

# RABBINIC HOLIDAYS

## CHANUKA

### INTRODUCTION TO CHANUKA

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Chanuka commemorates the miracle of God's saving the Jews during the time of the Greek empire. The Greeks wanted to destroy Judaism and Jewish practices and have the Jews follow the Greek culture and religion. A small group of Jews defeated the Greek army, which was the world's greatest military force at the time. Contrast Chanuka with Purim (on Purim, the Jews' physical lives were in danger while on Chanuka, their religion was being threatened).

### CHANUKA: BACKGROUND

#### Chanuka: Main Miracle

The main miracle of Chanuka was in defeating the Greeks; the oil's burning for eight days was secondary.

#### Chanuka: Why Eight Days

Eight days were required for the people who had contact with dead people to become ritually pure in order to make new olive oil.

#### Chanuka: Why Asher Kidshanu

Chazal have the authority to make laws, so we say “Who sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us” (asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu) for Chanuka blessings and other purposes that Chazal instituted after the Torah was given.

### CHANUKA: CUSTOMS

#### Chanuka: Customs: Foods

It is a non-binding custom to eat potato pancakes (latkes) on Chanuka; in Israel, it is also a non-binding custom to eat jelly-filled doughnuts (sufganiot).

### CHANUKA: CANDLES

### CHANUKA CANDLES: MEANING

#### Chanuka: Candles: Meaning

The reason for lighting Chanuka candles is to publicize the Chanuka miracle (pirsumei nisa).

### CHANUKA: CANDLES: WHAT TO LIGHT

#### Chanuka: Candles: What To Light: Menora Shape

All eight candle holders of a chanuka menorah must be on the same level. The menora itself may be curved horizontally.

The shamash must be slightly raised or lowered or to the side of the menora or in the center, as long as it clearly is not part of the other eight candles.

**NOTE** You may put oil lights directly onto a windowsill or other level surface, but candles must be in or on some type of holder.

### CHANUKA: CANDLES: HOW MANY TO LIGHT

#### Chanuka: Candles: One per House

The basic commandment is for one Chanuka candle to be lit per house per night. The extra candles (matching the number of days in Chanuka) and having every male light his own menora is an enhancement and a custom.

**NOTE** Having every male in the family light his own Chanuka candles is a universally accepted but non-binding custom among Ashkenazi Jews.

### **Chanuka: Candles: One Shamash per Area**

You only need one service (shamash) candle for any amount of Chanuka candles/oil lamps (menorot) in the same area.

## **CHANUKA: CANDLES: WHO SHOULD LIGHT**

### **Chanuka: Candles: Who May Light**

Anyone in the household who has reached *bar* or *bat mitzva* age can light Chanuka candles, thereby fulfilling the *halachic* requirement that one candle per household per night must be lit.

### **Chanuka: Candles: Light for Yourself**

Light Chanuka candles for yourself, even if there are no other people around. If there are other people asleep in the house who have not fulfilled the *mitzva* of lighting Chanuka candles, you should wake them so they can see the candles. **Do not wake children below gil chinuch.**

### **Chanuka: Candles: Obligation for Women To Light**

Women, like men, are required to light Chanuka candles or have them lit for them.

**NOTE** It was not traditionally customary for women and girls to light when men were present. The custom is that in a house in which the husband lights Chanuka candles, the wife does not also light. However, a wife is required to light if her husband is not present, and girls (above 12 years old) are required to light if no men are present.

### **Chanuka: Candles: Wife May Light for Husband**

A wife may light Chanuka candles for her husband if he is not home.

**NOTE** If your wife lit for you and you return late at night, you do not need to light for yourself.

## **CHANUKA: CANDLES: WHERE TO LIGHT**

### **Chanuka: Candles: Light in Own Home, Except...**

Light Chanuka candles in your own house, unless you are not in the city in which you live.

**NOTE** Even though the menora is for publicizing the miracle, Chazal set the observance to take place in each person's home (and not in groups at one home with several families together).

### **Chanuka: Candles: Place Anywhere**

You may place Chanuka candles anywhere (but they should be lit wherever you are staying). Outside of Eretz Yisrael, it is customary to place them by a window, ideally facing the street.

