



PO Box 1076 Jerusalem 91009 * Tel. 972-2-628-4101

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

17 Kislev 5768

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Friedfertig

RavAviner-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

archived at www.ateret.org.il/new/home.php

Summary of the Laws of Chanukah

1. Time of Kindling of the Lights

There are those who light at sunset, and others who light at the appearance of the stars (definite nightfall).

One who out of necessity must light earlier, the earliest time is an hour and a quarter halachic hours (a halachic hour is one-twelfth of daytime or nighttime) before the sunset or the appearance of the stars. Each should act according to the position he follows.

One who lights later should light with a blessing as long as the members of his household are still awake.

The lights must be lit for a half an hour after the sunset or the appearance of the stars, each according to the position he follows.

It is preferable to wait until the members of one's family gather together than to light on time.

*Note: I asked Rav Aviner which position he follows, and he answered that he lights after the appearance of the stars.

2. Before Kindling the Lights

One should not engage in any activity before lighting, lest one forget to light and the time for lighting passes.

3. Oils and Wicks

The preferred mitzvah is olive oil and wicks of cotton-wool. It is permissible to light with a kerosene lantern. Any kosher oil or candles are permissible.

Question: Is it permissible to light using an electric menorah?

Answer: Even though there are authorities who permit kindling the lights of Shabbat and to perform havdalah with electricity, they agree that one may not kindle the Chanukah lights with electricity, for various reasons:

- A) Electricity is not called a "light" from the perspective of its structure and the form of how it works.
- B) It is similar to a thin piece of wood which one may not use to fulfill his obligation, since it does not have any oily substance.
- C) It did not exist in the period of our talmudic Sages and was not included in their decree.
- D) It is required to have all of the measure of oil (a half an hour worth) placed before us which is not the case with electricity. Furthermore, there is the possibility of an electricity stoppage.

4. It is Forbidden to Use its Light

It is therefore proper that there be a light in the room where the Chanukah lights are located, in addition to the shamash (which is used to light each of the lights and in case of accidental usage, we rely on the fact that one benefited from this light). It is permissible, however, to pass through their light and one is not obligated to close his eyes.

5. Prohibition of Work

It is customarily for women not to perform any work (i.e. housework) while the lights are burning, and it is not proper to be lenient with this practice. It is a beautiful custom that the members of the family sit together by the lights.

6. Lighting from One Light to Another

One may not light one Chanukah light from another but rather by the shamash, and all the more so one may not light from a cigarette (for the halachic problems involved with smoking in general see Rav Aviner's response vol. 2 #417).

7. Placement of the Chanukiyah

Question: Is it preferable to light outside or inside?

Answer: The original decree was to light outside in order to publicize the miracle in the public domain, but the Rabbis permitted lighting inside because of the fear of non-Jews. Therefore now that we dwell upright in our Land, it is proper to return the crown to its original pristine state and to set up a box or glass lantern which withstands the wind and rain, and to renew our days as in the former times. If one does not do this, it is best to place the chanukiyah on the windowsill. It is permissible, however, to place it anywhere provided it is higher than 24 centimeters.

8. Arranging the Lights

It is proper that the lights be in a straight line and not in a circle, and that they be of equal height. There needs to be a distance of two centimeters between lights, in order that one does not melt another, and also so that the flames do not look like they are connected.

Question: It is permissible to use a round chanukiyah?

Answer: It is permissible on condition that there is enough distance between each light, at least two centimeters, in order that the flames do not look like they are coming together. One must keep them at a distance so that one light does not melt another.

9. How Many Chanukiyot

One chanukiyah per house is sufficient, but it is better that each person has his own menorah, except for one's wife since she is like his own body (i.e. they are considered as one).

10. Kindling Lights on a Bus

It is possible to kindle lights in a car or bud, provided there is no wind.

11. Order of Lighting

Recite all of the blessings and afterwards kindle the first light. We customarily recite "Ha-nerot Halalu" after lighting the first light while we are kindling the rest of the lights. It is also possible to recite it at the end.

One adds a light (each night) on the left, but lights beginning from the right, as a result, the first light lit is the additional one.

Question: When does one recite the blessing on the lighting – before the lighting or at the time of the lighting?

Answer: Only after one completes reciting all of the blessings does one light, and one may then say: "Ha-nerot Halalu," because at the time that we recite the blessings we should not be involved with anything. This is the same for other blessings such as ritually washing hands, etc..., since at a time when we are speaking to the King and saying to Him "You" [Atah], we certainly should not be doing anything else, even something which is a mitzvah.

12. Exact Wording of the Blessings

The blessing of the lights: We say "Ner shel Chanukah" (Light of Chanukah) and not "Ner SheChanukah" (with these two words as one) and not "Ner Chankah" (without the word "shel - of," but meaning the same thing). A convert also says: "Who performed miracles for our ancestors."

The blessing of "She-Asah Nissim": We say "bizman ha-zeh" (at this time) and not "u-bizman ha-zeh" (and at this time).

The blessing of "Shehechyanu": We say "lizman ha-zeh"(to this time) with a chirik (a vowel with is one dot under the letter), but there are those who say "lazman" with a patach (a vowel which is a straight line under the letter).

