

This is a combination of a halachic review, practical suggestions, useful information, Chanuka fun, and more. Do not take anything written here as "the final word"; doubts or confusion, check them out with your Rav.

Setting Up the Chanukiya

In general, one should prepare his Chanukiya well in advance of lighting time, so that there will not be a delay in lighting at the proper time. This is especially so on Friday of Chanuka because things get kind of hectic as Shabbat approaches. (And especially NOT SO for Motza'ei Shabbat lighting - Obviously, no preparation for lighting after Shabbat may be done on Shabbat - but one should set up for Motza'ei Shabbat on Friday - see further).

Some have the custom of setting up their Chanukiya in the morning for the evening (this goes for every day - except Shabbat, of course). This not only serves the practical purpose of being ready to light on time without undue delay, but it also commemorates the practice in the Beit HaMikdash called HATAVAT HANEIROT, whereby the Kohen (Gadol) tended the Menora and prepared it in the morning for kindling in the late, late afternoon. Since our lighting on Chanuka directly commemorates the lighting of the Menora in the Beit HaMikdash, this suggestion provides a nice "added touch" to the mitzva and symbolism of Chanuka lighting.

AL HANISIM is added to every Amida & Birkat HaMazon throughout Chanuka.

Forgetting AL HANISIM does NOT invalidate either the Amida or Birkat HaMazon. That means that neither is to be repeated because AL HANISIM was omitted.

If you catch your omission before saying HaShem's name in the MODIM (Amida) or NODEH L'CHA (Birkat HaMazon) brachot, go back and say it and continue from there.

However, if one realizes the omission after the end of the bracha but before the end of the Amida (before saying YIHYU L'RATZON IMREI FI... and taking 3 steps back), AL HANISIM can be said right before YIHYU L'RATZON, with the modified introduction, below.

In Birkat HaMazon, an omitted AL HANISIM becomes a HARACHAMAN, right before HARACHAMAN HU Y'ZAKEINU, as follows (there are variant texts for this)...

הָרַחֲמָן, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ נִסִּים וְנִפְלָאוֹת כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה. בִּימֵי מַתִּתְיָהוּ...

There is no reference to Chanuka in BRACHA MEI'EIN SHALOSH (a.k.a. AL HAMICHYA).

BRACHOT before LIGHTING

Brachot should be recited BEFORE beginning to light the candles. This complies with the general rule for Mitzva-Brachot, that they be recited immediately before performance of the mitzva. (There are exceptions - Chanuka lighting is not one of the exceptions.) This means, that for the first night, wait until all three brachot are said before lighting the candle. And, even on the eighth night, don't start lighting the candles until you finish both brachot.

(Some hold that this applies to the first b'racha - the mitzva b'racha, but not necessarily to the other b'rachot. Check with your Rav if you are not sure which opinion to follow.)

LOADING THE CHANUKIYA

Opinions differ, but a common practice is to place the first candle (or oil cup) in the right side of the Chanukiya.

If one lights at the doorpost, then the first candle should be closest to the doorpost, even if it is the left side of the Chanukiya.

Not at the doorpost, from the second night on, the custom (one of the customs) is to "load" the Chanukiya from right to left, and to light it, left to right.

At the doorpost, one loads it from the doorpost out, and lights it starting with the candle closest to the doorpost.

Loading and lighting direction are not crucial to the performance of the mitzva, but there are reasons for the various practices.

In should be stated that if you light on a window sill, then right and left are different for you and for someone looking from the outside. Check with your Rav which way to load and light in that case.

ESSENCE and HIDUR

The essential performance of the mitzva of Chanuka Lights is the lighting of a single candle each night. The custom that we follow of increasing the number of candles each night

In loving memory of
ר׳ משה יצחק ב״ר מרדכי ז״ל
on his 28th yahrzeit, 26 Kislev
We miss you Dad and Grandpa
יהי זכרו ברוך

is a HIDUR MITZVA (enhancement of the mitzva). This is not to suggest that anyone should follow the original practice of (just) one candle each night. The Jewish People "across the board" accepted upon itself - a long time ago - the current practice of lighting the number of candles that correspond to the day of Chanuka.

It is because the first candle you light fulfills the mitzva, that the b'rachot should be said before any lighting.

One practice that has developed because of the distinction between the first candle and the others, is to begin reciting/singing HANEIROT HALALU after the first candle is lit, while lighting the others.