**NOTE** Consult a rabbi as to whether candles should be lit inside an aquarium or other box as is sometimes done in Israel, since the candles should not be lit in a place where the wind would blow them out if not for the box around them.

## **CHANUKA: CANDLES: WHEN TO LIGHT**

### **Chanuka: Candles: Light After Dark**

Chanuka candles should be lit after dark (except on Fridays).

**NOTE** You may light chanuka candles as much as 1 ¼ hours before dark (not 1 ¼ hours before sunset!) but the ideal and proper time is after dark.

**NOTE** Although eating a snack, working, and other activities are permitted before lighting the candles, nothing should be done that might make you forget to light the candles, and it is best to light the candles as soon as possible.

### **Chanuka: Candles: Latest Time To Light**

**Latest time to light Chanuka candles:** 102 minutes before sunrise (so they will burn for 30 minutes before daybreak).

### **Chanuka: Candles: If You Fell Asleep before Lighting**

Wake up sometime during the night and light the Chanuka candles if you fell asleep before dark.

## **CHANUKA: CANDLES: HOW LONG MUST BURN**

### **Chanuka: Candles: Must Burn 30 Minutes**

Chanuka candles must burn for at least 30 minutes after dark.

### **Chanuka: Candles: Relighting Candle That Burned Out**

A Chanuka candle (or candles) that is expected to burn for at least 30 minutes does not need to be replaced or relit, even if it burns out in less than 30 minutes.

### **Chanuka: Candles: Relighting Candle that Blew Out**

You do not need to relight Chanuka candles that blew out after having burned for less than 30 minutes after dark, if they had been lit in a place where they would not be expected to have blown out.

If they were lit in a windy or drafty place, you must relight them in a different place and say the blessings again.

## **CHANUKA: CANDLES: WHAT YOU MAY DO WHILE...**

### **Chanuka: Candles: Do Not Use Light**

You may not use light from Chanuka candles for any purpose (do not read by them; do not light other candles from them, except from the shamash).

### **Chanuka: Candles: No Work While Candles Burning**

Do not do any “work” while the Chanuka candles are burning.

**REASON** In order to show that we are not using the candles for any other purpose.

**NOTE** “Work” may include some housework but usually means skilled labor done by professionals that may not be done on chol ha'moed and that requires light to do it.

## **CHANUKA: CANDLES: HOW TO LIGHT**

### **Chanuka Candles: Light Left to Right; Add Right to Left**

Light Chanuka candles from left to right, as you face it, not as it will be seen from outside the window. Add the new candle from right to left. For example, on the first night, put the candle on the extreme right of the menora.

**To set up and light Chanuka candles:**

- Set up the candles starting from the right side of the menora.
- Light the shamash candle and hold it while you say the blessings:
  - Lehadlik ner shel Chanuka.
  - She'asa nisim l'avoteinu ba'yamim ha'heim ba'zman ha'zeh.

- (And on the first night, add) She'hecheyanu.

- Light the left-most candle first and proceed to the next candle on the right, and so on.
- Once you have lit the first candle each night, say ha'neiroi hallalu (this is a halacha).

**NOTE** Once the menora has been lit, you may not turn or move it, even to the window.

**NOTE** Saying Ma'oz Tzur is a widespread custom but is not required.

Chanukiah and or type unknown

Chanukiah

### Chanuka: Candles: Lighting on Friday

On Friday of Chanuka, light Shabbat candles after Chanuka candles; at least one Chanuka candle must burn until at least 30 minutes after dark.

If a man forgets to light the Chanuka candles, he may still light them until sunset or until he says Mizmor shir l'yom haShabbat, whichever comes earlier.

But women start Shabbat when they light the Shabbat candles and so they may not light Chanuka candles after lighting Shabbat candles.

### Chanuka: Candles: SheHecheyanu on Later Days

Say she'hecheyanu the first time you light Chanuka candles each year:

- Even if your first time is the second or subsequent nights.
- Even if someone lit for you the previous night.

## CHANUKA: SYNAGOGUE MENORA

### Chanuka: Synagogue Menora: Where

A Chanuka menora in a synagogue should be set up at the front of the synagogue, oriented east-west, and lit while standing on the south side and facing north (the person lighting will be facing toward the inside of the synagogue).

