



# MENORAH 101

A Basic Summary of Holiday Laws  
In a Clear and Simple Style

---

❖	FINDING THE RIGHT MENORAH	2
	FUEL	2
	WICKS	2
❖	SETTING UP	2
	PROPER MENORAH LOCATION	2
	PREPARING THE INDIVIDUAL LIGHTS	2
	SHAMASH	3
❖	LIGHTING PROCEDURE	3
❖	LIGHTING TIMES	3
	IDEAL LIGHTING TIME	3
	ALTERNATE LIGHTING TIMES	4
	EXTINGUISHING THE LIGHTS	4
❖	WHO IS OBLIGATED?	4
	LIGHTING AS A GROUP	4
	LIVING ALONE	5
❖	IMPORTANCE OF THE MITZVAH	5
❖	SHABBOS	5
	FRIDAY	5
	SATURDAY NIGHT	5
❖	WHEN AWAY FROM HOME	5
	AWAY THE ENTIRE NIGHT	6
	AWAY FOR PART OF THE NIGHT	6
	LIGHTING BEFORE LEAVING	7

---

Basic

Detailed

By Rabbi Yochanan Schnall

## Menorah 101

By: R' Yochanan Schnell

### ❖ Finding the Right Menorah

- It is a mitzvah to use as beautiful a menorah as one can afford<sup>1</sup>.  
A menorah is only as beautiful as it is functional and a proper menorah<sup>2</sup> should have all eight lights clearly independent from each other, positioned at the same height and in a straight row.<sup>3</sup>
- The shamash (see ❖ **Setting Up**, below), must be distinctly positioned from the other lights.<sup>4</sup> Some have a custom that the shamash be taller or placed higher than the other lights.<sup>5</sup>
- Technically speaking, it is not necessary to use a menorah-candelabra to fulfill the mitzvah. Independent candles or glasses of oil can also be lined up in the above manner<sup>6</sup>.

### Fuel

- It is best to use a fuel that produces a consistent, clear flame. Today, the custom is to use olive oil or wax candles - with olive oil being the ideal of the two<sup>7</sup>.
- Using a gas or electric powered menorah does not fulfill the mitzvah<sup>8</sup>.
- The candles must be long enough and the oil reservoirs must contain enough fuel for the lights to burn through the required time<sup>9</sup>. (See ❖ **Lighting Times** below.)

### Wicks

- Each light may contain no more than one wick.<sup>10</sup>

### ❖ Setting Up

The menorah should be set up ahead of time whenever possible. This way, it can be lit as soon as the proper lighting time arrives.<sup>11</sup>

### Proper Menorah Location

- Outside of Eretz Yisroel, the predominant custom is to light the menorah inside the home<sup>12</sup>.
- The choicest location inside the home is in front of a public-facing window<sup>13</sup>, or, according to some opinions, near the front door, at the side opposite the mezuzah (this is the prevalent Chassidic custom)<sup>14</sup>.
  - If the only available public-facing window is higher than forty feet from people who are walking outside, all agree that the menorah is lit inside the home, near the front door<sup>15</sup>.
- It is ideal to place the menorah at a low height so that the flames are between 11 inches and 35 inches from the floor unless the only public-facing windows available are higher than 35 inches.<sup>16</sup>
- If the above areas are impractical, the menorah can be placed in any prominent area of the home<sup>17</sup> as long as candles are not usually lit there during the year.<sup>18</sup> (For example, this might exclude the dining room table.)
- The menorah may not be placed in a drafty area that could cause the flames to be extinguished.<sup>19</sup>
- When two or more menorahs are lit they must be separated far enough that an observer would not mistake their flames as belonging to the same menorah<sup>20</sup>.
- Once the menorah is lit, it should not be moved until after it has burned through the required timeframe<sup>21</sup> (See ❖ **Lighting Times**, below) Take care to set up the menorah where it can remain burning until then.

