

HALOCHOSCOPE ^{TOI} PE

Someone will have to travel a long distance by car on Chanukah. He will leave either in the afternoon or evening. Should he kindle his Chanukah lights before he leaves, even if this means kindling them earlier than the usual recommended time? Or should he wait until he arrives, even though it will be late? Normally one may not begin an activity before kindling the lights. In our case, may he rely on someone reminding him later on, such as his wife or companion travelling with him? May they eat and occupy themselves in other activities on the way?

The issues:

- (A) The timing of kindling Chanukah lights
- (B) The restriction on eating or activity once the time has arrived for a Mitzvah
- (C) A Shomer, one who will remind another to do the Mitzvah later on

(A) The time of kindling Chanukah lights

Chanukah celebrates the miracles experienced by the Torah-loyal Jews when they were saved from the Greeks and their traitorous Hellenist Jewish cohorts. The Greeks had defiled the temple and artifacts, and had tried to suppress Judaism. A small band of loyal Jews waged war on them and were miraculously victorious. A second miracle occurred when the victorious *Chashmonaim*, the priestly family that had won the war, returned to the temple to reconsecrate it they found only enough undefiled oil for one day. Yet while they spent the time needed to procure fresh oil the small amount of oil lasted for eight days.

In the *Bais Hamikdash*, the *Menora* was kindled by day, in late afternoon. When was the *Menora* was kindled at the rededication? Was it on the 24th of Kislev, and lasted eight days from then? Was it on the afternoon of the 25th? However, this has little bearing on the time that we kindle our Chanukah lights. The Chanukah lights that we kindle are only to remind us of the *Menora*. The main object of our Mitzvah is to publicize the miracle. This can only be accomplished if the light is visible, and is therefore only possible in the evening. This time is given in the Talmud as from sunset until the streets are empty. Sunset is the earliest time that the light could be seen showing up against the dark. Once people are no longer frequenting the streets the light is no longer able to have its desired effect. The whole point is to make the miracle known to the public.

The Talmud ponders this statement. Does it tell us that the lights must remain

kindled the entire period, and that if they are blown out they must be rekindled? One answer is that the period is the range for kindling. After this time one can no longer fulfil his obligation. Second, though the lights need not be rekindled, there must be sufficient oil to last this long. In practice, applying these answers is subject to much debate. At issue is whether the answers are exclusive of each other, and what the Talmud means by sunset. In addition, though there is a range, this might mean that the ideal time is at the beginning and the rest of the range is second best. Some Poskim consider the only time to light at, or right before, sunset, others only at nightfall, the end of sunset. Some say that there is a range, and in practice we try to fulfill as many of these opinions as possible by finding an optimum time.

The original Mitzvah was to kindle the lights at the entrance to one's home. This is still practiced in Eretz Yisroel. The Talmud discusses where kindling the lights at the entrance to homes would involve danger of antisemitism. In these situations one kindles them indoors. The *Pirsumei Nisa*, publicizing of the miracles, takes place before members of one's household. Since nowadays, in most communities outside Eretz Yisroel the miracle is publicized primarily inside the home, the consensus is that they may be kindled all night, as long as someone will see them.

On Erev Shabbos it must be kindled before sunset. We also follow a ruling that in any pressing situation one may kindle them as early as *Plag Hamincha*, some time before sunset. How does the opinion considering sunset the only time to kindle reconcile Erev Shabbos? What if the first night is Shabbos? It is not Chanukah yet. How may one recite the Brachos? The period between sunset and nightfall is considered a period of doubt whether it is day or night. Accordingly, how can an opinion consider the ideal time at sunset? Should we not wait until definite night.

One approach is that the early time given in the Talmud is the time one should have kindled them, but one may light them early. Another opinion is that on Erev Shabbos one view in the Talmud allows *Melacha*, including kindling the lights, after sunset. However, we do not follow this opinion and have no choice but to kindle them early. Since there is no choice it is permitted to recite the Brocha then. A third view is that the lighting is a preparation for the *Pirsumei Nisa* after dark. It is appropriate to recite the Brocha on the act that causes the Mitzvah. These answers do not address the issue of the *Brocha Shehecheyanu* on the first night, or of the opinion that considers the ideal time before sunset. There is a view that the Rabbis initially fixed this time for the Mitzvah. It is the time when one can most capitalize on *Pirsumei Nisa*. People are coming home and it is dark enough to see a light. Evidently, in this opinion, the time for the Mitzvah has come and one may

recite *Shehecheyanu*, even before the onset of the holiday. *She'asa Nisim* is recited as part of the Mitzvah too, even before the real "*zman hazeh*". If we assume that the Chashmonaim kindled the Menora in the late afternoon on the 24th, this is not such a major problem. Though it is not yet Chanukah the miracles may be celebrated. However, once the holiday was fixed, the Brochos should only be recited on the day of the Rabbinically ordained holiday, the 25th. One explanation offered is that the Mitzvah was instituted such that the lights represent the Menora in the Temple, which works according to those that date the first kindling on the 24th.

