



HALAKHOT OF HANUKAH

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 336 B.C.E. Alexander the Great assumed the throne of Greece. He conquered neighboring lands and actively spread Greek ideals throughout his kingdom. For the next 300 years Greek culture (Hellenism) dominated a large portion of the world, from Western Europe through Persia to the border of India.

Hellenistic Culture was polytheistic; it placed the private individual's pleasure and search for happiness above all other goals. It was antithetical to Judaism, which is based on Monotheism and stresses the individual's responsibilities above his pleasures. By 175 B.C.E., when Antiochus IV assumed the mighty Seleucid throne (ruling over that portion of Alexander's kingdom covering most of the Middle East), Hellenism had permeated most of the vast Greek kingdom. Antiochus recognized that Judaism was incongruent with his kingdom's culture and decided to Hellenize the Jews. He banned Torah study and fulfillment of misvot; he had the Bet Hamikdash defiled, forcing upon it idol worship and pig sacrifices; he placed the death penalty on those who defied the new order.

A courageous group of Jews, led by Matatyahu the Hashmonean and his sons, rose in armed revolt against this anti-Torah regime. In 165 B.C.E. the war culminated in a miraculous victory for the Jews, under the leadership of Yehuda Hamaccabee, the son of Matatyahu. As it says in "Al Hanisim", the Almighty

"delivered the many into the hands of the few...the disbelievers into the hands of those engaged in the Torah." The Bet Hamikdash was purified and the altar rededicated.

The Talmud relates that when the Jews searched for pure oil with which to light the Menorah in the Bet Hamikdash, they found one cruse with the Kohen Gadol's seal, containing an amount sufficient for one day's kindling. Miraculously, the small amount of oil sufficed for eight days, until they were able to crush olives and produce pure oil.

Hanukah, commemorating both the miraculous military victory and the rededication of the purified Temple, is celebrated by lighting a Menorah. This is the symbol for the ascendancy of the spiritual principle over the material. As G-d stated to the prophet Zecharya (6th Century B.C.E.) to be communicated to the national leader Zerubabel - who was reestablishing the Temple and Israel - in explication of a menorah vision: "Not by might nor by strength but by My spirit saith the Lord" (4:6).

Laws

1. The eight days of Hanukah were established by the rabbis as days of happiness and praise giving to the Almighty in celebration of the miraculous victory of the Macabees and the rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem. However, they are not commemorated as Yom Tob days of the Torah. Thus, working is permitted, festive meals are not required and most mourning laws are applicable. Eulogies

are not said except for a hakham at the time of his funeral in his presence. The holiday's unique misvah is kindling *Nerot* (lights). The fulfillment of happiness is left for each individual and family to define.

2. Both men and women are obligated in *Nerot* Hanukah. Although a positive misvah governed by time, women were not exempted; as they played an active role in the miracle they should be active in its commemoration.

3. One menorah is lit per family, which covers all the members of the family, even those not present. The head of household lights the first candle each night (as that constitutes the primary misvah). It is customary for wife and children to light the later candles, in age order.

4. On the first night one cup of oil or one candle is kindled in addition to the *shamosh* (server). Each successive night another light is added until the eighth night when eight cups of oil or candles are lit. The *shamosh* is placed to a side, out of alignment with the lights of misvah. It is customary to set the *shamosh* in place before beginning the kindling and kindle it after the last cup or candle of misvah. The misvah cannot be fulfilled with an electric menorah according to many leading authorities.

Some communities have a custom to light an extra candle to commemorate a later miracle that occurred during Hanukah. To prevent confusion, such an extra candle should be placed to the side.

5. The cup or candle added each evening should be to the left hand side of the person facing the menorah. The new addition is kindled first each evening so that lighting proceeds in a right-hand direction (from left to right).

6. The menorah must contain enough oil or wax at the time of lighting to remain lit at least thirty minutes. It must be set in a place where the flames will not be blown out by a usual

breeze or draft or anticipated occurrence. If there is a reason to do so, one may extinguish the flames after thirty minutes.

7. The act of lighting nerot that are expected to remain lit for the necessary time span comprises the misvah. Thus, if an unanticipated occurrence did extinguish the flames before thirty minutes passed, it is not mandatory to light again. However, it is appropriate to relight without a *berakha*.

8. The menorah should be placed by a window facing the street where passersby can see it, to fulfill the misvah of publicizing the miracle (*pirsumeh nissa*). In areas of mild climate, it is placed in the open doorway, opposite the mezuzah. It should be placed not below three and not above thirty feet from the ground and where it is going to remain the minimum thirty minutes. If one is in a place where there is legitimate fear of provoking hostility, the menorah may be lit where it cannot be seen from the outside.

9. The proper time to light the nerot (except on Friday) is at *Seit Hacoachavim* (the appearance of stars), which in New York is approximately 25-35 minutes after sunset. In rabbinical misvot such as *Ner* Hanukah the more lenient time measure may be used. *Bediavad* (normally meaning after it was done', but sometimes, as here, also referring to a case when one is pressed) one may light the nerot from sunset and when necessary even from a short time before sunset. In the latter case one must be sure the oil or candles are sufficient to remain lit for thirty minutes after *Seit*. *Bediavad* one may light all night long with *berakhot* providing there are passersby on the street, but the sooner the better.