### Preparing the Individual Lights

- On the first night of Chanukah, only one light is lit (besides the shamash)<sup>22</sup>. It is placed in the far right position of the menorah<sup>23</sup> - when standing inside the home and facing the menorah.
- On each successive night, an additional light is added to the immediate left of what was lit the previous night<sup>24</sup>. For example, on the third night the three lights are in the three places furthest to the right.

# Menorah 101

By: R' Yochanan Schnall

## Shamash

It is forbidden to derive benefit from the lights of the menorah. Therefore, an additional flame is customarily lit to serve as an alternate light source.<sup>25</sup> This additional flame is called a shamash.

- Even with a shamash in place, it is still inappropriate to derive benefit from the menorah's light<sup>26</sup>.
- If there is an additional source of light in the room, it is not obligatory to leave a shamash burning. (Nonetheless, this remains the predominant custom)<sup>27</sup>.
- One menorah light cannot be used to kindle another<sup>28</sup> so it is necessary to use an independent "service-candle" for lighting. The independent "service-candle" is often left burning to serve as the shamash as well<sup>29</sup>.
  - If the shamash is not the "service-candle", it is lit after lighting the menorah<sup>30</sup>. (This is often relevant for oil-based menorahs.)

## ❖ Lighting Procedure

1. Have all the members of the home present.<sup>31</sup>
  - Unless you plan on saying the blessings by heart, it might be wise to first find them in your siddur and prop the siddur open. This will facilitate reading from it while holding a lit shamash.
2. Stand before the menorah with your back to the general home area.
3. Light the candle that will be used for lighting the menorah.
4. Recite the two blessings that conclude with: "*l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah*" and "*she'asah nissim la'avoseinu...*"<sup>32</sup>.
  - If it is the first time you are lighting this year, recite the blessing of "*Shehechyanu*" as well<sup>33</sup>.
5. After reciting the blessings, no unnecessary speech or activity is allowed until after all the lights are lit.<sup>34</sup>
6. When there is more than one light, light the newest one first (the one furthest to the left). Continue lighting towards the right<sup>35</sup>.

Two traditional songs of thanksgiving are found in the siddur after the blessings for the menorah lighting: "Haneiros Halalu" and "Maoz Tzur".

7. Some begin singing "Haneiros Halalu" immediately after kindling the first light and continue singing it through lighting the rest of the lights.<sup>36</sup> Others wait until after all the lights are lit before singing it.
8. "Maoz Tzur" is customarily sung after the menorah is completely lit.

## ❖ Lighting Times

- To fulfill the mitzvah the lights have to be able to burn for at least half an hour during the "nighttime"<sup>37</sup>.
  - In this context of Halacha, "nighttime" begins forty minutes after sunset<sup>38</sup>. For example, if sunset is at 4:00, "nighttime" begins at 4:40. The minimum half-hour for the lights to burn must take place at anytime after 4:40.

### Ideal Lighting Time

- For Sunday through Thursday, the most appropriate time to light is ten minutes after sunset. (Please see endnote 39.) In this instance the candles must be able to burn for a minimum of sixty minutes - thirty minutes until "nighttime" begins and then for the half-hour minimum.
  - One who cannot leave work early enough to light at the ideal time (which unfortunately is often the case), should be sure to light as soon as it is practically possible<sup>40</sup>.
- See ❖ **Shabbos** below for the ideal lighting time for Friday and Saturday evenings.

## Menorah 101

By: R' Yochanan Schnall

### Alternate Lighting Times

#### – Late Afternoon

The earliest appropriate time to light begins at sunset. But if necessary, it is permitted once the halachic timeframe referred to as "*plag hamincha*" has arrived.<sup>41</sup> [www.myzmanim.com](http://www.myzmanim.com) is a good resource to see what time this is.

Especially when lighting at an earlier time it is important to ensure that there is enough fuel in the menorah for the lights to remain lit through "nighttime" *plus* the half-hour minimum.<sup>42</sup>

#### – Night

Lighting can also be done at any time during the night.<sup>43</sup> One who is lighting late at night, should see ❖ **When Away From Home** for important details.