### Chanuka: Synagogue Menora: How Long To Burn

The Chanuka candles in synagogue do not need to burn for 30 minutes after dark or even for any 30-minute period but that is the ideal minimum duration for burning.

### Chanuka: Synagogue Menora: SheHecheyanu in Synagogue

If you light the Chanuka menora in the synagogue on the first night of Chanuka, say she'hecheyanu in synagogue. When you go home, if you light only for yourself, do not say she'hecheyanu again. However, if you light for your wife or for any adults including children above the age of bar or bat mitzva, say she'hecheyanu again.

## CHANUKA: HALLEL

### Chanuka: Hallel on Rosh Chodesh

When Chanuka coincides with Rosh Chodesh, say full hallel (as is done on all days of Chanuka, instead of the "half-hallel" that is said on Rosh Chodesh).

## FAST DAYS

## INTRODUCTION TO FAST DAYS

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The purpose of Jewish fast days is to make us reflect on our behavior and improve it by:

- Eliminating negative actions and thoughts, and
- Taking more care in our observance of the commandments.

God told the Jewish people on many occasions that He did not want their pointless sacrifices or fast days but rather wanted the Jews to improve their behavior. If people fast but still have reprehensible behavior, the people have missed the point and purpose of bringing sacrifices and having fast days.

All fast days may be circumvented for health reasons. Consult a [rabbi](#).

Fast days come in several varieties:

- Major fast days: Yom Kippur and the Ninth of Av (Tish'a B'Av).
- Minor fast days: There are four minor fast days; see below.
- Fast for First-Born
- Individual Fasts

### The Major Fasts

Yom Kippur and the Ninth of Av begin before sunset and are both slightly longer than 24 hours. Yom Kippur is a festive day while, on the Ninth of Av, Jews mourn for the destruction of both Jerusalem Temples (the first was destroyed by Babylonians; the second, by the Romans). On both fasts, it is forbidden to:

- Eat or drink.
- Wear leather shoes (but you may wear any other clothing made of leather).
- Bathe (or even to wash anything more than fingers; you may not use a deodorant--not even a spray type--since it is similar to washing).
- Have marital relations.
- Use cosmetics or body scents.

### The Minor Fasts

The four minor fasts begin 72 minutes before local sunrise. They technically end at dark but functionally end after *ma'ariv* (and for the Fast of Esther, after hearing the megila). Unlike most times in the Jewish calendar, this 72 minutes is normal time and NOT based on the current length of the day (sha'a zmanit):

- Fast of Esther (Ta'anit Esther): Day preceding Purim (or sometimes earlier).
- Fast of Gedalia (Tzom Gedalia): Usually the day after Rosh Hashana.
- Tenth of Tevet (Asara b' Tevet):
- Seventeenth of Tamuz (Shiv'asar b'Tamuz): Beginning of the Three Weeks of semi-mourning before Tish'a b'Av.

On all fast days, eating and drinking are forbidden. The Tenth of Tevet and the Seventeenth of Tamuz additionally have the same restrictions as the Nine Days. So you may wash or bathe on the Fast of Esther and on Tzom Gedalia but not on the Tenth of Tevet and the Seventeenth of Tamuz. (See [Nine Days: Restrictions](#)).

**NOTE** On a fast day that has been delayed for Shabbat, there may be leniencies for:

- The mohel, sandak, and father of a baby getting a brit mila to eat after mincha.
- Pregnant or nursing women (this leniency applies to eating throughout the day).

### Fast for First Born

Fast for first-born males 13 years old and older, on the day before Passover. This includes first-born cohanim and Levites (levi'im). The fast begins 72 normal minutes before sunrise and ends with kiddush at the seder. However, the widespread custom is to attend a siyum on the day before the first seder so that the first-born

men do not need to fast on that day.

## Personal Fasts

Fast by a groom and bride on their wedding day is an example of personal fasts. This fast begins 72 normal minutes before sunrise and ends with drinking wine under the chuppa.

