

HOW TO LIGHT CHANUKAH CANDLES

By: Rabbi Noah Gradofsky
Chanukah 5770 (2009)

1. This year, the first night is Friday evening, December 11th, and the last night is Friday, December 18th.
2. Both adult men and women are obligated in this *mitzvah*.
3. Though more than one person may light candles, each house need only have one adult person light candles (i.e. mom or dad or any bar/bat mitzvah). Common practice is for everyone to light a menorah, which is even better.
4. The *mitzvah* is fulfilled even if only one candle is lit each night. However, common practice is to light one candle on the first night, and then to add one more candle on each successive night. The Talmud describes this as a “better” mitzvah. On the first night, the right most candle is lit. Every night one candle is added to the left. The newer candle is lit first (i.e. add from right to left, light from left to right).
5. In general, the candles should be lit no earlier than sunset (4:30 PM is safe). **On Friday night, candles should be lit before sunset.** The rabbis set the latest time to light candles as “until people have left market.” Since our markets tend to remain open until around 8/9 PM, one can probably light as late as this time (or perhaps even later).
6. The candles (or at least one candle) should remain lit “until people have left the market.” Since this may be too long a time for the average Chanukah candle, I recommend an oil menorah (you can get a menorah and wicks for less than \$20 from any Jewish book store – they are quite beautiful to see) or lighting at least one Shabbat or yahrzeit candle as part of the Chanukah lighting. The purpose of this time rule is to make sure that the candles are lit at all times that passers-by are likely see them.
7. The menorah should be lit near a window or door, and not too high that people will not see it.
8. Since the candles are a *mitzvah*, we are not permitted to use the candles for any personal benefit, including using their light to see. Therefore, there should be a *shammash*, an additional candle that provides light. The *shammash* is also used to light the candles (although, technically, one could use one Chanukah candle to light the next, common practice is not to do so).
9. Before lighting the candles, one should say the blessings (which appear in any prayer book). They are:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציוונו להדליק נר חנוכה.

Baruch attah Ado-nay, Elo-henu Melech ha'olam asher kideshanu bemitzvotav vetsivanu lehadlik ner Chanukah.

Blessed are you, Adonay our God, sovereign of the Universe, who sanctified us by His commandments, and commanded us to light the Chanukah candle.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה.

Baruch attah Ado-nay, Elo-henu Melech ha'olam she'asah nissim la'avotaynu bayamim hahem ba-zeman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonay our God, sovereign of the Universe, who performed miracles for our forbearers in those days at this time”

When one lights for the first time that year:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Baruch attah Ado-nay, Elo-henu Melech ha'olam shehe'cheyanu, veyiyemanu, vehigiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonay our God, sovereign of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and sustained us, and brought us to this day.

10. **On Friday night, there are two opinions as to the order of lighting Shabbat candles and Chanukah candles.** There is a general rule that if we have two *mitzvot* to do, we first do whichever *mitzvah* we do more often (*tadir v'sheayno tadir, tadir kodem*). So, for instance, on a weekday morning we put on our *tallit* (which we wear seven days a week) first, and then our *tefillin* (which we do not wear on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*). If we follow this rule with Shabbat and Chanukah candles, we would light Shabbat candles first, and then light Chanukah candles. However, there are some opinions that lighting Shabbat candles marks the beginning of the Shabbat. If this is the case, then one could not light Chanukah candles after lighting the Shabbat candles. Therefore, prevalent custom is to light Chanukah candles before lighting Shabbat candles. However, there are many Rabbis (myself included) who disagree with this practice. After all, the *mitzvah* of lighting Shabbat candles is a preparation for Shabbat (i.e. we light candles before Shabbat, so that we have light on Shabbat). The Talmud never says that lighting Shabbat candles automatically starts Shabbat. Even those Rabbis who said that this was the case, permitted a person to light Shabbat candles with the explicit condition that the person is not beginning Shabbat (this is why many people first light shabbat candles and then drive to Shul for Friday night services). Based on this analysis, I light Shabbat candles before Chanukah candles, with the intent that my lighting Shabbat candles does not constitute acceptance of Shabbat (See Maggid Mishneh on Maimonides Mishneh Torah Chanukah 4:13). However, one who follows the more prevalent custom of lighting Chanukah candles first, still fulfills both *mitzvot*.

11. **On Saturday night,** one should recite Havdallah before lighting the Chanukah candles.

12. While the candles are lit, it is nice to spend some time singing Chanukah songs, eating fried foods (latkes, jelly doughnuts etc), and celebrating together.

13. **Please remember that fire safety is our number one concern. Light candles in a safe place and do not leave them unattended.**

14. If you have any questions, please contact me through the synagogue office (516) 432-1410 or e-mail RabbiNoahG@templeisraeloflb.org.