

In Hilchos YOM TOV

You have heard the shaylos . . .
Now learn the issues & the opinions

When to Light the Chanukah Menorah

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by **Rabbi Shmuel Stein** at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

The Rambam¹ writes that “One must be very careful regarding the mitzva of lighting the Chanukah menorah. This is a very important mitzva because of the *pirusmei nisa*, the publicizing of the miracle of Chanukah, that is involved.” The Gemara² teaches us, “Someone who is careful about (keeping the halachos³ of) lighting the Chanukah Menorah will merit having sons [and sons-in-laws⁴] who are Torah scholars.”⁵ One of the important halachos of lighting the Chanukah menorah is to light at the correct time. In this chapter we will discuss the following halachos:

- 1) The ideal time to light the *menorah*
- 2) How long must the lights of the Chanukah *menorah* burn?
- 3) The latest time to light the *menorah*
- 4) The *menorah* nowadays: Lighting for one’s household

The Ideal Time to Light the Menorah

The Gemara⁶ writes that the Chanukah menorah should be lit at the time that the “the sun sets.” The *poskim* discuss exactly how to define when this 2. time occurs. There are two basic opinions:

- 1) **The Vilna Goan:** The *menorah* should be lit at *Shkiyah*.
- 2) **The Shulchan Aruch:** The *menorah* should be lit at *Tzais Ha’kochavim*.³ 4.

This dispute revolves around what time the Gemara is referring to when it says that one should light the *menorah* “when the sun sets.” To understand this dispute, we will quickly review the definitions of *Shkiyah* and *Tzais Ha’kochavim*:

Shkiyah (Sunset). *Shkiya* occurs when the sphere of the sun sinks beneath the horizon. Although the rays of the sun are still above the horizon once the sphere of the sun has set *Shkiya* has occurred.



Tzais Ha’kochavim (the appearance of three stars). After the rays of the sun have disappeared and the sky has gone dark, stars begin to emerge. When three medium size stars appear *Tzais Ha’kochavim* has occurred.



As we mentioned above, the dispute between the *Vilna Goan* and the *Shulchan Aruch* revolves around what time the Gemara is referring to when it says that one should light the *menorah* “when the sun sets.”

1. The Vilna Goan - at Shkiyah: The *Vilna Goan*⁷ rules that the Gemara is referring to the time of *Shkiyah*, and thus the ideal time to light the Chanukah Menorah is at *Shkiya*. Accordingly, the ideal time to light the Menorah this year in Miami Beach is 5:30 pm.

2. The Shulchan Aruch - At Tzais Ha’kochavim: The *Shulchan Aruch*⁸ rules that the Gemara is referring to the time of *Tzais Ha’kochavim*, and thus the ideal time to light the Chanukah *menorah* is at *Tzais Ha’kochavim*.

There are varying customs as to when *Tzais Ha’kochavim* occurs. Some follow the opinion that *Tzais Ha’kochavim* occurs 72 minutes after *Shkiya*, and accordingly would light the *menorah* this year in Miami Beach at 6:42 pm. Others follow the opinion that *Tzais Ha’kochavim* occurs 50 minutes after *Shkiya* and would light the *menorah* this year in Miami Beach at 6:20 pm. While others follow the opinion of 8.5° and would light the *menorah* this year in Miami Beach at 6:07 pm.

Which opinion should one follow?

There are various customs regarding which of these two opinions to follow:

Chasidic and Sephardic communities generally follow the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and the Chanukah Menorah is lit at *Tzais Ha’kochavim*.⁹

Many Litvish communities follow a compromise between these two opinions is followed, and the *menorah* is lit at a time that is acceptable according to *both* opinions. This is accomplished by lighting between 20 to 30 minutes¹⁰ after *Shkiyah*, as lighting at this time can fulfill both the opinion of the *Vilna Goan* and the *Shulchan Aruch*.¹¹ According to this custom, one would light the Chanukah *menorah* this year in Miami Beach sometime between 5:50 pm and 6:00 pm.

To Summarize: There are two commonly practiced customs regarding the ideal time is to light the Chanukah *menorah*. In Chasidic and Sephardic communities, the *menorah* is lit at *Tzais Ha’kochavim* following the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and in many Litvish communities the *menorah* is lit between 20 to 30 minutes after *Shkiyah* in order to conform to both the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Vilna Goan*.

How Long Must the Lights of the Chanukah Menorah Burn?

