



Guidelines for the Ill on Chanukah

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*Guide to Traditional Jewish Observance in a
Hospital*
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E. Chanukah

Chanukah, the Jewish festival of rededication, also known as the “festival of lights,” is an eight-day minor holiday in the winter, on which all types of “work” that are prohibited on Shabbat and most other holidays are permitted. *Chanukah* is generally observed by lighting candles in the evening and reciting additional prayers of thanksgiving.

Electric Lights

1. According to most opinions, one does not fulfill the *Mitzvah* of lighting *Chanukah* candles with electric lights.⁴²¹ However, a hospitalized patient who has no alternative should perform the *Mitzvah* of lighting the *Menorah* with electric lights, but should not recite the blessings.⁴²²

Location of Lights

- 2a. When lighting an electric *Menorah* in a hospital room, it is best to place it in a spot where one does not normally put lights so that it is clear that it is there for the sake of the *Mitzvah*.⁴²³
- 2b. It is best to light one’s *Menorah* near the window in order to publicize the miracle. This is so even for one who normally lights their *Menorah* by their front door, since this is generally not feasible in a hospital.⁴²⁴
- 2c. There is a principle that the kindling is the performance of the *Mitzvah*, and not the placing of the light.⁴²⁵ Therefore, a patient who is confined to their bed and cannot get up to kindle the *Chanukah* lights by the window should not light them next to their bed and have someone move them. Rather, another person should kindle them in the correct place on behalf of the patient or they should be kindled by the bedside and left there.⁴²⁶

Spouse on Behalf of Patient

3. The *Mishnah Berurah* writes that “When one’s wife kindles *Chanukah* lights in his home he fulfills his obligation with her kindling, even if he is in a place that is far away from his home.”⁴²⁷ Therefore, the spouse of a hospitalized patient should light the *Chanukah* lights at home and bear in mind to include their husband or wife in the *Mitzvah*.⁴²⁸

⁴²¹ Although this is the general practice, *Lev Avraham* 23:2 quotes a ruling of Rav Eliyashiv and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that if one is in a difficult situation and has no other choice, they may make a blessing on electric lights, such as flashlights, as long as they are battery powered and have enough energy left in the batteries to last the entire time that the candles must stay lit. A blessing should not be said on a *Menorah* that is plugged into an electrical outlet. Elsewhere, R. Auerbach is quoted as ruling that if one has no other option, they could make a blessing on electric *Chanukah* lights as long as it has incandescent bulbs, not neon or fluorescent, since they can be considered “fire” (*Halichot Shlomo, Chanukah* 15:3, pg. 283; *Nishmat Avraham OH* 677:3(2), 3rd ed. Pg. 834).

⁴²² *Lev Avraham* 23:1. The rules of lighting a *Chanukah Menorah* differ from those of lighting Shabbat candles because on Shabbat the goal is to bring illumination to the room in honor of Shabbat, whereas on *Chanukah* we attempt to reenact the miracle of the *Menorah* that occurred with burning wicks and oil.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁴ *Chasdei Avraham* vol. 3, 23:2.

⁴²⁵ *Shulchan Aruch OH* 675:1.

⁴²⁶ *Lev Avraham* 23:3.

⁴²⁷ *Mishnah Berurah* 677:2.

⁴²⁸ *Lev Avraham* 23:6.