Question: The text of the Vilna Gaon is: "Ner Chanukah" (without the word "shel"). Isn't it strange to say such a definitive statement in matters which are all customs?

Answer: This is an established version of Ashkenazim. The proper wording of the blessings is also established by the halachic authorities (see Mishnah Berurah 676:1).

13. Obligation of a Woman

A woman is obligated just as a men and she may recite the blessing for the members of her household in the absence of her husband. A single woman is also obligated.

14. Minor

We must educate him in this mitzvah when he arrives at the age of education (6-7 years old). It is preferable for him to light his own chanukiyah, or even to kindle one light. It is certainly permissible for him to light the shamash.

15. Mourner

He recites the blessing of "Shehechyanu" on the first night in his house.

16. One who is Not at Home

Question: How should one who is traveling fulfill the mitzvah of lighting?

Answer:

A) If his wife lights in the house, he fulfills his obligation. It is best, however, that he lights or that he participates in the place he is located without a blessing or that he participates in the lights of his host by giving him a "perutah" (a nominal amount of money).

B) If his wife is not lighting for him, he is obligated to light in the place he is located and he can participate in the lights of his host.

C) In a time of need, it is permissible to light an hour and a quarter before the night.

D) If he arrives home late, he can light any time the members of his household are awake. If they are sleeping, he should light without a blessing.

E) If he can, it is best to return to his house to light.

Question: Where should a single person (who is not currently living at home), such as a live-in worker, someone in training or someone involved in starting a new settlement, light the chanukiyah?

Answer: Publicizing the miracle must be done in any house where people live, and therefore any single man or woman must light in their house or room. Afterwards they can join in the singing of "Maaz Tzur" and eat sufganiyot (donuts) with others.

17. A Light which Extinguished

The basic law is that one fulfills his obligation even if the light was extinguished, but he should nevertheless re-light it. If he placed it in a place where the wind is blowing and it was extinguished, however, he is obligated to light it again. If it was lit for a half an hour and it is a half an hour after the sunset or the appearance of the stars, depending upon the position one follows, it is permissible to extinguish the lights.

18. Lighting on Erev (Right before) Shabbat

One should light before the lights of Shabbat. One must be careful that the lights are long and will burn a half an hour after the sunset or the appearance of the stars, depending upon the position one follows, at least one of the lights.

19. Motza'ei (After) Shabbat

One should light after havdalah, but in shul before havdalah.

20. The Remaining Oil

The oil or candles which remain(s) are set aside for a mitzvah, and he should make a fire and burn them. It is permissible to benefit from that which is left in the box or bottle.

Question: One can make a condition that what is left may be used for another purpose?

Answer: There are many details regarding this, and this is not the place to discuss them in a summary of laws.

21. One who Forgot to Say: "Al Ha-Nissim"

In birkat ha-mazon, if one remembers before he says Hashem's Name, he should return to "Al Ha-Nissim." One who does not remember should continue the blessing after eating, and before reciting "Ha-Rachaman Hu Yezacheinu – May the Merciful One make us worthy," he adds: "May the Merciful One perform miracles and wonders for us as He performed for our ancestors in these days at this time in the days of Mattityahu ben Yochanan...." The same applies if in the Shemoneh Esrei, if forgotten he should complete the Shemoneh Esrei, and in "Elokai Netzor – May God guard" before "Yehiyu le-ratzon – May it be His will," one should add: "We give thanks to you on the miracles..."

22. Tzedakah

The custom is to increase giving tzedakah.

23. Meal

We customarily increase our meal, and it is best to sing songs and praises to Hashem and to talk about aspects of the miracle of Chanukah, and then it will be considered a mitzvah meal (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 670:2).

24. Chanukah Games

Question: Are we obligated to play Chanukah games?

Answer: Despite what many think, there is no holy Jewish custom regarding this practice. There are two explanations for the existence of this custom.

- A) The Chatam Sofer wrote that the time of Chanukah corresponds to the time of the vacation of the non-Jews, and Jews hang around and are bored and this leads to the sins of dispute and forbidden speech. They therefore accustomed the people to play Chanukah games in order for them to be involved with something. It is therefore preferable to be involved with more spiritual and deeper activities.
- B) Another work, Yesod Ha-Teshuvah, wrote that the people had a desire for these games during the entire year, and it was impossible to prevent them, and they therefore designated the days of Chanukah for them. The Havot Yair qualified that if it was indeed necessary to allow these games, we should have established other days

and not Chanukah, which are days of thanksgiving for the miracles which Hashem performed for us.

If so, all agree that one who does not have to play and it is proper for him to prevent himself from doing so, and engage in the hidden light of the days of Chanukah, which is the light which the Greeks attempted to extinguish. This is the light of Torah.

25. Greeting of "Chag Sameach - Happy Holiday"

Question: Should one greet others on Chanukah with "Chag Sameach"?

Answer: It is not clear. Chanukah, however, not a "chag - holiday", since it does not have a "korban chagigah - holiday sacrifice." One should therefore say: "Chanukah Sameach - Happy Chanukah."

26. Torah Learning

It is proper to make the soul slightly happier by additional Torah learning during these days, as the Sages of Israel taught us throughout all of the generations.