

Chanukah Preparations – Chanukah Checklist

Before Chanukah make sure to procure the following items:

- A Menorah
- Olive oil and wicks preferred or, if unavailable, then procure candles for your Menorah.
- A minimum of 44 candles are needed for the Menorah. This includes both the daily candles as well as the *shamash* candles (the candle used for lighting the daily ones) for all eight nights of the holiday.

Chanukah is primarily celebrated by lighting the Menorah every evening. It takes the center stage!

The Chanukah Menorah: Where, When, How and Why:

Where: The custom is to light the menorah by the window or door facing the street so people passing on the street can be reminded of the miracle of Chanukah.

- There were times when lighting the Menorah for public view was unsafe so that some people would light the menorah inside on their dining room or other table. This custom has grown in popularity, especially since members of the family gather around the table for the Chanukah menorah lighting
- If you are lighting by the doorway, it should be on the left side of the entrance, so you are surrounded by *Mitzvot*; the *Mezuzah* on the right side and the Menorah on the left. It is utmost importance that the menorah be set up in a safe manner with nothing flammable if it falls. It is also important not to leave the menorah unattended. If one must leave the house and is concerned about fire safety, one may put out the Menorah as long as it has burned for half an hour.
- The entire point of the Menorah is to give off light. Family members and people passing by can share in this special Chanukah experience. The light should not be used for any other purpose other than looking at it.

That was the Where.

Now the When: The Menorah is lit at nightfall.

- On average that would be about an hour after the Shabbat candle lighting time for that week. It's ok to light it earlier but not before sundown. Some people try to light it within a half an hour after nightfall.
- If that is not possible, its ok to light later as long as someone is awake in the household or there are people walking by and able to see the menorah.
- One must be very careful on Friday and Saturday evenings. On Friday evening, one must not light the Menorah when it is already Shabbat. To avoid this, we light the Menorah before lighting the Shabbat candles at 18 minutes before sunset.
- Saturday evening, one should wait until Shabbat is over which is at least one hour after the candle lighting time on that Friday. For example: If candle lighting was 4:11 in NYC on Friday evening, one should light the menorah on or after 5:11 on Sat night.
- In NYC in 2023 the candle lighting time for the Menorah, i.e., nightfall the first night is Thursday, Dec. 7 at 4:59PM; Friday Dec. 8, 4:11PM; Saturday Dec. 9, 5:11PM; Sunday, Dec. 10 – Thursday, Dec. 14 is at 5:00PM.

How: The Menorah is lit at nightfall.

- The first night we light one candle the plus the *shamash*. The second night we add an additional candle to the left of the first candle. Each night we add another candle to the left side until the final night we have eight lights. On each succeeding night we light the additional candle first. We make the following blessings on the first night:
- Blessings upon lighting the candles:
 - » First blessing: *Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Haolam Asher Kideshanu Bemitzvotav Vzivanu Lehadlik Ner Shel Chanukah.*
 - » Second blessing: *Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Haolam She-asa Nissim La-avotaynu Bayamim Hahaym Bazman Haze*
 - » Third blessing (only the first night) *Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Haolam Shehechyanu VeKimanu Lazman Haze.*

While making the actual blessing remember to say G-d's name properly (not *Hashem Elokheinu*). See in the Artscroll Sefard Siddur page 830.

The third blessing is only made on the first night or the first time one lights the Menorah this year. After one has lit the Menorah, one recites or sings a prayer called *Hanairot Hallalu Kodesh Haim*, meaning "These lights are holy." We then also sing the famous *Moaz Zur*.

Why: We light the Menorah to remind us of the miracle in the days of the *Hashmonean* (Maccabean) Priests, when the Greek Hellenists, at that time from the dynasty of the Seleucid empire, a Greek state in Syria, wished to hellenize ancient Israel. The *Hashmonean* family rose against them leading a rebellion and retaking the Temple in Jerusalem. When they went to light the Menorah, there was only enough pure olive oil to last for one day. Miraculously it lasted for 8 days.

- » To remember the miracle, we too light the Menorah for 8 days.
- » We increase the lights each night as an important lesson that we should increase goodness.
- » We light the *shamash* as a reminder that if we want to benefit from the light, it shouldn't be from the candles but from the *shamash*. The reason is to publicize this miracle of Chanukah, which also represents the few against the many, the weak against the strong, and those who would wish to forget the Torah and just become like the dominant culture.
- » Today for many people it is an expression of religious freedom. It is also an expression of hope against even great adversity. It is also a time to celebrate with friends and family.

- **Hallel:** During the morning service, we recite it every day after the *Amidah*. This is a gratitude prayer. We give thanks to the Creator for the miracles and wonders He performed back then as well as today. One of the most important things is to be grateful for the miracle and to recognize that there are still miracles happening in our lives today. Perhaps when we say *Hallel* we can take a moment to think about the things we are grateful for. Some of those things have elements of the extraordinary, perhaps even the small miracles.
- **Al HaNisim:** We also add a special prayer "*Al HaNisim*" in the *Amidah* and in the *Birkat HaMazon*. This prayer acknowledges the miracle of the military victory of the Macabees, few in number, over the mighty Greeks.
- **Chanukah Party:** The goal of a Chanukah party is not mainly the food or drink but the gathering, singing, and praising the Creator and acknowledging our miracles of the past and present. But what would a Chanukah party be without the traditional *latkes* and donuts? Because the miracle happened with oil, we eat these foods which are deep-fried in oil.
- **Dreidel game:** Many people play the *dreidel* some for money; others just for fun. The 4 sides of the *dreidel* have the letters, *Nun, Gimel, Heh, Shin*, standing for *Ness Gadol Haya Shom*. A great miracle happened there. Although many people give out gifts on Chanukah, it is more appropriate to give Chanukah *Gelt* to the children, particularly after the lighting of the candles.