The Gemara¹² writes that the Chanukah *menorah* must stay lit “until people in the streets have left the marketplace.” Since the primary purpose of the lighting the Chanukah *menorah* is to publicize the miracle of Chanukah, the *menorah* must stay lit until the people have left the

1 Hilchos Chanukah perek 4 see *Shulchan Aruch* 671:1 and *Mishna Berura* 671:2 2 Shabbos 23b see Tur 671:1 3 Shvus Yitzchak (Chanuka, at the end). Others explain this Gemara to mean that one who is careful to have a nice flame for the mitzva will have this merit (see Peleh Yoetz Ner Shabbos and Ner Chanuka). 4 Rashi Shabbos 23b (d’bei nasha and d’h nafik minayhu) 5 The Bach (671:1) points out that being careful regarding the halachos of the Chanukah menorah not only works to merit having children who are Torah scholars but can also help make oneself a Torah scholar as well. However, the Bach adds that this *segula* will obviously only help if applies himself properly to Torah learning. 6 Shabbos 21b 7 See Gra here on *Shulchan Aruch* 672. The intention of the Gra must be referring to the *first Shkiyah* because the Gra (261:2) does not agree that there are two *Shkiyos*. There is really a third opinion brought in the *Mishna Berura* (672:1) that the Gemara is referring to the *second Shkiyah*. However, discussing this opinion at depth is beyond the scope of this discussion. This is also the opinion of the Rambam Chanukah 4:2 brought in Biur Halacha 672:1 d’h Lo meachrim 8 672:1 9 See Sefer Mikadesh Yisroel, Chanukah 130 that this is the opinion if most *poskim* and the custom in most communities (Ashkenazic and Sephardic). 10 Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky is quoted to have ruled that one should light 20 minutes after *Shkiya* (Emes L’Yaakov 672 note 586). Rav Ahron Kotler ruled that one should light between 25-30 minutes after *Shkiya* (cited by Rabbi Eider pg. 20) See sefer Kovetz Halachos Chanukah pg. 48. See Igros Moshe O.C. 4:101:6 who rules that one should light 10 min after *Shkiya*. 11 When the Menorah is lit within a half an hour after *Shkiyah* it complies with the opinion of the Vilna Goan for the *Shulchan Aruch* rules (672:2) that one may light up to a half an hour after the ideal time to light (as we will later discuss). Lighting at this time also fulfills the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch* based on the Biur Halacha (672:1 d’h Lo meachrim) who writes that if someone lit within a half an hour prior to *Tzais Ha’kochavim* [or the second *Shkiya*] he has fulfilled these opinions as well. Therefore, when one lights 25 minutes after the *first Shkiya* it is within a half an hour prior to the *second Shkiya*. Although it is more than a half an hour away from *Tzais Ha’kochavim* (i.e. 72 minutes), since it is still dark outside one can still be *yotzei* this opinion (see Biur halacha 672:1 d’h V’Lo makdim) although the Menorah is lit prior to *Tzais Ha’kochavim* since it is lit within close enough proximity to *Tzais Ha’kochavim* one would still fulfill the mitzva according to the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch*. 12 Shabbos 21b

marketplace. The *Shulchan Aruch*¹³ writes that people generally leave the market a half an hour after the time of lighting the *menorah*. Therefore, one must ensure that the lights of the *menorah* can stay lit for a half an hour after the proper time of lighting the *menorah*.

Accordingly, someone who follows the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* must allow the oil to burn for a half hour after *Tzais Ha'kochavim*, which this year in Miami Beach is 7:12 pm (based on the opinion of 72 minutes). Those who follow the ruling of the *Litvish poskim* must also ensure that there is enough oil to burn until a half an hour after *Tzais Ha'kochavim* (7:12 pm), because since they too wish to conform with the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*.¹⁴

The Latest Time to Light the Menorah

The Gemara¹⁵ writes that if someone is unable to light the *menorah* in the ideal time “he may light the Chanukah *menorah* until the people in the streets have left the market.” Once people have left the market, he can no longer publicize the miracle of Chanukah to the people in the streets. Accordingly, the *Shulchan Aruch*¹⁶ writes that one must be careful to light the *menorah* before the half an hour (after the ideal time to light the *menorah*) has passed.¹⁷

This would mean, that the latest time that one may light the *menorah* and recite a *beracha* is a half an hour after *Tzais Ha'kochavim* which this year in Miami Beach is 7:12 pm. Nevertheless, nowadays, when we light inside our homes many of the halachos regarding when to light the Chanukah *menorah* have changed, and someone who arrives home after this time may still light the *menorah*, as we will now discuss.

The Menorah Nowadays: Pirsumei Nisa for One's Household

The Gemara¹⁸ writes that “One must publicize the miracle of Chanukah to the people in the streets by lighting the *menorah* outdoors at the doorway of his home.” However, the *Shulchan Aruch*¹⁹ writes that (nowadays) when it can be dangerous to light the *menorah* outdoors, one should light the *menorah* on his table inside his home.” The Mishna Berura²⁰ explains that when one lights indoors the purpose of lighting the *menorah* is no longer to publicize the miracle to the people *outside* in the streets, but rather to publicize the miracle to the people of his household.

Accordingly, the Rema²¹ writes that nowadays when we light the *menorah* indoors for the people in our household, one may light the *menorah* and recite the *berachos* the entire night, even after the time that “people have left the market” has passed.²²

How long must the menorah stay lit nowadays?