10. Under normal circumstances, to prevent possibly forgetting the misvah, one should not begin dinner or begin work on an extended task within the half hour before the proper time to

light the menorah. It is customary to pray arbit before lighting.

11. On Friday evening, the menorah is lit before the Shabbat candles. As it must remain lit for a half hour after nightfall and must be lit at least several minutes before sunset, it must contain enough oil or large enough candles to remain lit for over an hour. (Shabbat candles, with ends shaved to fit the menorah, are suitable.) If it happens that a family is lighting close to sunset, after the first Hanukah light is lit (the essential misvah) the woman may turn away from the Hanukah lighting to light the Shabbat candles.

12. On Saturday night, in the synagogue, Hanukah lighting is before *habdala*. The one who lights relies on having said *Ata Honantanu* in the amida to permit him to do *melakha*. Although the congregants also recited *Ata Honantanu*, they do not have to do any *melakha* at that moment, so it is preferable to delay the formal exiting of Shabbat for them - a symbol of our love of Shabbat. In the home, Hanukah lighting is after *habdala*.

13. On the first evening, three *berakhot* are recited, just prior to lighting: *Lehadlik Ner Hanukah*; *She'asah Nissim*; *Shehehiyanu*. On subsequent evenings, only the first two are recited. After the first candle is lit all present begin reciting *Hanerot Halalu* and *Mizmor Shir Hanukat Habayit*. It is customary to sing Hanukah songs.

14. The light of the candles, except for that of the shamosh, is to be exclusively for misvah and may not be used for any other purpose. If a candle goes out, it must be relit with a match or with the shamosh, but not with one of the menorah candles.

15. Women have the custom not to work for the half hour that the candles are required to remain lit. As they usually have household chores, not working provides opportunity to

appreciate the misvah and heightens consciousness that the candles are not lit for personal use.

16. It is customary to light a menorah each evening between mincha and arbit in synagogues with *berakhot*. If possible, the synagogue menorah should be placed on a Southern wall as a remembrance to the menorah of the *Bet Hamikdash*, which was on the South side in the *Heichal*. The *berakhot* in the synagogue are recited only if ten people are present.

17. The lighting in a synagogue may not substitute for the misvah to light at home even for the one who did the lighting, even if he is lighting at home only for himself. [In this latter case, since when he lights at home there is no household he is covering, he should only recite the first *Berakha* (*Lehadliq*). As he personally recited *She'asah Nissim* (and if its the first night, *Shehehiyanu*) in his synagogue lighting, he fulfilled his private obligation as far as those *berakhot* are concerned.]

Regarding One Sleeping Away From Home

1. One who is single and regularly lives with his parents, is covered with their lighting even if he is not present. If a husband is away, his wife lights at home for the family and covers him. If one's family isn't lighting at home for whatever reason, he should light with *berakhot* wherever he is.

2. If one's wife is visiting her parents while he is away and lighting with them, since she is not lighting in the capacity of her own household, he should light with *berakhot* wherever he is.

3. Even if one is in a time zone that is so different from his family's that the family will not have lit by the time it becomes morning for him, he should not light with a *berakha* where he is. He still is included in their lighting.

4. If one is in a place where he will not see *nerot* Hanukah at all during a night of Hanukah if he does not himself light, he should light even though he normally would be included in the lighting of his family.

5. Regarding one not covered by parents or spouse who is a sleeping guest in someone's home: if he eats at his own expense, he is not covered by his host and is obligated to light. Preferably, he should pay a token fee to become a partner in the host's oil or candle and join in with him. If he is a houseguest for eating also, such that he pays nothing for the hospitality, he is covered by the lighting of his host, as he is presently part of the household.

Prayers

1. All eight days *Al Hanissim* and *Beeme Matitya* are added to all the *amidot* and to *birkat hamazon*. If one forgot to recite them he does not repeat.

2. Complete *Hallel* is recited all eight days with a *berakha*. Women do not say the *berakha*. There is no *musaf* during the regular days of Hanukah. *Tahanun(ana)* is not said. Tefillin are worn and all other prayers are recited as usual.

3. On all eight days Torah selections about the *Mishkan* dedication are read from *Sefer Bemidbar*, *Parashat Naso* to reflect the rededication of the Second Temple that took place during Hanukah. On Shabbat this selection is read from a second Sefer Torah as *Maftir*.

4. *Rosh Hodesh Tebet* always falls on the sixth day of Hanukah. Sometimes day 7 is also *Rosh Hodesh*. (This is one of the two months who's *Rosh Hodesh* fluctuates between one and two days.)

5. The *Haftara* for Shabbat Hanukah (even when *Rosh Hodesh*) is the prophecy of Zecharya IV:6, regarding the meaning of the Menorah. When there is a second Shabbat during Hanukah the *Haftara* is the portion discussing the construction of the Menorah in the First Temple (I Kings 7).

6. When *Rosh Hodesh Tebet* falls on Shabbat, we read from three Sifrei Torah. *Kaddish* is surely recited on the second and third; if there were seven aliyot to the first Torah, *Kaddish* is also recited on it.