### Extinguishing the Lights

- After the lights have burned for the required minimum time, they may be extinguished.<sup>44</sup>
  - If extinguishing them is anticipated, it is preferable to verbalize this intent before lighting<sup>45</sup>.
- Lights sometimes blow out or are accidentally extinguished before burning through the required time.
  - If they initially had a reasonable chance of remaining lit through the required time, it is proper - but not obligatory - to relight them.<sup>46</sup>
  - If they did not initially have a reasonable chance of remaining lit (such as because of a drafty location or insufficient fuel), they must be relit – this time in a manner that would promote burning properly for an entire half-hour of nighttime.<sup>47</sup>
    - A blessing is never recited when relighting.<sup>48</sup>
- It goes without saying that the lights may never be lit or deliberately extinguished on Friday evening - after Shabbos has begun.

### ❖ Who is Obligated?

- Everyone over bar/bas mitzvah is included in the obligation to light the menorah<sup>49</sup> (see **Lighting as a Group** below).
- Children who can understand the mitzvah's concept are obligated to perform it<sup>50</sup>. (This is often at age five or six<sup>51</sup>.) They too should use a suitable menorah and sufficient fuel in order to fulfill the mitzvah properly<sup>52</sup>.

### Lighting as a Group

- People can fulfill their obligation as a group and have a representative light on their behalf. For this to occur, all the group members must be residing in the same home and jointly own a share in the oil or candles.<sup>53</sup>
  - Joint ownership is accomplished either if someone acquires the fuel and wicks on behalf of the group or if each member contributes towards their cost<sup>54</sup>.
  - If at all possible, the beneficiaries should be present for the lighting and hear the blessings as they are recited<sup>55</sup>.
- In most families of Sefardic ancestry and their communities, households light as a group and only one menorah is lit in every home<sup>56</sup>.
- In families with Ashkenazic ancestry and those living in their communities, lighting as a group is not considered the ideal but rather each individual lights independently<sup>57</sup>.
  - Wives may light if they wish, but the general custom is that they include themselves with their husbands' lighting<sup>58</sup>.

## Menorah 101

By: R' Yochanan Schnall

- Whether girls who live with a family (see endnote 59) should light independently is a subject of dispute. The common practice is that they fulfill their obligation when the head of household lights.<sup>60</sup>
  - Single girls/women who do not live with a family may join together as a group with other women who live with them but it is best for them to light independently.<sup>61</sup>

### Living Alone

- Someone who lives alone and cannot light the menorah where it would be seen by other Jewish people, should endeavor to invite a Jewish friend over when the menorah is lit.<sup>62</sup>

## ❖ Shabbos

### Friday

- On Friday afternoon, the menorah is lit before the Shabbos candles<sup>63</sup>.
  - Let's do some math:
    - 18 The menorah is lit before the Shabbos candles which are lit eighteen minutes before sunset.
    - 40 Regarding Chanukah, "nighttime" begins forty minutes after sunset.
    - + 30 The menorah must contain enough fuel to remain lit through a half-hour of "nighttime".
    - 88 The menorah must contain enough fuel to remain lit for more than 88 minutes!<sup>64</sup>
- **Regular Chanukah candles do not last for 88 minutes and using them does not fulfill the mitzvah!** Some practical alternatives are:
  1. Extra-long candles; 2. an oil menorah with sufficient reservoirs; 3. Instead of a menorah, line up tea lights or Shabbos candles in accordance to the rules described above in ❖ **Setting Up- Menorah Styles.**
- It is appropriate to pray mincha before lighting the menorah<sup>65</sup>.
 

During the rest of the week, the menorah is usually lit after sunset and this preference is automatically fulfilled. On Friday afternoon, however, since the menorah must be lit before sunset this preference becomes more conspicuous<sup>66</sup>.