Alternatively, one can wait until all the lighting is done to say HANEIROT HALALU. Stick to family practice on this, unless you have a good reason to switch.

RIGHT AFTER LIGHTING

One should not just light the Chanuka candles (and sing Maoz Tzur) and then go on to business as usual, but rather one should look at the candles for a while, ponder G-d's miracles, spend some time with the family talking about the message of Chanuka and how it relates to our time, play a little dreidel, sing a song or two, have a special Chanuka snack, have some Chanuka fun.

TORAH sh/b part of lighting

It is recommended to learn some Torah, share a Dvar Torah, have a family shiur, or something like that, right after candle lighting (or sometime in the evening). The decrees of the Greeks included a ban on learning Torah. Our celebrating Chanuka marks our freedom from Greek oppression, including the ability to learn Torah in public without fear. So let's do just that!

Here's a MASHAL (analogy) to the above point. (You can use it as the DT for one of the nights.) There was a dancer who had a terrible accident - badly breaking his/her leg. The leg required two surgeries to repair the damage, a subse- quent third operation to adjust things properly, and lots and lots of physiotherapy and recuperation time. Finally, after almost a year and a half, the dancer is given the good news that the leg is now as good as new. The dancer throws a party to celebrate the restoration to good health. At the party there is food and drink, good music, speeches, even some party favors and games. But the main element of the party is the Dance. When the dancer does his/her dance, then the celebration is complete.

After years of Greek oppression, during which time Torah Learning and Mitzvot Observance was forbidden

under pain of death, there was a series of operations (military, in this case) and miracles that finally restored the Jewish People to good, spiritual health. We celebrate by the lighting of candles, the saying of Al HaNisim and Hallel, with traditional foods, even party games (dreidel). But the highlight of our celebration should be Torah Learning and increased attention to Mitzvot. If we have a personal CHANUKA, a rededication of ourselves to Torah and Mitzvot, then we will know that Chanuka is real.

TEXT OF THE BRACHA

Notice on the "Chanuka Lighting" page (below and as a separate link) that the word SHEL in the first bracha is in parentheses. There is a dispute as to whether the bracha ends L'HADLIK NER SHEL CHANUKA or L'HADLIK NER CHANUKA. One should follow his own (or family) minhag, if you have one. If not, ask your Rav which wording you should use. (A third opinion suggests: L'HADLIK NER SHE-L'CHANUKA.)

The following comments are not meant to encourage you to go with the NER CHANUKA version, but they might help explain why some people embraced this text for the bracha. BTW, Rinat Yisrael siddur has NER CHANUKA. So does the GR"A siddur, Eizor Eliyahu. Koren siddur & ArtScroll have NER SHEL CHANUKA. So does T'filat Kol Peh. T'filat Yosef has (SHEL).

Candles for Shabbat are candles, in the sense that they produce light (which is their main function), heat, fire - just like "regular" candles. Therefore, the appropriate term for them is NER SHEL SHABBAT, candles of or for Shabbat. So too, SHEL YOM TOV and SHEL YOM HAKIPURIM. Chanuka candles are not "regular" candles. We are not allowed to use them - not their light nor heat nor fire. As we say, ELA LIR-OTAM BILAVAD, (they are) exclusively to look at them, to see them. That's it. They are not candles that are being used for Chanuka. They're Chanuka Candles.

[Here's a MASHAL... It's like the difference between the flowers one buys for his Shabbat table - here and outside Israel. In most other places of the world, one would go to a flower shop and buy flowers, using the flowers to honor Shabbat. They are flowers for Shabbat. But in Israel, one usually buys Shabbat flowers. They are flowers that are being sold for Shabbat by vendors who only sell flowers on Erev Shabbat and Chag. Same flowers, but different.]

Again, this is not meant to discredit referring to them in the bracha as NER SHEL CHANUKA. The gemara and many authorities since, have given the text as NER SHEL CHANUKA. The above was just meant

to explain why other sources go for NER CHANUKA as the ending of the bracha. If you do, then you've got another nice DT to share with your family and guests.

Additionally, with NER CHANUKA, the first bracha has 13 words, corresponding to the 13 MIDOT of G-d's mercy. With the second bracha also having 13 words, the two brachot add to 26 words, 26 being the numeric value of HaShem's name. (NER CHANUKA and NER SHEL'CHANUKA both fit this numeric observation.)

