

Laws of Hanukah

A Compendium

By: Rabbi David Kadoch



1 - What's permitted and prohibited on the days of Hanukah

1. During the 8 days of Hanukah, one is prohibited to eulogize and fast but doing work (*melacha*) is permitted.
2. The women have a custom not to do work during the time that the candles are burning
 - a. To clarify: This means the minimum amount of time that the candles need to be burning for. I.e. The first 30 minutes
 - b. To clarify: This is referring to work which would be prohibited on Hol HaMoed, such as: sewing or knitting. Work that would be permitted on Hol HaMoed, such as: cooking, baking and organizing the home is allowed.
3. The meals eaten on Hanukah are optional, unlike Purim which is obligatory. Nevertheless, it's a good custom to partake in special meals during Hanukah especially if one will sing *zemirot* and share Divre Torah.
4. It's a good custom to eat dairy on Hanukah since Yehudit, the daughter of Yohanan the Kohen Gadol, fed the army general dairy to tire him out and then she proceeded to cut off his head. In honour of this miracle, many eat dairy foods. The letters in Hebrew that means dairy (ח.ל.ב) stand for the 3 mitzvot that the Greeks wished to annul from Jewish people - חודש, שבת, מילה - Rosh Hodesh, Shabbat and Berit Milah.
5. We do eulogize a Hacham that passes away on Hanukah.
6. One does not fast on Hanukah if the *nahala* of his parents falls out on Hanukah.

2 - The Order of Lighting and the Place of Lighting

1. One should make sure to have oil to light at least one hanukah candle per night even if it means he should sell his clothing to buy oil.
2. On the first night, one lights one candle and adds a candle for each night. On the 8th night, one should light 8 candles.
3. One should light one *hanukiya* per household even if the members of the household are many.
4. A candle that has 2 wicks protruding in different directions counts as 2 candles.
5. If the *shamash* used to light the *hanukiya* is extinguished, he cannot relight it using the flame of the *hanukiya*. Rather it must be relit using an external flame, match or lighter.
6. The *hanukiya* should be placed by the entrance of one's home leading to the outside where the public travel.

7. If one lives on an upper floor, he should light by a window facing the public.
 - a. To clarify: If the window to his apartment is over 20 *Amot*, (10 metres approx) from the ground, he should not light by the window, rather by the doorway to his apartment.
8. One should ensure there's one light lit for mundane use. We call this *the shamash*.
9. The best place to light the *hanukiya* is between 3 and ten *tefahim* (24 and 80 cms) from the ground.
10. If one lights above 10 *tefahim* (80 cms) it's good. However, above 20 *Amot* (10 metres), one does not fulfill the mitzva.
11. If one lit it in a place that was not allowed and then moved the *hanukiya* to a place that was good, one must extinguish the candle and relight, since the place of his lighting wasn't good to begin with.
12. One should place the *hanukiya* on the left side of the door, opposite the doorpost of that has the *mezuzah* affixed to it.
 - a. To clarify: If there is no *mezuzah* on that door, then the *hanukiya* should be placed on the right side.
13. In synagogue, the *hanukiya* is lit on southern wall.
14. Because of the importance of publicizing the miracle, the congregation should light and bless at synagogue as well. Nevertheless, one doesn't fulfill his obligation with the lighting at synagogue and must return home to bless at home.
15. At synagogue, the *hanukiya* is lit between *Mincha* and *Arvit*, even if it is prior to nightfall (3 stars)
 - a. The time for the night reading begins at nightfall (3 stars) and lasts all night until dawn.
 - b. The time for the day reading begins at sunrise and ends at sunset.
16. A mourner within 30 days for a relative or 12 months for a parent should not light the candles of the *hanukiya* in synagogue since that brings him to extra happiness when *she'heheyanu* is recited as a group. On the rest of the nights, the mourner can light in synagogue.
17. One who lives in a residence that has two doors leading to the outside (public) should light two *hanukiyot*.
 - a. To clarify: Nowadays, where most people light inside the home, one *hanukiya* is suffice.
18. One traveling on a train or a boat may light while traveling. One doesn't to be in a fixed residence to light the *hanukiya*.

3 - Time of Lighting

1. One may not light the *hanukiya* before the sun sets. One needs to wait until nightfall (3 stars).
2. If one will be busy and can't light at nightfall, he may light after *Pelag HaMincha* on condition that there's enough oil for the candle to last 30 minutes after nightfall.
3. If one cannot light at nightfall, he can still light as long as there are people walking in the streets that can see the lights.
 - a. To clarify: This is the best option. If one can't light until later at night, it is still acceptable as one may light the *hanukiya* all night until dawn.
4. Once the lights have been lit for 30 minutes, they can be extinguished or used for personal use.
5. If one forgot to light the *hanukiya* at night, he cannot make it up the next day or the next night.
6. Prior to lighting, one cannot begin a meal or any type of work, even learning Torah.

- a. To clarify: One who is already in the middle of a project or a meal, doesn't have to pause what he's doing.
7. The prevalent custom is to wait for both heads of the household (mother and father) to be present at the time of lighting.