The Mishna Berura²³ rules that even nowadays one must use enough oil for the *menorah* to remain lit for a half an hour. Just as in the times of the Gemara the *menorah* was required to stay lit for a half an hour (until the people left the marketplace), this requirement remains nowadays as well. Although we no longer light the *menorah* for the people in the streets, nevertheless once Chazal required that the *menorah* stay lit for a half an hour this requirement stays in effect nowadays as well. The Mishna Berura adds, that “once the *menorah* has been lit for a half an hour one may blow out the flames, as once this time passes there is no longer a mitzva to allow the lights to continue to burn.” However, other *poskim*²⁴ write that although one does not have an obligation to keep the lights burning past a half an hour, if one's *menorah* is lit in a place where people in the streets can see it (e.g., at a window which faces the street), it is preferable to allow the *menorah* to stay lit for as long as people are still in the street so that it can create more *pirsumei nissa*.

Keeping the original times instituted by Chazal

The Rema²⁵ writes that although nowadays the *menorah* is lit for the people in one's household and it is therefore permissible to light the entire night, one should nevertheless make an effort to light the *menorah* at the ideal times that were effective during the times of the Gemara. Meaning, that even nowadays one should try to adhere to the times discussed earlier. For example, those who follow the *Chasidic* and *Sephardic* custom should try to light at *Tzais Ha'kochavim*, and those who follow the *Litvish* custom should try to light between 20 to 30 minutes after *Shkiya*.²⁶

To Summarize

The Gemara writes that someone who is careful about the mitzva of lighting the Chanukah *menorah* will merit to have sons (and sons-in-laws) that are Torah scholars. This includes someone who is meticulous to light the Chanukah *menorah* in the most ideal time. Nowadays, when we light indoors and publicize the miracle of Chanukah to our household, one may light the Chanukah *menorah* the entire night. Nevertheless, the Rema writes that ideally one should keep to the times that were applicable to the times of the Gemara when they lit outdoors and publicized the miracle of Chanukah to the people in the street. *Chasidic* and *Sephardic* custom is to light at *Tzais Ha'kochavim*, and *Litvish* custom is to light between 20 to 30 minutes after *Shkiya*.) The *menorah* must remain light for a half an hour.

The intention of this summary is to discuss common practical shaylos. One should consult a Rav concerning p'sak halacha.

¹³ 672:2 ¹⁴ Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky (Kovetz Halachos pg. 49 note 30). Similarly, the Mishna Berura (679:2) rules that when lighting on erev Shabbos one must ensure that enough oil is used that the lights can burn until a half an hour after *Tzais Ha'kochavim*. ¹⁵ Shabbos 21a ¹⁶ 672:2 ¹⁷ The Shulchan Aruch (672:2) rules that although ideally one must light before the half an hour passes, if one did not light at that time he may still light the entire night. Many *poskim* rule that when the *menorah* is lit after the half an hour has passed he may not recite a *beracha* since it no longer publicizes the miracle of Chanukah, as the Bais Yosef 672 d"h *V'ahu* states that lighting after people have left the market is only acceptable *mi'safeik* (as an uncertainty) and therefore a *bracha* should not be recited. Still, other *poskim* rule that one may recite a *bracha* [see *Machtzis hashekel* 672:4 d"h *ain*] as they argue that the Bais Yosef retracted from his ruling in his *sefer Bais Yosef* as is evident from his ruling in the *Shulchan Aruch*. Others conclude that one should not recite a *beracha* [Gra Ma'asei Rav Chanukah 231] ¹⁸ 672:2 ¹⁹ Shabbos 21b ¹⁹ Shulchan Aruch 671:5 ²⁰ 672:9 ²¹ 672:2 ²² The Mishna Berura 672:11 writes that one may recite the *berachos* on the lighting of the Menorah only if people of his household are awake. Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky rules [Kovetz halachos Chanukah pgs. 59-60 in note 13] that someone who lives alone should recite a *beracha* even though nobody else is around, since the way he generally performs the *pirsumei nissa* is to himself. However, someone who generally does have other people living with him must fulfill his *pirsumei nissa* with at least one member of his household (Mishna Berura 672:11). The Mishna Berura (ibid) writes that if someone arrives home and the members of his household are sleeping, he should wake them up in order to light the Menorah and recite the *berachos*. Some *poskim* [Igros Moshe 4:105:7] rule that one may recite a *beracha* even if there are no other people of the household around. ²³ 672:6 ²⁴ Hilchas chag b'chag pg. 63; also said in the name of the Brisker Rav [cited by Rav Felder (of Lakewood) *sefer Shiurei halacha*] ²⁵ 672:2 ²⁶ The Aruch Hashulchan explains that although these times may no longer apply nowadays one should try to keep to the times which were initially established by Chazal. Additionally, the Biur Halacha (d"h *U'mikol*) explains that even nowadays some people light in a place where there is some *pirsumei nissa* for the people outside therefore one should try to keep the original times that Chazal established.