INDOORS/OUTDOORS

The original place for lighting and displaying of the Chanukiya was outdoors at the entrance to one's home or courtyard.

Over many generations in exile, where lighting outdoors was inconvenient (weather-wise) to say the least, and often dangerous ("neighbors"), the practice evolved to light indoors.

In some circumstances, the lighting was to be done at a window, so that the candles would be visible to passersby in the street. In other cases, the Chanuka lights were lit in a conspicuous location for the attention of the members of the household, especially when it was dangerous to light at the window.

When lighting inside the home - for whatever reason - the one place that the Chanukiya should not be placed is where the Shabbat candles usually are. They need to be in an eye-catching, attention-grabbing location so they can serve their function of Publicizing the Miracles.

Many people who have come to Israel, still light inside, at the window, as they had been doing in their countries of origin. Others have gone back to the original practice of lighting outdoors, which is common in Israel - especially in Jerusalem.

When lighting outdoors, the candles are usually protected from getting blown out by being placed inside a fish-tank-like box, specif- ically made for that purpose.

If you are considering changing any aspect of your Chanuka candle lighting routine, (candle to oil or vice versa, sunset to stars-out or vice versa, indoors to outdoors or vice versa, window to door or vice versa, boys and girls to boys only or vice versa, each family member to one for the family or vice versa...), you should consult a Rav.

AGAIN, we remind you... These pages should be considered a review of some - but not all - of the many Chanuka topics. Even when we've presented more than one opinion, there might be other opin- ions that we haven't mentioned. We've said it often, but we repeat, it is best to consult your Rav to clear up any doubts you might have.

CANDLE LIGHTING

The following applies to

THIRD CANDLE: SUN, Dec 13th

FOURTH CANDLE: MON, Dec 14th

FIFTH CANDLE: TUE, Dec 15th

SIXTH CANDLE: WED, Dec 16th

SEVENTH CANDLE: THU, Dec 17th

The two Friday lightings for Shabbat Chanuka - the first and eighth candles - will be presented later, as will the lighting of the second candle on Motza'ei Shabbat.

WHEN TO LIGHT

There are two opinions as to when is the ideal time to light Chanuka lights during the week (i.e. except for Friday and Motza'ei Shabbat, when Shabbat affects the timing, as we will soon present).

Minhag Yerushalayim (which many, but not everyone in Jerusalem follow - and some outside Jerusalem do follow) is to light WITH THE SETTING OF THE SUN.

CONCERNING SUNSET...

In Yerushalayim, the custom is to calculate sunset taking into account the elevation of the city (about 800m above sea level). Most other locations use the sunset at sea level. You should check with your local rabbinate or religious council (or someone else who knows about these things), exactly what timings to use for Chanuka candles (and anything else that uses sunset as a beginning or ending point).

This year - 5787, Chanuka occurs at the time of year that sunset is at its earliest. Times of sunset for Jerusalem, for the five nights of Chanuka listed above (not including Friday and Motza"sh lighting - sunset is not used - it is either to late or too early) sunsets are 4:40pm, 4:40pm, 4:40pm, 4:41pm, and 4:41pm.

Other locations in Israel will vary from these times a few minutes earlier or later. If you need exact timing, check the ZMANIM link on philotorah.co or the internet or ask someone who knows the details.

Those who light with sunset should have already davened Mincha, and should subsequently daven Maariv at the appropriate time, obviously after lighting the candles.

THE OTHER OPINION

The "rest of the Jewish world" lights when the "light of the sun has left the sky", i.e. Stars-Out a.k.a. Tzeit HaKochavim.

CONCERNING TZEIT...

There are different opinions as to when Stars-Out occurs. Except for Friday (too late) and Motza'ei Shabbat (too early), the earlier times are available to use for candle lighting.

Opinions include that the time of Stars-out can be as little as 13 minutes after sunset, 17 mins, 20 mins, 25 mins. The Shabbat out time is about 35 minutes after sunset (in Israel; more as your location's latitude increases) and Rabbeinu Tam is 32 minutes later than that.

(Remember that Friday & Motza'ei Shabbat have different timing.)

Those who light with Stars-Out should light right after Maariv, unless they have a fixed time later in the evening for davening, in which case they can light at Zeit HaKochavim.