## FAST DAYS: TIMING

### FAST DAYS: WHEN THEY START

#### Fasts that Start 72 Minutes before Sunrise

All fasts start 72 minutes (normal time) before sunrise except for the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur. These include:

- 17th of Tamuz
- 10th of Tevet
- Tzom Gedalia
- Fast of Esther
- Fast by a groom and bride on their wedding day
- Fast for first-born males on the day before Passover. This includes first-born cohanim and Levites (levi'im).

**NOTE** Unlike most times in the Jewish calendar, this 72 minutes is normal time and NOT based on the current length of the day (sha'a zmanit).

#### Fast Days and Crossing International Dateline

Your fast-day times are determined by where you ARE, not where you started traveling or where you are heading. This means that when you reach sunset (plus enough time for the sky to get dark), your fast is over.

## FAST DAYS: PRACTICES

### FAST DAYS: TEETH BRUSHING

#### Fast Days: Brushing Teeth without Water

You may brush your teeth on Yom Kippur and all other fast days without water and without toothpaste. (You may not use water to brush your teeth even on Tenth of Tevet and 17th of Tamuz.)

#### Fast Days: Flossing on Fast Days

You may floss your teeth on Yom Kippur as long as your gums don't bleed and on other fast days even if they do bleed.

### FAST DAYS: EATING

#### Fast Days: Tasting Food

You may not taste food (even a minimal amount) on a fast day, even if you are cooking for the end of the fast, such as on Tish'a b'Av.

#### Fast Days: Health Difficulties

You may eat or drink as necessary on the fasts of the Tenth of Tevet, 17th of Tamuz, and Tzom Gedalia if you are sick, faint, or dehydrated, but only enough to resolve your health difficulty. Consult a rabbi.

#### Fast Day: Forgetting

If you forgot and broke your fast on any fast day, you may not continue eating after you remember that you should be fasting.

# FAST DAYS: PRAYERS

## Fast Day: Sim Shalom

Say "sim shalom" instead of "shalom rav" at mincha on a fast day, even if you are not fasting at mincha.

## Tzom Gedalia: Katveinu

On Tzom Gedalia, when saying avinu malkeinu, say "katveinu" and not "zachreinu."

## Tenth of Tevet: Friday

When Tenth of Tevet occurs on a Friday, you may not start Shabbat early in order to cut short the fast. That is, you may not eat until dark, as is normally the case.

## Aneinu

On a fast day, if you are not fasting:

- Do not say aneinu.
- Do say *Sim shalom*.

## VaYechal

If at least six of the men in a mincha minyan on a fast day are fasting, read the Torah portion Va'yechal (Exodus 32: 11-14). If fewer than six are fasting, omit it.

## THREE WEEKS/TISH'A B'AV

### THREE WEEKS: THREE STAGES OF MOURNING

#### Seventeenth of Tamuz to Tish'a B'Av: Three Stages of Mourning

Before Tish'a b'Av we are in a type of mourning so the laws are similar to mourning for a parent. There are three stages:

**The "Three Weeks":** The least severe stage starts three weeks preceding the Ninth of Av

**The "Nine Days":** The next-most severe stage begins on Rosh Chodesh Av.

**"Week" of Tish'a b'Av:** The most severe mourning is during the "week" of Tish'a b'Av (beginning after Shabbat preceding Tish'a b'Av).

### THREE WEEKS: RESTRICTIONS

#### Three Weeks: Restrictions

Forbidden during the Three Weeks :

- Saying she'hecheyanu;
- Shaving;
- Haircuts;
- Listening to music (even recorded);
- Getting married.

#### Three Weeks: Moving into New Dwelling

You may move into a new home or apartment, whether owning or renting, during the Three Weeks before Tish'a b'Av. Ideally, you should not move into a new place during the Nine Days but if necessary, it is permitted.

#### Three Weeks: Swimming

If you are swimming for:

- Pleasure, you may swim during the Three Weeks but not during the Nine Days.

- Exercise (you don't particularly enjoy swimming or you are not doing it for fun or to cool off), you may be permitted to swim even during the Nine Days. Consult a rabbi.

### Three Weeks: Socializing

Activities for socializing are not prohibited during the Three Weeks before Rosh Chodesh Av (but the activities might be prohibited for other reasons such as if they are dangerous).