In summary, one may kindle the lights at *Plag Hamincha*. There should be enough oil to burn into the night, to facilitate *Pirsumei Nisa*. If one reaches his destination before dawn, he may kindle then. The dictum of *Zrizim Makdimin Lemitzvos*, doing Mitzvos at the first opportunity, might not apply here. We follow the view that today one need not strive to fulfill the Mitzvah first thing at night. All night is good. *Plag Hamincha* is only good in pressing circumstances. If one can delay his departure until sunset, he should kindle then — *Zrizim Makdimin*. [See Shabbos 21b, Poskim. Tur Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 672, commentaries.]

[Note: The Talmud discusses a guest kindling at another person's home, or contributing towards his lights. The Poskim debate whether one could kindle there and leave immediately. Having someone kindle on one's behalf also works. However, if done for a traveller, the Poskim say one must bear in mind that the time of sunset varies between the departure and destination points.]

(B) Restrictions at the time for a Mitzvah

When the time to perform a Mitzvah arrives one should not begin eating, studying, or anything that will take long enough to distract him from the urgency of doing the Mitzvah. Eating means a *Kebaitza*, egg-size piece of bread or *Mezonos* snacks. Fruit may be eaten, unless there are other reasons for restricting it. There is a concern that he will forget to do it until it is too late, or that the preoccupation will take so long that when he is finished it will be too late. The source for this restriction is a Talmud passage discussing the time of *Mincha*. Certain activities listed are forbidden to begin even before the time for *Mincha*, if they will drag in through *Mincha* time. Some are time consuming. Others can become drawn out. Some are short, but complications could arise. Regarding other Mitzvos too, such as searching for *Chameitz* or sitting down to the *Pesach Seder*, the Talmud invokes this restriction. Regarding some Mitzvos the restriction applies a half hour before the time of the Mitzvah. In some cases, one should not begin at this time, but need not stop to do the Mitzvah when the time arrives.

In our case, certainly after nightfall, and probably after sunset, one should not

begin such activities before lighting. The Poskim discuss whether the cushion is made restricting such activities for a half-hour earlier than the first possible time. Since there are so many opinions about it, one may assume that until sunset it is safe to begin eating. At sunset the time has arrived according to some opinions, and it is within range of the later times given. Since one may fix a later time in the night nowadays, some say this relieves him of this restriction.

(C) Designating a Shomer

If one designates someone to remind him about a Mitzvah when he is finished, he may begin these activities within range of the Mitzvah. This is based on a dispensation cited by the Poskim to the restricted activities in a town where the *Shamash* of the shul calls people to come to shul. As soon as one is called he must stop immediately. The dispensation is not mentioned by the Poskim with regard to Chanukah. It is possible that it fits the category of Mitzvos which are strict in this regard, due to the timing being so constrained. If so, those who permit kindling late into the night might permit reliance on a Shomer, provided he reminds the person before all potential onlookers go to sleep, and the person kindles immediately when he is reminded.

However, it would appear that in our particular case there is no need to be concerned in the first place. The concern is that these activities are done in a distracting environment. Some are done on a site other than the site of the Mitzvah. One might not remember to leave for shul, and a reminder helps. Some will preoccupy the doer so much that he will forget the Mitzvah. If, however, one will necessarily have to go to the place where the Mitzvah will be done, albeit a little late, he may start or continue the alternative activity. In our case, the travellers are on the way to their destination, where they will be kindling the lights, i.e., on the way to the Mitzvah. They are relying on the view that one may kindle late at night. Since they are allowed to do this activity (travelling) we may assume that as long as they do not stop off for a long meal, they may eat the type of snacks that would otherwise be forbidden. [See Brochos 2b Shabbos 9b 21b Pesachim 4a 99b 109a, Poskim Rambam Hil. Chanukah 4:5. Tur Sh. Ar. O.C. 89:2 232:2 235:2 672, 679, commentaries. Birkei Yosef. Terumas Hadeshen 102. Yereim 102. Sheeris Yaakov 1 Mikraei Kodesh 2:1 Moadim Uzmanim II:152. etc. Mai Chanukah 3a.]