Stars-Out lighters should favor the earlier times for TZEIT (except, of course for Friday or Motza"Sh). 5:00pm might be a good time to strive for. (But after Maariv, as mentioned above.)

Remember: Customs vary.

UNTIL WHEN?

Candles must burn at least a half hour after stars-out. This was the original (in the time of the Gemara) time-period after dark that people were still around outdoors and it became the definition of the time range for PIRSUMEI NISA, publicizing the miracle.

Although in our day, people are out later than this time, the halacha only requires the half hour after stars-out.

However, it is recommended that one use longer candles or more oil to extend this time (somewhat), in recognition of the expansion of the current-day Pirsumei Nisa time-frame. We would further suggest that one's candles should stay lit at least a half hour after the latest stars-out time, (i.e. Rabbeinu Tam time). This is only a recommendation, not in any way meant to be a halachic ruling.

Again, using Jerusalem timing - adjust for other locations, as is necessary - the stars-out time for Shabbat-out is 5:15pm (in Jerusalem) this year. That's a generously later TZEIT time, which we are suggesting because of the above point. Candles, then, should burn (every night of Chanuka) at least to 5:45pm, and 'somewhat more' will bring the time to around 6:00pm.

However, since Rabbeinu Tam's Stars-Out is 5:47pm during Chanuka week (this year), one might try to have his Chanuka lights burn at least until 6:20-ish. This is not a requirement, but it does acknowledge the different opinions concerning Stars-Out. Treat this - as mentioned earlier - as an off-the-record suggestion, especially in light of the reality that the Pirsumei Nisa time is later into the night today, than it was in the time of the Gemara.

You will have noticed that TZEIT time

for lighting SUN thru THU is an early Stars-Out time and that until when should the last uses a later TZEIT time. This is so intentionally.

How early can one light?

When necessary, one may light as early as PLAG MINCHA (a halachic hour and a quarter before sunset). This is by no means preferable, but if circumstances are such that you have to light early - leaving town, and the like, then PLAG is the earliest.

For Jerusalem, PLAG ranges from 3:31 to 3:32pm. Use 3:35pm as the earliest time allowable for lighting but remember that early is not ideal and the closer to the sunset time, the better (when you have a compelling reason for lighting early.

Remember, that the candles must burn until at least a half hour after stars-out, regardless of how early you light. Extra large candles or a lot of oil might be necessary to accomplish this, when lighting soon after PLAG.

Again, early is not great, so the closer to sunset, the better.

FIRST CANDLE: FRI, Dec 11th
EIGHTH CANDLE: FRI, Dec 18th

It is preferable to daven Mincha before lighting Chanuka candles, but one should not miss out on a minyan to daven before lighting.

Check if you have a Mincha Gedola minyan near you.

Chanuka candles should be lit BEFORE Shabbat candles - even if different people are lighting each. Count on 5-10 minutes before the posted Shabbat lighting time; adjust according to your household's experience. Save Ma'oz Tzur for the Shabbat table - it saves some time and also helps us bring Chanuka to the Shabbat Chanuka table.

IN JERUSALEM

Many in Jerusalem light according to the regular timing, even though Shabbat candle lighting is 40 mins before sunset.

Some follow the acceptable practice of delaying Shabbat candle lighting for 20 minutes or so and lighting Chanuka candles right before Shabbat candles. Light Shabbat candles at about 4:20pm and Chanuka candles before then.

For anywhere else, one should consult a Rav as to whether to stick to regular candle lighting time even for Erev Shabbat Chanuka.

Care should be taken when lighting early (as on Friday, but even during the week for a variety of reasons) to...

[1] Never light before PLAG mincha - use 3:35pm as the red line. Outside of Israel, the times are most likely to be different - a local calendar should definitely be consulted.

[2] Make sure the candles are long/fat enough - or that there is sufficient oil - to last the required amount of time after stars-out, and then some.

If Shabbat candles were inadvertently lit before Chanuka candles, then - if it is still before sunset, anyone who has not yet taken Shabbat, may light Chanuka candles. If there is any doubt as to whether the sun has set or not, candles should NOT be lit.

SECOND CANDLE: Motza"Sh, Dec 12

Candles for Motza'ei Shabbat should be set up from before Shabbat so as not to delay the Chanuka candle lighting any more than is necessitated by Shabbat. (This is not required, but it is a highly desirable thing to do, and it reflects a love and care for this mitzva.)