## THREE WEEKS: RISKY ACTIVITIES

### Three Weeks: Dangerous Activities

We are discouraged from doing dangerous activities during the Three Weeks before and including Tish'a b'Av. But since it is forbidden to do dangerous activities anyway, there are few relevant activities that are forbidden. Some people do not travel during this time but it is not forbidden to do so. Non-urgent surgery should be scheduled for after this period.

## FIRST NINE DAYS OF AV

### Nine Days: Restrictions

Restrictions during the Nine Days before Tish'a b'Av are the same as for Three Weeks, plus:

- You may not eat meat or drink wine.

#### EXCEPTIONS

- You may drink wine on Shabbat (but not on Rosh Chodesh Av or erev Shabbat.)
- You may drink wine for havdala (but ideally give the wine or grape juice to a child between ages 6 and 10).
- You may eat meat or drink wine at a brit, siyum, or pidyon ha'ben.

- You may not wear freshly laundered clothes, or wear or buy new clothes.

**NOTE** You may wear clean socks and underwear. Ideally, throw them on the floor first but, b'di'avad, it is OK to wear them even if you did not.

- You may not wash yourself for pleasure.

**NOTE** Showering or bathing to clean one's soiled body is permitted (except on Tish'a b'Av). So you may bathe or shower during the Nine Days if you are dirty, sweaty, or smelly.

- You may not do any activities that involve luxury.
- You may not say she'hecheyanu except on Shabbat.

**NOTE** Therefore you should not buy new fruits or new items that you will enjoy during the Nine Days. But if you DO eat a new fruit or buy something new, you must say she'hecheyanu anyway.

### Nine Days: Court Cases

Try not to be involved in a court case opposing a non-Jew during the Nine Days.

**REASON** The Nine Days are considered to be an inauspicious time for Jews. But if you cannot avoid it, it is not forbidden and you may proceed.

### Nine Days: Kiddush Levana

If you are not likely to see the moon on any of the days from the 10th to the 14th of Av, you may say kiddush levana during the Nine Days.

### Nine Days: New Projects or Investments

You should not start new projects or make investments during the Nine Days if they can be delayed without incurring a loss.

**REASON** The Nine Days are considered to be an inauspicious time for Jews.

### Nine Days: Painting Your House

You may not paint your house during the Nine Days. Ask a rabbi for possible exceptions.

### Nine Days: Swimming

For laws on swimming during the Nine Days, see Three Weeks: Swimming.

## TISH'A B'AV

### Tish'a B'Av: Pre-Fast Meal

You may say birkat ha'mazon with a mezuman or with a minyan during the Nine Days. But you may not do so at the meal preceding Tish'a b'Av (se'uda ha'mafseket).

**REASON** Only bread dipped in ashes and a hard-boiled egg should be eaten and that is not a meal for socializing or togetherness.

### Tish'a B'Av: On Saturday Night

When Tish'a B'Av begins on Saturday night, the custom is as follows:

- Say baruch ha'mavdil when Shabbat ends.
- Say the blessing on the candle after ma'ariv.
- Do not say the remainder of havdala at all. Instead:
  - Wait until Sunday night, after the fast is over, and then
  - Say only the blessing on the wine and the paragraph of ha'mavdil blessings.

**NOTE** You will not say the blessings on the spices for havdala for that week.

### Tish'a B'Av: Flying

You should not fly on Tish'a b'Av, even if you are flying to Israel to make aliya.

### Tish'a B'Av: Hand Washing

On Tish'a B'Av, as on Yom Kippur, if you must wash your hands to remove:

- Tum'a, you may wash your hands only up to the knuckle that connects your fingers to the rest of your hand (thumb: second knuckle; fingers: third knuckle).
- Dirt from your hand, you may wash wherever the dirt is on your hand.

### Tish'a B'Av: Teeth Brushing

On Tish'a b'Av, you may not brush your teeth using water. You may use a dry toothbrush. You may floss your teeth.

### Tish'a B'Av: Tefilin

Tish'a b'Av is similar to the day of burial of a person and so tefilin are not worn in the morning. The afternoon has a lower level of mourning and so tefilin (and talit gadol) are worn at mincha.

