LIGHTING THE MENORAH: HALACHAH AND CUSTOM

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The method of performing the mitzvah chavivah ("precious mitzvah") of kindling the Chanukah lights has generated countless halachic debates over the years. For many questions regarding the particulars of fulfilling this mitzvah there is no clear consensus and the practical halachah will depend on the traditions and customs of each family. The following Discussion highlights some of the unresolved disputes concerning the lighting of the menorah and makes recommendations for those who do not have a clear-cut family custom:

Issue: The proper time to light Chanukah candles l'chatchillah is a subject of much halachic debate. Some are careful to light Chanukah lights right at sunset, others a little bit later, while others wait for nightfall. If you have a family custom, follow it. Otherwise, the preferred time to light is 20-25 minutes after sunset. [1]

Issue: Where to place the first light on the menorah—at the extreme right or the extreme left. In addition, there are various customs as to which direction the lighting takes on subsequent nights—from right to left or from left to right. One who does not have a specific family custom should place the first light at the extreme right side of the menorah (facing the person who is lighting). On subsequent nights, each additional light is placed to the left of the first one, and the lighting begins from the newest light, going from left to right. [2]

Issue: Whether or not married women should light a menorah in their home. If you have a family custom, follow it. Otherwise, married women should not light, [3] and if they do, they should do so before their husband lights. [4]

Issue: Whether or not single girls living in their parents' home light Chanukah lights themselves. If you have a family custom, follow it. Otherwise, it is better that they not light. [5] All agree that a single woman or girl living alone is obligated to light Chanukah lights.

Issue: There is a three-way dispute as to the correct text for the conclusion of the first blessing over the lights. It is either lehadlik ner Chanukah, [6] lehadlik ner shel Chanukah[7], or lehadlik ner shelachanukah (one word, patach underneath the lamed). [8] If you have a family custom, follow it. If not, follow the third option. [9]

Issue: At the conclusion of the second blessing, some say bazman hazeh while others say bizman hazeh. Follow your family custom. If you don't have one, either text may be used. [10]

Issue: At the conclusion of the blessing of shehechayanu, some say lazman hazeh while others say lizman hazeh[11]. Follow your family custom. If you don't have one, say lazman hazeh[12].

Issue: Some complete the recitation of all of the blessings and then begin to kindle the lights. Others begin to light after reciting the first blessing of lehadlik[13]. Unless that is your family custom, recite all of the blessings and then begin the lighting. [14]

Issue: Reciting Haneiros halalu after lighting the first light or after all of the lights are kindled. [15]If you have a family custom, follow it. If not, recite Haneiros halalu after all of the lights have been lit. [16] All opinions agree that one may not begin reciting Haneiros halalu before lighting the first light, and if one did so, he must repeat the blessing of lehadlik, since it is considered as if he spoke between reciting the blessing and performing the mitzvah. [17]

Issue: In some families, the custom is not to eat a meal while the candles are lit. There is no halachic basis for this custom, so if that is not your custom, do not adopt it. [18]

Issue: Women refraining from doing certain household chores while the candles are burning. Some women refrain from doing these chores the entire Chanukah, while others refrain during the first and last day only. [19] Some women refrain from sewing, doing laundry and heavy cleaning, [20] while others refrain from cooking, baking and other light kitchen work as well. [21] Some women refrain from work for half an hour after lighting candles while others refrain from work as long as candles are burning anywhere in the community, which may be as late as midnight. [22] If you have a family custom follow it. Otherwise, refrain only from sewing, doing laundry and heavy cleaning throughout the eight days of Chanukah, but only for an half an hour after the menorah was lit. [23]

Issue: Whether or not Havdalah takes precedence over Chanukah lights on Motzaei Shabbos. If your family has a specific custom, follow it. Otherwise recite Havdalah first. [24]

Issue: Some say al ha-nissim during Shemoneh Esrei and v'al ha-nissim during Birkas ha-Mazon, while others say v'al ha-nissim both times. All agree that during Birkas ha-Mazon one must say v'al ha-nissim. Unless one has a family custom, he should say v'al hanissim both during Shemoneh Esrei and Birkas ha-Mazon. [25]

Issue: Reciting magdil or migdol during Birkas ha-Mazon. If you have a family custom, follow it.

Otherwise say magdil. [26]

Sources:

1. As was the custom of the Chazon Ish, Rav A. Kotler, Rav Y. Kamenetsky and many other Gedolei Yisrael.
2. O.C. 676:5. This is the view of the Arizal as well and the most widely observed custom.
3. Mishnah Berurah 675:9.
4. Rav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun 1:4).
5. Shalmas Chayim 380, based on Chasam Sofer, Shabbos 21a.
6. O.C. 676:1, and Peri Megadaim. This is the text of the Arizal and the Gra as well.
7. Mishnah Berurah 676:1, based on early sources quoted in Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 1.
8. Maharshal, quoted by Magen Avraham and all the poskim.
9. Since this is the most correct according to dikduk rules; see R.S.Z. Henna in Siddur Sha'arei Tefillah. This was the custom of the Chazon Ish (Orchos Rabbeinu 3:17) and Rav Y. Kamenetsky.
10. Siddur Yaavetz, Aruch ha-Shulchan 676:3, Orchos Rabbeinu 3:17 and Koveitz Halachos 6:3 recommend bizman hazeh, while several dikduk authorities recommend bazman hazeh (see Ohr Yisroel 15:3) and that has become the more widely accepted custom. Some have a custom to say u'bizman hazeh, but that has not been widely accepted.
11.Mishnah Berurah 676:1; Aruch ha-Shulchan 676:3.
12. This has become the universally accepted custom and is recommended by didkuk authorities.
13. Avudraham, quoted in Bais Yosef, O.C. 676.
14. Rama, O.C. 676:2.
15.Both customs are quoted in Mishnah Berurah 676:8.
16.Custom of many contemporary poskim (Orchos Rabbeinu 3:21, Minchas Yitzchak 4:115-3, Rav M. Feinstein, Rav Y. Kamenetsky, Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, Rav C. Kanievsky).
17.Minchas Yitzchak 4:115-3; Rav C. Kanievsky (Ohr Yisrael 15, note 618); Koveitz Halachos 6:6.
18. Ohr Yisrael 1:16, quoting Mikdash Yisrael 16.
19.Chayei Adam 154:3.
20. Rav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 8; Halachos of Chanukah, pg. 4); Rav Y. Kamenetsky (Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 670, note 584); Shraga ha-Meir 6:87.
21. See Halichos Shelomo 16, Orchos Halachah 14.
22. Magen Avraham 670:2, quoted by Be'er Heitev 2 and Siddur Ya'avetz.
23. This is the most widely accepted custom.
24. See Aruch ha-Shulchan 679:2 who explains that those who have the custom to light the menorah first do so because they already heard Havdalah in shul. But those who did not hear Havdalah in shul are certainly required to recite Havdalah first at home.
25. Mishnah Berurah 682:1; Aruch ha-Shulchan 282:1. See Siddur Yaavetz.

26.This is the accepted custom.

Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2013 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com