

בית הוראה דיעטראיט
BAIS HORAAH OF DETROIT
HALACHA HOTLINE

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF HaRav Shmuel Irons שליט"א VAAD HALACHA Rav Aharon Yoel Sorscher • Rav Yissachar Wolf • Rav Boruch Miller

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ISSUE #11 – Chanukah FAQs

Commonly Received Questions and their Answers

• Is there an obligation to make a mesiba/party during Chanukah?

- There is no obligation. However, doing so is mentioned in halacha as a means of commemorating the celebrations that occurred after the rededication of the Bais Hamikdash. Note: such an event is not considered a seudas mitzvah unless words of Torah are shared.

• When is the proper time to light the menorah?

- There are varying minhagim as to the optimum time for lighting the menorah. These customs range from lighting at sunset to waiting until a given number of minutes past sunset. The different minhagim all have basis in halacha. As such, if one has a family minhag, he should follow that minhag. In the absence of a family minhag, a halachic authority should be consulted.
- The absolute **latest** time one can light is just before alos hashachar (first morning light).
- The absolute **earliest** time one can light (in a case of great need) is plag hamincha. This should be done only if it will be impossible to light at any time before alos hashachar. A bracha can be made in such an instance. There must be enough oil or wax to last 30 minutes after tzais hakochavim.
- On Friday, the menorah is lit before the Shabbos candles, at any time after plag hamincha. Menorah lighting should not be left for the last minute; however it is important to bear in mind that the candles must burn for 30 minutes past tzais.
- On Motzaei Shabbos, havdala is made at the regular time. The common custom is to light the menorah after havdala.

• Is there a requirement for women to refrain from work during candle lighting?

- Yes. There is a well-known minhag brought in halacha for women to refrain from certain types of work for 30 minutes after candle lighting. Any work which is prohibited on chol hamoed should be avoided during this time.

• Should women light the menorah?

- Women are obligated in lighting the menorah. A married woman is yotzai with her husband. A single girl who lives at home can be yotzai with her parent's lighting. This is the common minhag; even if she will not be present at the lighting (e.g. she will be arriving home late), she can still be yotzai with the family lighting.
- There are several cases in which a woman must light her own menorah:
 - A woman who is home alone (or with only young children) must light in her home with the brachos. She cannot be yotzai with a neighbor or friend.
 - A single woman who lives on her own must light in her home. If several girls share an apartment, a halachic authority should be consulted as to whether each of them must light individually.
 - A single girl who is traveling on her own must light for herself. If she is staying at a home that is lighting, a halachic authority should be consulted about the proper method to be yotzai with her host.

• Am I allowed to eat or drink before lighting?

- From 30 minutes prior to the zman, one may not eat more than a 2 fluid ounce amount of (5-grain) mezonos or hamotzi foods. One may eat fruits, vegetables and shehakol items as long as he or she is careful to light at the correct time.

• If one is unable to light at the proper time, must he refrain from eating or doing work in the interim?

- Yes, it is forbidden to eat before lighting, as described in the previous question. It is also forbidden to engage in work activity during this time. However, if one appoints a shomer or creates a reliable reminder (such as an alarm), both are permitted. A valid shomer is ideally someone who has already lit, and will be able to provide reminders, either in person or by phone.

• How high off the ground should the menorah be placed?

- The flames should be at least 10.6 inches off the ground. Ideally, they should be lower than 35.5 inches. If there is any safety concern, or if the flames won't be seen well from outside, one can be lenient and situate them at any height less than 20 amos (approximately 35 feet).

• Where in the house should the menorah be lit?

- Outside of Eretz Yisroel the common minhag is to light indoors. Most have the custom of lighting next to a window, so that the menorah is also visible to those outside the home. This includes a neighbor who can see your menorah from inside his house. Some have the custom to light the menorah next to the door, opposite the mezuzah.

• Is it more important to position the menorah to be seen by those outside the house, or those inside?

- Ideally, the menorah should be placed where it can be seen both by people inside and outside the home. If there is a choice of windows, it should be placed by the window that is more centrally located for those inside the house.

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- **May I read from a Tehillim with the light of the menorah?**
 - One may not derive direct benefit from the Chanukah candles, even for a mitzvah purpose. However, as long as there is a shamash and enough other light in the room to enable reading, it is permitted.
- **I live in an apartment building, should I light by the window?**
 - If the window of your apartment is less than 35 feet off the ground, the menorah should be lit at the window. Alternatively, if there are other buildings of similar height in close proximity, you should light at the window. Otherwise, the menorah should be lit next to the apartment door, on the opposite side of the mezuzah.
- **May a menorah be extinguished or moved, for safety or other reasons?**
 - Once the menorah has burned for 30 minutes past tzais, one may extinguish or move the menorah if necessary. Ideally, this intention should be stipulated at the time of lighting.
- **I have to leave for an international flight before the zman, and won't land until morning. What should I do?**
 - The following are options in order of preference:
 1. Change the flight to accommodate lighting, even if this involves additional cost.
 2. If the traveler's spouse will be home, the spouse should light with the traveler in mind.
 3. Alternatively, a family member (such as a child above bar or bas mitzvah age) can light on behalf of the traveler.
 4. Have a neighbor or friend come to your house and light for you. They should light their own menorah at home, and then - without talking in between - go over to your house and light your menorah. They cannot make new brachos for you.
- **If someone is stuck in the hospital, is there any solution for fulfilling the mitzvah?**
 - Options 2-4 from the previous question can be utilized.
 - If none of these options are practical, a battery-operated, incandescent bulb may be lit on a table in the hospital room for a half hour. The brachos are not made.
- **Can I light in a hotel room?**
 - Generally, yes - unless the hotel prohibits lighting candles. For safety reasons it is advisable in such an instance for only one person to light, and to use a safer option that does not produce a lot of smoke (i.e. tea lights).
- **I got delayed unexpectedly while driving and won't arrive until after sunrise. Should I light in the car?**
 - No. Menorah can only be lit in a home where it is possible to eat, sleep and spend significant time. A car does not qualify. The best option would be to book a hotel room where you can light the menorah. You should remain there for at least 30 minutes, and have something to eat while there. See the above question about lighting in a hotel room for further guidance.
- **I will be sleeping in one house and eating in another. Where should I light?**
 - If you will be sleeping in your own home, you should light at home.
 - If you are staying out of town and your host has placed you at someone else's house to sleep - but you will be eating all meals at the host's house - you should light at the host's house.
 - If the meals will be at a shul or simcha hall, light at the home where you are sleeping.
- **Should I light at home before leaving for a trip?**
 - If you are leaving after sunset, you should light at home even if you expect to arrive at your destination with plenty of time to light. If there is a safety concern in leaving the candles burning, you can ask someone to come over and extinguish them once 30 minutes have passed after tzais.
- **I will be returning home on Motzai Shabbos, do I light after havdala, or later on, when I get home?**
 - In most cases, if one is returning home that night, he would light at home. See question #5 above regarding the requirements of lighting past the proper time. However, if he will only be returning very late at night, a halachic authority should be consulted. A yeshiva bochur returning to his dorm from his parent's home should light at home before returning.

Please note: These halachos are only for outside of Eretz Yisroel. As always, feel free to contact the Bais Horaah for any additional questions or scenarios which are not covered in this paper.

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