### Tish'a B'Av: What To Do until 12 Noon

Activities for Tish'a B'Av until halachic midday:

- **Thinking:** Until halachic midday, you should do things and think about things that will keep you in bad spirits or will make you sad.
- **Sitting:** You may not sit on any kind of seat that is higher than 12 inches (30 cm) above the floor or ground until after halachic midday.

### Tish'a B'Av: What To Do after 12 Noon

After halachic midday on Tish'a B'Av, you may do any activities except the five activities forbidden on Tish'a B'Av (washing, anointing, eating/drinking, marital intercourse, wearing leather shoes) or the Nine Days. But you may not greet anyone, or reply to someone else's greeting to you, including saying "hello," "good morning," "how are you," etc., until after dark.

## PURIM

### INTRODUCTION TO PURIM

#### Introduction to Purim

Purim commemorates the saving of the Jews in the Persian Empire from Haman's plan to wipe them out completely. The story is a classic example of how God intervenes in human history in a hidden manner. The essential element was that the Jews were saved from physical destruction/death (contrast with Chanuka, where the Jews were not being threatened with physical death but with the destruction of their religious beliefs and practices).

#### Halachot

- Giving charity to poor people.
- Giving gifts of ready-to-eat food to friends.

**REASON** To promote friendship and a feeling of community.

- Reading the megila of Esther at night and the next day.
- Eating a festive meal.
- Giving three half-dollars (or whatever the local unit of coin currency is where you live) to charity in commemoration of the half-shekel, which was given by all Jews to the Temple when it stood in Jerusalem.

**NOTE** This is not actually an observance of Purim, but it has become traditional to give the 3 half-dollars on Purim.

#### Widespread Customs

- Dressing up in costumes.
- Making noise during the reading of Haman's (and his wife's) name in the megila, in order to wipe out their names.
- Drinking more wine than normal.

**NOTE** Jewish women are required to fulfill all of the commandments of the holiday, just as men are, since the women were also saved.

## PURIM: AD DLO YADA

### Getting Drunk Ad Dlo Yada

The idea of getting drunk *ad dlo yada* is that, even when optimal mental functions are impaired by alcohol, a person's essence is on such a high spiritual level that he or she can see God's hand in the actions of the evil *Haman* just as in the actions of the good *Mordechai*.

**NOTE** Jews should never get drunk, even on *Purim*, but they should drink a little more than they normally would.

## PURIM: COMMANDMENTS

### Purim: Commandments

There are four *mitzvot* for *Purim*:

#### 1. *Shalach Manot* (Gifts of food to promote friendship)

Send to one person at least two readily edible foods that will be appreciated by the recipient. Sending gifts of food (*mishlo'ach manot*) must be done on *Purim* day. The earliest time to send *mishlo'ach manot* is after hearing the morning *megila* reading (so that the commandment of giving gifts to friends is also covered by the blessing of *she'hecheyanu* over the *megila*).

#### 2. Gifts to Poor People

Give some money to at least two poor people or to a fund designated to give to poor Jews on *Purim*. The earliest time in the day to give gifts to the poor on *Purim* is daybreak.

#### 3. Hearing the *Megila* Twice (evening and morning)

- If you miss hearing a word or even syllable of the *megila* on *Purim*, say it to yourself and then catch up to the reader.
- If you are not near a *minyan* and do not have a *megila* scroll, you should read the *megila* from a book. But you will not have fulfilled the commandment of reading the *megila* and so you do not say any of the blessings.

#### 4. Eating at a *Purim se'uda*.

- The minimum amount to eat and drink for a *Purim* meal is at least 1.3 fl. oz. (39 ml, or 1/6 cup) of bread, any amount of meat (if you enjoy meat), and some wine (any amount more than you normally drink).
- The earliest time you may eat the *Purim* meal is from daybreak; the latest time you must begin is before sunset. You must eat at least 1.3 fl. oz. (39 ml, or 1/6 cup) of bread and some wine (and meat if you enjoy it) before sunset. You may continue your meal after sunset as long as you ate the bread before sunset.