

CHANUKAH ISSUES

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

I am uncomfortable going to sleep before the Chanukah lights burn out. How long do they need to burn? May I extinguish them before going to bed?

Once the candles remained lit for at least one-half-hour after nightfall, one has fulfilled the mitzvah. It is then permitted to extinguish the candles. The leftover oil which was placed in the menorah should be used for next day's lighting. Leftover oil from the last day should be burned in a manner where one does not derive benefit from it.

Is it permissible to read by the light of the candles if we have lit the requisite shamash?

No, you may not read by the collective light of all of the candles even if the shamash is lit. It is, however, permitted to use the shamash itself for personal use, e.g., to light the pilot light on your stove.

May I, a single mother, make the bracha on the Chanukah candles and be motzi my fifteen-year-old son? Is it preferable that he, instead, make the bracha and be motzi me?

The preferred method is that both of you should light and recite the blessings. If, however, only one person can or will light, then it is preferable that your son light and be motzi you with your obligation.

My husband comes home very late from work and we usually light candles when he comes home. Are the children and I permitted to eat before candle lighting in this case? Alternatively, may I light candles with the children on my own or is it preferable to wait for my husband to light?

If your husband truly does not mind, then the preferable way is for you and the children to light the candles on your own at the proper time, and your husband will light when he comes home after work. If your husband insists that no lighting take place before he arrives, children under the age of bar and bas mitzvah may eat supper at their regular time of eating. Adults should preferably eat foods whose berachah rishonah is shehakol, ha-eitz or ha-adamah, or less than 2 oz. of bread or mezonos foods. If that proves difficult, they should ask a friend to remind them that they did not yet fulfill the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles. Once they have appointed a shomer, they may eat as they usually do.

My husband learns in Kollel and is able to come home to light the candles at the proper time. Since I work full time for a difficult boss, I am not always able to be home for the proper time of

lighting the candles. Although my husband always offers to wait for me so that I could be present for the lighting, I nevertheless feel guilty that I am causing him to delay the mitzvah past its preferred time. How should I respond to his offer?

It depends on your true feelings. If your sincere wish is for your husband to light on time and you would bear absolutely no resentment that you are not present for the lighting, then it is preferable that he lights on time; you are yotzei your obligation even though you are not home at the time of lighting. But if this arrangement would lead to some resentment on your part, then you should take up your husband's offer to wait for your arrival.

Is there a basis in halacha or mesorah for giving gifts on Chanukah or is this practice discouraged?

Chanukah gelt, distributing money to the children or to the needy, is an age-old tradition which has a mesorah and valid sources. We do not, however, find any source for giving out Chanukah gifts, and most probably it is a custom copied from other religions.

Because I am totally overwhelmed with taking care of my children, I find it difficult to daven Shacharis but I do try to daven Mincha. On Chanukah, may I daven Hallel right before Mincha even though it is already late afternoon?

Yes, you may. Hallel may be recited anytime during the day - from sunrise until sunset. While Hallel is considered a mitzvah which is time bound from which women are generally exempt, some opinions maintain that they are obligated to recite Hallel on Chanukah, since they too were included in the miracles of Chanukah.

I have heard that there is a minhag to serve dairy foods on Chanukah, in addition to fried foods. Can you explain the source for this custom?

While there is no specific custom to eat just any type of dairy, there is a custom to eat cheese on Chanukah. The reason for this custom is to recall the miracle which occurred with cheese - which Yehudis, the daughter of Yochanan the Kohein Gadol, fed to the Greek governor until he was very thirsty. She then fed him wine until he was drunk and fell into a deep sleep. She then proceeded to cut off his head and brought it to Yerushalayim. When the Greeks saw that their leader was dead, they fled.

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