This year, with the first Friday's lighting being 1 candle plus the Shamash and Motza"Sh's lighting being 2 candles plus the Shamash, the workable plan is that on Friday you set up for both the first night and the second night at opposite ends of the Chanukiya. This way, you will be as ready as possible to light on Motza'ei Shabbat without having to delay with set-up.

Many shuls will daven Maariv on Motza'ei Shabbat Chanuka earlier than usual (13-17 minutes after sunset is an acceptable Tzeit HaKochavim time for the reciting of the Sh'ma - even though Shabbat is not over yet). This allows people to get home closer to "right after Shabbat" and maximize the time that Chanuka candles will be lit during their "prime time". OBVIOUSLY, one cannot light Chanuka candles - or even set them up - before Shabbat is out. But by having set up for Motza"sh on Friday, and by davening Maariv a little earlier, and by hurrying home, unnecessary delay can be avoided and the prime time for candles can be maximized.

WHICH GOES FIRST?

Havdala or Chanuka candles. This is a topic that bears yearly review because of how fuzzy our memories can sometimes be.

Two Mitzvot to Perform -

Havdala and Chanuka candles. By the rule of TADIR (that which is more frequent should be done first), havdala should be said first. And by logic, one should "finish" with Shabbat and then light candles for the next day of Chanuka, which is Sat. night and Sunday. Therefore, many authorities hold that on Motza'ei Shabbat, one should say havdala first and then light Chanuka candles. This opinion is followed by the majority of Chanuka-candle-lighting Jews all over the world. The Maharal (among others) is vehement in his insistence that we cannot possibly consider doing something so "weekday-ish" as

lighting candles, unless we have first said havdala. He rejects any contrary arguments. Even if you want to point to the halachic permission we have on Motza'ei Shabbat to do certain things before havdala, provided, of course, it is after Shabbat-out time and we've either davened Maariv with ATA CHONANTANU or at least said BARUCH HAMAVDIL... - for example, answer the phone, with Chanuka candles the objection would be based on instituting candle lighting as a fixed yearly task before havdala. This first opinion objects to the formal-izing of such a weekday activity before the havdala ceremony. And, as mentioned earlier - most Jews follow this opinion and say Havdala before lighting Chanuka lights on Motza"Sh.

ON THE OTHER HAND...

There is a strong argument for lighting Chanuka candles before havdala. First of all, Shabbat is over at the posted time AND when one has said Havdala in davening (ATA CHONANTANU in the Maariv Amida) OR at least said BARUCH HAMAVDIL BEIN KODESH L'CHOL. The Havdala with wine, spices, candle, is NOT what ends Shabbat - it is what honors the departing Shabbat (and permits eating and drinking). Even so, havdala should go first, except for one very important factor: The prime time (and according to some opinions, the only time) for Chanuka candles is ticking away - namely, the first half-hour after dark. We cannot, of course, light Chanuka candles when it is still Shabbat. But we should maximize the portion of time of the "half-hour after" once we are allowed to light. Havdala will wait; Chanuka candles will not.

Therefore, the OTHER opinion is that Chanuka candles go first and then havdala. Remember: Shabbat must be over - both with time and havdala words - before one may light Chanuka candles.

And this procedure comes with the additional reminder not to use the Chanuka candles for havdala (or even to light the havdala candle from one of the Chanuka candle), since one may not benefit from the Chanuka lights, and the bracha in havdala is specifically upon using the light (examining of fingernails, etc.). Chanuka candles first is the opinion of the Vilna Gaon and others, and is Minhag Yerushalayim. (Remember that not everyone in Yerushalayim follows the practices known as Minhag Yerushalayim and some people elsewhere do.)

SO WHICH IS IT?

This dispute is one of the few in halacha that is resolved in this way: D'AVAD K'MAR AVAD, UD-AVAD K'MAR AVAD. "Whichever opinion you follow, you have performed

correctly." Either procedure may be followed. Family and community custom should play a significant role in this issue. Again, a Rav should be consulted, especially if one is considering a change of his/her practice.

Some add that those who light outdoors should follow the custom of lighting before havdala. Those who light indoors can take their pick.