For this reason, many communities schedule mincha at an earlier time than usual. In a community where this is not available, the menorah should be lit before mincha since this preference does not override praying with a minyan<sup>67</sup>.
- Be aware that the menorah is muktzah and cannot be moved the entire Shabbos<sup>68</sup>. The stand or table that it is placed on usually becomes muktzah as well<sup>69</sup>.

### Saturday Night

It is forbidden to ignite a flame until after Shabbos concludes<sup>70</sup>. Therefore, the Chanukah lights cannot be lit until at least fifty minutes after sunset<sup>71</sup>.

- There are varying opinions whether the lighting of the menorah is before or after havdalah. One should follow his or her family custom<sup>72</sup>.
  - Families without a specific custom should recite havdalah first<sup>73</sup>.

## ❖ Importance of the Mitzvah

- When the ideal lighting time (ten minutes after sunset) arrives, the menorah should be lit as soon as it is practically possible<sup>74</sup>.
  - Preserving harmony in the home is more important than lighting at the proper time. For example, if one's wife is scheduled to arrive after the ideal lighting time, it is appropriate to wait for her.<sup>75</sup>

## Menorah 101

By: R' Yochanan Schnall

- Beginning half an hour<sup>76</sup> before the ideal lighting time, it is prohibited to begin a significant, absorbing activity until after the menorah has been lit.<sup>77</sup> Some examples are studying, eating a meal or beginning a project. (Snacking remains permitted.)<sup>78</sup>
- We do not ignite a flame from any of the eight Chanukah lights even if it is for the other lights in the menorah<sup>79</sup>.
- Since the Chanukah lights are designated for a mitzvah, no benefit may be derived from their light.<sup>80</sup>
- Yehudis was a heroine who played a significant part in the miraculous defeat of the Greeks. In her tribute women customarily refrain from domestic activities such as sewing or laundry<sup>81</sup> during the required time that the lights must burn<sup>82</sup> (see ❖ **Lighting Times**).
- Leftover wicks or fuel from the eight lights may be reused another night for the eight lights. However, using them for the shamash or any other purpose - mitzvah or mundane - is forbidden<sup>83</sup>.
  - After Chanukah, all leftover fuel and wicks must be destroyed or thrown away in a respectable fashion so that they are not mistakenly used.<sup>84</sup>
  - Leftover fuel or wicks that were not actually used in the menorah are always permitted for benefit<sup>85</sup>.

### ❖ When Away From Home

- When one is planning to travel during Chanukah, it is virtuous to wait until after sunset before leaving in order to light at home at the appropriate time.<sup>86</sup>

#### Away the Entire Night

The obligation to light when one will be away for the entire night depends on if other members of the household remain at home.

##### – Other Household Members Remain at Home

If other household members remain at home, one of them should be appointed to light on behalf of the entire home. The representative must be above bar/ bas mitzvah and priority should be given to the traveler's son or wife.<sup>87</sup>

- If possible, the traveler(s) should light locally as well. The blessings should not be recited unless it is an earlier time than the lighting at home. Alternatively, if a local person will be lighting and reciting the blessings, the traveler should listen to these before lighting<sup>88</sup>.

##### – No-One is Left at Home

If the entire household has left, the traveler(s) should light normally where they are staying.<sup>89</sup>

If they are eating most of their meals at the location where they will be sleeping, the menorah should be lit there<sup>90</sup>. If they are not, a rabbi should be consulted as to where they should light.

#### Away For Part of the Night

When away for part of the night, the obligation to light upon returning home depends on if other Jewish people will be awake at that time.

##### – Other People will be Awake

One who returns home at a time when other Jewish people will be awake and about and they would see the lit menorah, should light when arriving home.

- The same is true if it is appropriate/practical to wake other people in order that they see the lit menorah<sup>91</sup>.
- If an entire household is away for part of the night, they should light normally upon their return<sup>92</sup>.

