

QUESTIONS AND HALACHOT OF CHANUKAH

This year, Chanukah begins on Sunday night, December 6 and ends on the evening of December 14.

Chanukah is a rabbinical festival surrounding events that occurred about 2200 years ago when the Syrian Greeks conquered Israel. There are two mitzvot applicable on Chanukah: To say full Hallel every day with berachot; and to light the chanukiyah. The rabbis also added the paragraph 'al hanissim' to be said in the Birkat Hamazon and the Amidah.

There are three major questions regarding the observance of Chanukah today:

1. *Why do we celebrate a great military victory with tiny flames? After all, a flame is fragile. With one flick of a finger it can be extinguished. Victories, especially military ones, are celebrated with great pomp, parades and brass bands.*
2. *Why did the miracle of Chanukah happen after the fact, after the battles had been won, and after the Temple had been recaptured and rededicated?*
3. *What message did Hashem send us by making the lights of the chanukiyah last for eight days?*

Chanukah is a victory celebration in which the emphasis is not on the struggle against tyranny, land liberated, or the military victory, although there certainly was one. It is the celebration of a spiritual struggle and a spiritual victory. This is why there is no halachic ordinance of eating meals and giving gifts as on Purim, but only saying Hallel and lighting candles.

The Jewish people refused to surrender to the tidal wave of the dominant Greek culture that proclaimed that only it alone was civilized and relevant. Stubbornly insisting on maintaining their own religious values and spiritual way of life, the Jews of that time not only survived but also revived Judaism for the future. The Greek challenge was more insidious than the pagan one, which only offered immorality and barbarism. The Greeks offered aesthetics and philosophy: the perfect mind in a perfect body in a beautiful environment, the Olympics and genius.

The Greeks had no desire to destroy the Jewish land or to spill Jewish blood. Their purpose was to unify their empire by forming one culture by imposing their values and their religion. They did not set out to destroy the Temple or the menorah. They were satisfied to allow Temple life to function as long as it marched to a Greek tune.

A candle flame is the physical manifestation of the spiritual "Ner Hashem Nishmat Adam" says King Solomon in Mishle. The verse in Proverbs (6:23) likens a mitzvah to a lamp, and Torah to its light. Just as a lamp requires a wick and oil, which then must be lit, so is man the wick onto which Hashem pours wisdom (oil), so that the soul may become incandescent with holiness, spreading the light of holiness. As is true with a human spirit, a flame can die or soar. It can be extinguished easily or it can light up the world. The essence of the Jew is his spirit.

The number eight has always reminded us of being above nature, of the miraculous. The eight-day miracle of the oil was a miraculous reflection of the resurrection of the will of the Jewish people to resist efforts of the Greeks to destroy the Torah way of life and the final success of their efforts.

The miracle happened right at the end, after the wars were won and the Temple was recaptured and cleansed. Many times a person tries their best to serve Hashem, sometimes there are gray areas and doubts creep in. A person asks himself "Did I do the right thing?" If only we could get a sign from Hashem, like the Maccabees did, that our efforts were correct and approved. Nobody, after witnessing the miracle, could deny the validity of the aims and methods of the Maccabees.

Let us this Chanukah do as our forebears did before us: rededicate ourselves to Hashem and the Torah.

1. Electric chanukiyot should not be used to fulfill the mitzvah. Use either wax candles or oil. Olive oil is best.
2. To beautify the mitzvah, the chanukiyah itself should be attractive.
3. If possible, one should light the chanukiyah 20 minutes after sunset, and the flame should burn for at least 30 minutes after the stars appear.
4. If one did not light the candles at this time, one may light them with a berachah as long as the family is awake. If one failed to light them until all are asleep, they may be lit without a berachah until daybreak.
5. On Friday, the chanukiyah is lit before the Shabbat candles. The chanukiyah must burn for at least 1/2 hour after the stars appear; this is approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes from the time that they are lit. Therefore one should use longer candles.
6. On Saturday night, the chanukiyah is lit in the synagogue before Havdalah, and at home after Havdalah.
7. On the first night, the wick or candle is placed on the extreme right of the chanukiyah. On every subsequent night, another wick or candle is placed to the left of this and the new one is always lit first.
8. There should be space between each wick so that it is easy to distinguish how many candles are burning. Aside from the Chanukah lights necessary for that night, an extra candle is lit, the Shamash. This is used to light the candles and stands apart from the others. The candles or wicks must be placed in an even row at equal heights except for the shamash.
9. Some say one should say HaNerot Halalu after lighting the first candle, while others suggest saying it after lighting all the candles.
10. On the first night of Chanukah, before lighting the candles one should recite three blessings. On all other nights, only the first two are said (and not Shehecheyanu). Here is the text in Hebrew and below it is the transliterated text:

ברוך אתה ד' אלוקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר (אשכנזים מוסיפים: של) חנוכה

ברוך אתה ד' אלוקינו מלך העולם, שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה

ברוך אתה ד' אלוקינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו וקימנו והגענו לזמן הזה

Baruch Atta Hashem Elokenu Melech HaOlam Asher Kidishanu BeMitzvotav VeTzivanu Lehadlik Ner (Ashkenazim add: Shel) Chanukah.

Baruch Atta Hashem Elokenu Melech HaOlam SheAssa Nissim LaAvotenu Bayamim Hahem Bazman Haze.

11. Baruch Atta Hashem Elokenu Melech HaOlam SheHecheyanu Vekiyemanu Vehiygianu Lazman Haze.
12. According to the Talmud (Shabbat 21) the minimum requirement of Chanukah candles is for each household to have one candle lit every night. The next best method (Mehadrin) is lighting one candle for every person in the house every night. The very best (Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin) way to fulfill this mitzvah is: According to Sephardim, only one person per house lights one candle on the

first night and adds another candle each night. The extra candles can be lit by others including children. According to Ashkenazim, every person in the house needs to light one candle on the first night and to add another candle each night.

13. Point to ponder: Every single Jew today who lights a chanukiyah follows the most mehudar (beautiful) way
14. The candles only need fuel to burn for a half hour after dark. The extra hiddur candles don't need to burn for a half hour. A blind person is obligated to light. If he's married, his spouse should light for him/her. The Ashkenazic minhag is that each individual lights for him or herself, however the Sephardic minhag is that one person lights for the whole household. Married women and unmarried girls who live in their husband/father's home can rely on their husband/father's lighting even according to the Ashkenazic custom, however, if they want to light they can light with a Berachah.
15. According to Sephardic custom, members of the household who are dependent on their parents fulfill their obligation with their parent's lighting even if they don't stay at home and even if they live in a distant country in a different time zone. However the Ashkenazi minhag is for single children to light when not sleeping at home.
16. According to Ashkenazic custom someone who is a guest at another person's house on Chanukah should light their own chanukiyah. According to Sephardic custom, a guest who is not independent of the homeowner (such as where one doesn't pay for expenses or he only pays for some expenses but not for every need) should give his host a prutah (5 cents) to join with his lighting. He should have intention to fulfill his obligation with the owner's lighting. Or the host can give the guest the oils and wicks as a gift and the guest doesn't have to give the host a prutah.
17. Two people who share an apartment in which they eat and pay for the food together, should light one chanukiyah (in which they both have a portion) and switch off with who should do the Bracha. If they pay for their own food separately even if they are family members they should light separately.

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