen. New wicks are not needed every night. If one is using store-bought olive oil, one should declare explicitly that it is not being used solely for Chanukah candles. Oil left over in the receptacles after the Menorah has been lit for the requisite amount of time may be thrown out, or used the next night.
2. The candle holders or oil receptacles should be positioned in one level and on a straight line. The lights are placed in the menorah from right to left before kindling and are lit from left to right.
3. Menorot may be kindled anywhere inside one's home. Optimally, they should face outside, or should be in one's doorway (inside or outside) opposite the mezuzah. Care should be taken in the placement of the Menorah, as it is forbidden to move it once it is lit. Safety should also be a paramount concern when it comes to candle lighting, so the menorah should not be placed on or near anything flammable, precarious or otherwise dangerous.
4. On the first night, we recite three blessings, while on all other nights we only recite two, not the *shehecheyanu*. If it is one's first time lighting, even if it is not the first night, one should recite the *sheheceyanu*.

Erev Shabbat

1. On Erev Shabbat, there should be sufficient oil or candle-length, enough that the menorah can burn 30 minutes after nightfall. Because Shabbat is accepted when Shabbat candles are lit, one must light the Menorah before the Shabbat candles.
2. On Motzai Shabbat in shul, the Menorah is lit followed by Havdalah. In one's home, Havdalah is recited first, followed by lighting the Chanukah candles.

Prayers

1. The prayer of על הנסים, *Al Hanissim* is inserted in both the Shemoneh Esrai and Birkat Hamazon; in the event that it is omitted, one need not repeat either prayer.



**HAVE A HAPPY
CHANUKAH!**