## Menorah 101

By: R' Yochanan Schnall

### - **No-One will be Awake**

One who returns home at a time that other Jewish people will not be awake and about and no other Jewish person would see the lit menorah, should not light when arriving home. Rather, a member of the household who is above bar/ bas mitzvah should be appointed as the home representative. The appointee should light at the normal time.<sup>93</sup>

- Priority should be given to the traveler's son or wife if they are available.
- One who lives alone should light when returning home. Ideally, the blessings should be recited only if there are still Jewish people who are awake and about that would see the lit menorah<sup>94</sup>.

### **Lighting before Leaving**

One who is leaving in the afternoon should consider the fact that the earliest possible lighting time may have already arrived. (See ❖**Lighting Times**.) The traveler should light before leaving and – as noted above – the flames have to remain burning through the appropriate mitzvah timeframe.

- Note: Lighting before sunset is not ideal. Therefore, if this traveler is also scheduled to return home that very night when other Jewish people would be awake and see the lit menorah, it is preferable to light when returning home<sup>95</sup>.

---

אשריה לדי' כי גמל עלי

I am indebted to my wife for all the patience and support she continues to have for me.

Thank you my dear reader, for without your interest this pamphlet would not exist.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to be a quick review of some pertinent laws relevant to this time of year. It was formulated for those who do not have the opportunity or resources to study the laws in detail.

Many of these laws and sources have been adapted from the seforim:

Halachos of Chanukah by Rabbi Shimon D. Eider חג בהג זצ"ל, הלכות חג בהג זצ"ל by R' Moshe Mordechai Karp שליט"א  
 and קונטרס שיעורי הלכה מתוך שיעורים של רב שמואל פעלדער

Please share your feedback with me at [TimelyTorah@gmail.com](mailto:TimelyTorah@gmail.com).

Feel welcome to make copies of this pamphlet for free distribution

Kisleiv 5775

<sup>1</sup> Mishna Berura 673:28  
<sup>2</sup> See Rema 671:4 and Biur Halacha "Umutar"  
<sup>3</sup> Rema 671:4  
<sup>4</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:1  
<sup>5</sup> Rema 673:1  
<sup>6</sup> Mishna Berura 671:18; Kaf Hachayim 673:3, 671:32  
<sup>7</sup> Rema 673:1  
<sup>8</sup> Halachos of Chanukah chapter II note 62  
<sup>9</sup> Shulchan Aruch 675:2  
<sup>10</sup> Rema 671:4  
<sup>11</sup> Mishna Berura 672:1  
<sup>12</sup> Aruch Hashulchan 671:24, see also Shiurei Halacha of Rabbis Shmuel Felder  
<sup>13</sup> Mishna Berura 671:38  
<sup>14</sup> Rema 671:7. See Igros Moshe Orach Chayim IV #125  
<sup>15</sup> Sha'ar Hatziyun 671:42  
<sup>16</sup> Sha'ar Hatziyun 671:30  
<sup>17</sup> Since the main publicizing is for the members of the home See Rema 671  
<sup>18</sup> Rema 671:7  
<sup>19</sup> Mishna Berura 680:1  
<sup>20</sup> Rema 671:2  
<sup>21</sup> Mishna Berura 675:6  
<sup>22</sup> Shulchan Aruch 671:2  
<sup>23</sup> Shulchan Aruch 676:5  
<sup>24</sup> Shulchan Aruch 676:5  
<sup>25</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:1  
<sup>26</sup> Mishna Berura 673:15  
<sup>27</sup> Mishna Berura 673:14  
<sup>28</sup> Rema 674:1  
<sup>29</sup> See Rema 673:1  
<sup>30</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:1  
<sup>31</sup> Mishna Berura 672:10  
<sup>32</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Rema 676:2  
<sup>33</sup> Shulchan Aruch 676:2  
<sup>34</sup> Shulchan Aruch 432:1  
<sup>35</sup> Shulchan Aruch 676:5  
<sup>36</sup> Mishna Berura 676:8  
<sup>37</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:2, Mishna Berura 672:5  
<sup>38</sup> Igros Moshe Orach Chayim IV 101:6  
<sup>39</sup> There is much dispute regarding the ideal time to light the menorah. What is presented here is according to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein ז"ל (Igros Moshe Orach Chayim vol. 4 101:6)  
<sup>40</sup> Mishna Berura 672:10  
<sup>41</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:1  
<sup>42</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:1  
<sup>43</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:2  
<sup>44</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:2  
<sup>45</sup> Mishna Berura 672:7  
<sup>46</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Rema 673:3; Mishna Berura 673:27  
<sup>47</sup> Mishna Berura 673:25  
<sup>48</sup> Mishna Berura 673:25  
<sup>49</sup> Shulchan Aruch 675:3  
<sup>50</sup> Shulchan Aruch 677:2, Rema 675:3  
<sup>51</sup> Mishna Berura 128:123