REMEMBER: Shabbat is paramount. In case of doubt as to whether Shabbat is being encroached upon, one should NOT light Chanuka candles yet. It must be DEFINITELY after Shabbat before lighting. But one should not unnecessarily delay the fulfillment of the mitzva of Chanuka candles.

A note for Rabeinu Tam people:

Those who end Shabbat throughout the year 72 minutes after sunset and consider it to be the correct halachic time, must keep to that time on Motza'ei Shabbat Chanuka, even though it means losing "prime time" for Chanuka candles.

Those who hold Rabeinu Tam as a CHUMRA (a strict measure, a way of extending Shabbat, but consider the earlier time as halachic), may end Shabbat earlier on Motza'Sh Chanuka, in order to fulfill the mitzva of Chanuka candles at their better time. Check this out with your Rav if you are not sure what to do.

IN SHUL, by the way, it is the universal practice to light Chanuka candles before saying havdala, this to maximize Pirsumei Nisa in a situation where everyone present will be leaving for home shortly.

At home, people will still be there for the Chanuka candles, so there is no need to light before havdala (according to those who follow the first opinion).

A NICE TOUCH... Those who say havdala first can light the Shamash for the Chanuka candles with the havdala candle before extinguishing it, thus dovetailing the two mitzvot.

Those who follow the second opinion can light the havdala candle from the Shamash (but NOT from one of the Chanuka candles), thereby dovetailing one mitzva into another.

On Motza'ei Shabbat, when we light after Stars-Out, it is sufficient for the candles to burn for half an hour. Still, it is preferable that they last longer. This has to do with the fact that in our time, people are out in the streets later than in times past and Pirsumei Nisa (publicizing the miracle) applies later than the original "half-hour after stars-out" (according to most opinions).

More on (weekday) timing...

If, because of one's work or travel schedule, one has to choose between lighting early or late, or between lighting early or appointing someone to light for you in your home at the proper time - one should consult a Rav for a p'sak based on how early and how late, and any other relevant factors.

Sometimes a less-than-perfect performance of a mitzva is a fine, acceptable "second best". Sometimes, not. Lighting Chanuka candles early or late is a poor second, at best (except when Shabbat insists on early or late, depending upon which end of Shabbat is at issue).

Lighting early lacks an element of Pirsumei Nisa at the time of lighting - which is when the mitzva is performed - because a candle flame is not eye-catching during full daylight.

Lighting late is not so great because of the time-period for Pirsumei Nisa from the days of the Gemara remains the optimum time (and some say the ONLY time) for the fulfillment of the mitzva.

Although we follow other opinions, and basically allow lighting any time of the night, it is far less than ideal to light late. A "good" excuse is okay, but not great.

One should consult a Rav especially for recurring situations, such as coming home late from work or school, and the like. Remember that having someone light for you in your home is a valid alternative to your lighting for yourself, and sometimes it is even the preferred alternative. Ask your Rav.

OTHER MATTERS...

Many shuls sing L'CHA DODI to the tune of MA'OZ TZUR on Leil Shabbat Chanuka. And, of course, at the table, there are many Chanuka songs to add to your usual Friday night and Shabbat day repertoire of Z'mirot and songs. Remember, although Chanuka does not require a SEUDAT MITZVA, any meal (especially, but not only, on Shabbat) with songs, stories, and relevant Divrei Torah becomes a special Chanuka Seudat Mitzva.

We say Full Hallel on all 8 days of Chanuka

Chanuka Torah Reading

Torah reading for Chanuka is from Parshat Naso, Bamidbar 7 (known as Parshat HaN'si'im) and the beginning of Bamidbar 8 (the beginning of B'haalot'cha). It is the portion of the Torah that tells of the dedication (CHANUKA) of the Mishkan (and Mizbei'ach) during the time of Moshe Rabeinu and the generation that came out of Egypt. On Chanuka, we celebrate the rededication of the Beit

HaMikdash during the time of the Chashmona'im - hence the choice of Torah reading.

Furthermore, we have sources that say that the original Mishkan was ready to be put in service on the 25th of Kislev, but the inauguration of the Mishkan was held over to Rosh Chodesh Nissan in honor of Yitzchak Avinu who was born in Nissan. So reading about the dedication of the Mishkan is perfectly appropriate for our Chanuka, which begins on 25 Kislev.

