



Hilchot Chanukah

The laws of Chanukah are numerous. Below are the main laws in brief form.

General Halachot of Chanukah

- Chanukah begins on the 25th day of Kislev and continues for eight consecutive days. This year the first light should be kindled this Wednesday night, December 25th, in the evening.
- Fasting and eulogies (except for a great Torah scholar) are prohibited during Chanukah.
- (v')Al HaNissim is added in Bircas Hamazon immediately before v'Al Hakol and in Shemoneh Esrei immediately before v'Al Kulam.
- If omitted, Shemoneh Esrei or Bircas Hamazon need not be repeated.

Who Must Light

- The basic obligation is that each household kindle at least one light every night of Chanukah.
- Many have the practice that every male in the household kindles his own lights.
- There are women who have the custom to kindle their own lights.
- Women who have the custom not to kindle their own lights when adult males are present should be present when male members of the household kindle the lights and should listen when the blessings are recited.
- Where no adult males are in the household the woman of the house must kindle the lights.
- Boys under the age of Bar Mitzvah who understand the significance of Chanukah should kindle the lights but may not discharge the obligation of others.

When to Light

- On nights other than Friday night, the lights should ideally be kindled upon nightfall (Tzeis Hakokhovim).
- In our time the kindling is generally performed indoors and therefore may be done after this time. The lights should burn for at least a half-hour beyond nightfall.
- Care should be taken to ensure that appropriately sized candles or adequate oil is used to assure they will burn for the required length of time.
- On Friday, the Chanukah lights should be kindled before the Shabbos candles.

- To ensure that the Chanukah candles burn for a half-hour beyond nightfall on Friday night, the lights should burn for at least an hour and a half from the time they were kindled.
- There are conflicting customs as to which takes precedence in the home Saturday night, Havdalah or the kindling of the Chanukah lights.
- Both are acceptable, though the more prevalent practice is to recite Havdalah first.
- Once the time for kindling lights has arrived, one should not engage in any other activities such as eating, working, or studying Torah.
- Those that are delayed in lighting the Menorah and want to eat a meal, should appoint a shomer, who already lit, to remind them to light. If there's no shomer, an alarm should be set.
- Snacking is allowed even without a shomer.

Where to Light

- In Talmudic times the lights were placed at or near the outer part of the doorway facing the street. Nowadays most people, particularly in the Diaspora, light indoors.
- Ideally, the lights should be at least a foot off the ground and below three feet.
- One discharges his/her duty if these directions are not followed.
- The essence of the obligation is the act of kindling the lights, not their placement. Care should therefore be taken to position the menorah in the place where the lights will remain alight.
- One may not kindle the lights in one place and then move them to another location.
- One must light the candles at home.
- Therefore, one who witnessed the kindling of lights in shul, or at a Chanukah party or other gathering where candles are lit, does not thereby dispense his or her obligation.
- For issues of traveling and lighting, please consult a halakhic authority.

What to Light

- Any fuel may be used for the lights and all materials are acceptable for the wicks.
- Ideally, one should kindle olive oil.
- Electric or gas lights may not be used.
- Minimally, a light should be kindled every night.
- Ideally, one should kindle a light the first night and add an additional light every subsequent night (two lights on the second night, three on the third and so on), until the eighth night when eight lights are kindled.

How to Light

- The general custom is to place the first light on the extreme right of the menorah. Each subsequent night a new light is added to the immediate left of the first light. The new light is kindled first.
- Before kindling the lights the appropriate blessings should be recited.
- On the first night, three blessings are recited (“L’hadlik Ner”, “Sh’asa Nissim” and “Shehechiyanu”).
- On all subsequent nights, two blessings are recited (“L’hadlik Ner” and “Sh’asa Nissim”).
- After kindling the first light Haneros Halolu is recited.
- If the lights were inadvertently extinguished, even within the first half-hour, they need not be rekindled. It is preferable, however, to rekindle the extinguished lights. No blessings are recited when rekindling the lights.

Chanukah Safety

In honor of Chanukah, the Israel Fire and Rescue Authority has published a number of safety guidelines. Follow these tips and you can prevent fires and keep your family safe.

1. Most arts and crafts menorahs made by children are not suitable for lighting and may burn down when used.
2. Place the menorah on a sturdy surface made of non-flammable material such as marble, glass, or metal.
3. Place the Chanukah candles ONLY inside the menorah or candlesticks made of inflammable material.
4. Do not place the menorah near or under any flammable material such as curtains or books.
5. Do not walk around while holding a lit candle
6. Do not place the menorah in a location where it can be knocked over - either by a passing person or the wind, or where something can fall on it.
7. Keep matches and lit objects away from children.
8. Make sure your pet cannot reach the menorah.
9. Never leave a lit menorah unattended

We wish each and every one of you a Happy Chanukah! It is our fervent hope that despite the challenging times, we nevertheless find the ability to celebrate the holiday and perform its mitzvos with joy. May we merit together the day when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt and the light of its menorah shines brilliantly for all humanity.

We thank Rabbi Avraham Shmidman for preparing the above halachot for publication.