<sup>52</sup> See Biur Halacha 657 "k'dei", Mishna Berura 658:28 and Shiurei Halacha of Rabbi Shmuel Felder  
<sup>53</sup> Mishna Berura 677:1 (If the entire group is financially dependent on one person – such as is often the case with a family - it is not necessary for them to have joint ownership in the oil and wicks.)  
<sup>54</sup> Shulchan Aruch 677:1, Mishna Berura 677:3  
<sup>55</sup> Mishna Berura 677:4  
<sup>56</sup> Shulchan Aruch 601:2  
<sup>57</sup> Rema 601:2  
<sup>58</sup> Mishna Berura 671:9  
<sup>59</sup> Their own family, or as a boarder. (A boarder must also regularly eat meals together with the host family)  
<sup>60</sup> See Mishna Berura 671:2 and 675:13. See also Shiurei Halacha by Rabbi Shmuel Felder  
<sup>61</sup> Shulchan Aruch 675:3  
<sup>62</sup> See Sha'ar Hatziyun 672:17 and Igros Moshe IV 105:7  
<sup>63</sup> Shulchan Aruch 679:1  
<sup>64</sup> Mishna Berura 679:2, see Igros Moshe Orach Chayim IV 101:6  
<sup>65</sup> Sha'arei Teshuva 679:1  
<sup>66</sup> Mishna Berura 679:2  
<sup>67</sup> Halachos of Chanukah V A 3  
<sup>68</sup> Shulchan Aruch 679:1  
<sup>69</sup> Shulchan Aruch 309:4  
<sup>70</sup> Shemos 35:3  
<sup>71</sup> Igros Moshe Volume 4 #62 (page 94)  
<sup>72</sup> Mishna Berura 681:3  
<sup>73</sup> See Aruch Hashulchan 681:2  
<sup>74</sup> Mishna Berura 672:10  
<sup>75</sup> See Shiurei Halacha by Rabbi Shmuel Felder  
<sup>76</sup> See Sha'ar Hatziyun 672:14  
<sup>77</sup> Mishna Berura 672:10  
<sup>78</sup> Halachos of Chanukah III A 10  
<sup>79</sup> Rema 674:1  
<sup>80</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:1 see Mishna Berura 672:8  
<sup>81</sup> See Halachos of Chanukah I B 9 for a definition of what is included  
<sup>82</sup> Shulchan Aruch 670:1, Mishna Berura 670:3  
<sup>83</sup> Shulchan Aruch 677:4, Mishna Berura 677:17  
<sup>84</sup> Shulchan Aruch 677:4, Mishna Berura 677:19  
<sup>85</sup> Biur Halacha 677 "Hatzarich"  
<sup>86</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 5  
<sup>87</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 2  
<sup>88</sup> Mishna Berura 677:16  
<sup>89</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 8  
<sup>90</sup> See Biur Halacha 677 "Bimkom"  
<sup>91</sup> Mishna Berura 672:11  
<sup>92</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 8  
<sup>93</sup> Halachos of Chanukah IV A 2  
<sup>94</sup> Mishna Berura 672:11, see Sha'ar Hatziyun 17  
<sup>95</sup> See Shiurei Halacha by Rabbi Shmuel Felder