4 - Types of oils and wicks

1. All oils and wicks are kosher to light the *hanukiya*.
2. The best oil to use is olive oil.
3. If olive oil isn't available then the next best thing is to use a different oil that produces a clean flame or a wax candle.
4. The custom of the Sepharadim is to have a *shamash* separate from the 8 candles that can be used for mundane use: reading, inspecting etc. The custom of the Ashkenazim is to use the *shamash* as the candle to light the other candles.
5. The lighting is what constitutes the mitzva. Which means that if one extinguished the candles before 30 minutes have passed, he still fulfilled the mitzva.
6. Even if the candles were extinguished on Friday before the onset of Shabbat, he still fulfilled the mitzva as long as there was enough oil originally to have lasted 30 minutes past nightfall.
7. If one lit a *hanukiya* that didn't have enough oil to begin with and then added oil later, he doesn't fulfil the mitzva and must light again.
8. According to most halachic authorities, one does not fulfil the mitzva lighting with an electric *hanukiya* since it doesn't have status of a candle.
 - a. To clarify: In certain circumstances, one can fulfil the mitzva of Shabbat candles with an electric light because the purpose of Shabbat candles is to provide light. However, since the mitzva of Hanuka is to commemorate the miracle which was done with candles, electricity can't be used.
 - b. If one has no other option, he may light an electric *hanukiya* but not recite a blessing since, in the end, he is publicizing the miracle.
9. One does not fulfil the mitzva lighting candles fueled by gas.

5 - The Blessings

1. On the first night 3 blessings are recited: *Lehadlik ner hanukah, she'asa nisim, she'heheyanu*.
2. If one omitted *she'heheyanu* on the first night, he says it on the second night.
3. On all other nights, *she'heheyanu* is omitted and only the first two blessings are recited.
4. All blessings must be recited before actually kindling the candles.
5. If one didn't light and has no intent to light that night, and he comes across someone else's *hanukiya*, he should bless *she'asa nisim* and if it's the first night, *she'heheyanu* as well.
6. After the first candle is lit, he may begin reciting *hanerot halalu*.
7. After *Hanerot Halalu* is recited, one proceeds to chant *Mizmor Shir Hanukat HaBayit LeDavid*
8. When facing the *hanukiya*, on the first night, one should light the candle to his right.

9. On the second night, he lights the “new candle” first, i.e. adjacent to the one he lit on night #1. Then he lights the candle to the right of it.
 - a. To clarify: The rule of thumb is that the newest candle of the night always gets lit first, moving from left to right.
10. Women are obligated in the lighting of the *hanukiya* even though this is a time-bound mitzva. The reason is because they were part of the miracle of Hanukah
11. A guest in one’s home should pay some coins to the owner of the house to purchase a bit of the oil that will be used for the *hanukiya*. This way he joins the owner of the house in the mitzva.
12. A student studying abroad is included with his parents’ lighting and is exempt from lighting his own *hanukiya*.
13. One who is travelling and is at a hotel may rely on his wife to light at home for him.
14. Any leftover oil and wicks after the 8th night should be burned and shouldn’t be used for personal purposes.

6 - Shabbat and Hanukah

1. If a person only has money to purchase either shabbat candles or hanukah candles, he should purchase shabbat candles because of *shalom bayit* (i.e. there should be light in the house during the shabbat meals).
2. However, if it’s between hanukah candles and wine for kiddush, he should purchase hanukah candles.
3. On Friday, it is preferable to pray *Mincha* prior to the lighting of the *hanukiya*.
4. On Friday, one lights the hanukah candles before the shabbat candles.
5. It is important that there is enough oil for the light to last at least 30 minutes after nightfall on Shabbat. This is especially important on Friday since the Hanukah candles are lit before the normal time.
6. On *Motsae Shabbat*, we do not recite *Bore MeOre HaEsh* on the hanukah candles.
7. In synagogue, hanukah candles are lit first followed by *Havdala*.
8. At home, *havdala* is recited first followed by the *hanukiya* since the members of the family haven’t heard *havdala* yet.

7 - Al HaNisim

1. *Al HaNisim* is inserted in *Birkat HaMazon & Amida* during the 8 days of Hanukah.
2. If one forgot to recite it and said “*Baruch Ata Hashem*” at the end of the blessing, he doesn’t go back.
3. *Al HaNisim* is recited during *Musaf* of Shabbat even though there was no *Musaf* sacrifice on Hanukah.
4. *Hallel* is recited in its entirety during the 8 days of Hanukah.
5. There is no *tahanunim* or *tziduk hadin* during the 8 days of Hanukah.
6. The Torah reading portions of Hanukah are found in *Parashat Naso* and end at the beginning of *Parashat Beha’alotcha* on the 8th day.

7. On Rosh Hodesh, a second sefer torah is taken out to read from Rosh Hodesh. The 4th Aliya is parasha of Hanuka
8. If Rosh Hodesh falls on Shabbat, then the 6th Aliya finishes the Parashat HaShavua, the 7th Aliya reads the Parasha of Rosh Hodesh and the Maftir reads the Parasha of Hanukah.
 - a. The Haftara read is that of Hanukah adding the first and last pesukim of Rosh Hodesh (and Mahar Hodesh if applicable).

8 - Moroccan Customs of Hanukah (Based on Darke Abotenou)

1. Many Moroccan Jews had the custom to recite "*LeHadlik Ner SHEL Hanukah*" (adding the word SHEL). One should keep the custom of his forefathers as both are acceptable.
2. The verse "*Mizmor Shir Hanukat HaBayit LeDavid*" is added during Pesuke DeZimra prior to *Hashem Melech*.
3. The correct reading of Al HaNisim is *AL HaNisim, Bime MaTATya & HashmoNAI*.
4. *Bame Madlikin* is omitted on Friday night of Hanukah.
5. Nine verses pertaining to "light" are inserted during *Petihat HaHechal* during Hanukah. See any Moroccan siddur for the pesukim.