

Lighting Chanukah Candles

The Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach

Kislev 5781/December 2020

The upcoming festival of Chanukah, also referred to as the “Festival of Lights”, is defined by the Mitzvah to light the candles each night of the holiday. Beginning with the first candle on Thursday evening, Dec. 10th, candles are lit for eight consecutive nights. Like many *Mitzvot*, lighting Chanukah candles comes with a unique set of details designed to make the experience most meaningful.

Publicizing the Miracle

The primary purpose of lighting Chanukah candles is to publicize our ancestors’ miraculous victory over the Syrian-Greeks and the restoration of Jewish sovereignty, cultural identity and Torah values. The concept of ‘publicizing the miracle’ (*pirusmei nisa*) shapes many of the details surrounding this *Mitzvah*.

Where to Light

The Chanukah candles should be lit in a spot visible from a public thoroughfare. Usually, this is accomplished by lighting in a window or a doorway (opposite the *Mezuzah*) that faces the street. Where this is impossible, the candles should be lit in a ‘high-traffic area’ within the home, where it will be seen throughout the evening by members of the household.

When to Light

The earliest time to light candles during the week is sunset (approximately 4:30 pm during Chanukah) and the ideal time is around nightfall (approx. 5:15 pm). The candles must burn for at least 30 minutes. One may wait to light until the whole family is assembled and candles may be lit any time at night as long as a second member of the household is awake.



Important Note: Chanukah candles can pose an extremely dangerous fire hazard. In recent years, there have been a number of tragic accidents linked directly to neglect of basic safety protocols surround Jewish candle lighting rituals. Jewish law insists that safety not be compromised in the fulfillment of a *Mitzvah*. Please exercise caution and good judgment.

Friday/Saturday Night

On Friday evening, Chanukah candles should be lit right before the Shabbat candles. However, they must still burn minimally until until 30 minutes after nightfall (until 5:45 pm). For this reason, on Friday evening it is important to add additional oil or use larger candles. (The traditional colored candles burn for only about 30 mins). At the conclusion of Shabbat, Havdalah is recited before lighting the Chanukah candles at home.

What to Light

Any oil or candle that provides a fine, clean & odorless flame is acceptable for use on Chanukah. Olive oil is often preferred because it was used to light the Menorah in the Temple.

How to Light

On the first night, a single candle or wick is placed at the extreme right of the Chanukiya (Chanukah candelabra). Three blessings are recited prior to lighting:

- 1) “*Lehadlik near shel Chanukah*” (upon the lighting of the Chanukah Candles);
- 2) “*She’asa nisim...*” (who performed miracles)
- 3) “*Shechechianu...*” (Who has sustained us in life...). The flame used to light the candle (the ‘*Shamash*’) is then placed at a different height to distinguish it from the actual Chanukah candles. Immediately after lighting, “*Haneirot Hallalu*” (These candles..) is recited and “*Maoz Tzur*” (Mighty Rock) is sung. On subsequent nights, a new candle is added to the left of the previous night’s candle. Only blessings 1 & 2 are recited, and the newest candle is lit first.

Home Sweet Home

Because Judaism recognizes the home as the key to transmitting Jewish values, special emphasis is placed on lighting candles at home. While one can certainly join the festivities surrounding the lighting of Chanukah candles taking place elsewhere, one should light his or her own candles upon returning home later that evening. In addition, each member of the family may light their own Chanukiya to increase the light and allow everyone to fulfill the mitzvah.