On "regular" days of Chanuka, one Torah is read from; three people are called to the Torah. On Rosh Chodesh (that is a weekday - Thursday and Friday this year), two Torahs are read from; four Aliyot (3+1). On Shabbat Chanuka which is not also R"Ch, we use two Sifrei Torah. We have Shabbat Chanuka twice this year. On Shabbat - R"Ch - Chanuka (not this year), three Torahs.

FIRST DAY OF CHANUKA
Shabbat, 25 Kislev - Dec 5th

Two Torahs - in the first we read Parshat Vayeishev. Seven Aliyot, as usual.

Then the second Torah - MAFTIR

The reading starts with the introduction to Chanukat HaMizbei'-ach (the dedication of the Altar/ Mishkan) and continues to include the day one Nasi of Yehuda (Nachshon b. Aminadav). When the first day of Chanuka is Shabbat, the maftir includes the 11-pasuk intro with the allocation of wagons and oxen to the Levi families for carrying the parts of the dismantled Mishkan (except for K'hat, who carry the sacred vessels on their shoulders). Some communities begin with the 6-pasuk portion of Birkat Kohanim which immediately precedes Parshat HaN'si'im. This is appropriate because the battles and dedication of the Second Beit HaMikdash, which we celebrate with Chanuka, were done by the Kohein family of Chashmona'im.

The portion of Yehuda's Nachson b. Aminadav is made up of 6 p'sukim, which means that we have a 17-pasuk (or 23-pasuk) Maftir on this first of two Shabbatot Chanuka.

The HAFTARA, which is exactly the same as the one for Parshat B'haalot'cha, is from the book of Zecharia (2:14-4:7, 21 p'sukim) and includes the descrip- tion of a vision of a golden Menora.

It ends with a message that is as fresh today as it ever has been. "Not through armies and not through might, but through My (HaShem's) spirit..."

Yes, we need an army, and tanks and planes, etc. etc. But our ultimate and foolproof weapon against our

enemies is the spirit of G-d, which we are granted when we remain faithful to Him, keep His Torah and Mitzvot, and live by His values. We merit victory via faithfulness in HaShem and our efforts.

At Mincha of Shabbat Chanuka, we read the first part of Parshat Mikeitz.

SECOND DAY OF CHANUKA SUN, 26 Kislev - Dec 6th

One Torah, 3 people. The 6-pasuk portion of Yissachar's Netan'el ben Tzu'ar is read. 3 p'sukim for the Kohen. 3 p'sukim for the Levi. All 6 p'sukim repeated for the Yisrael.

THIRD DAY OF CHANUKA MON, 27 Kislev - Dec 7th

One Torah, 3 people. The 6-pasuk portion of Zevulun's Eliav ben Cheilon is read. 3 p'sukim for the Kohen. 3 p'sukim for the Levi. All 6 p'sukim repeated for the Yisrael.

FOURTH DAY OF CHANUKA TUE, 28 Kislev - Dec 8th

One Torah, 3 people. The 6-pasuk portion of Reuven's Elitzur b. Sh'dei-ur is read. 3 p'sukim for the Kohen. 3 p'sukim for the Levi. All 6 p'sukim repeated for the Yisrael.

FIFTH DAY OF CHANUKA WED, 29 Kislev - Dec 9th

One Torah, 3 people. The 6-pasuk portion of Shimon's Sh'lumiel b. Tzuri-shadai is read. 3 p'sukim for the Kohen. 3 p'sukim for the Levi. All 6 p'sukim repeated for Yisrael.

SIXTH DAY OF CHANUKA THU, 30 Kislev - Dec 10th First day of R"Ch TEVET

Two Torahs. To the first one we call three people for the Rosh Chodesh reading from Parshat Pinchas, Bamidbar 28:1-15. (We don't need to repeat a pasuk or two as we would on just a weekday Rosh Chodesh.)

In the second Torah, we read the portion of the tribal leader of the day. That would be Gad's Elyasaf b. D'u'el. Total number of Aliyot is 4, as for every Rosh Chodesh (& Chol HaMoed).

SEVENTH DAY OF CHANUKA FRI, 1 Tevet - Dec 11th Second day of R"Ch TEVET

Two Torahs - same as the SIXTH DAY. Second Torah (fourth Aliya): The 6-pasuk portion of Efrayim's Elishama b. Amihud is read.

Note: The sixth day of Chanuka is always Rosh Chodesh Tevet. When Kislev has its regular 30 days, then the seventh day of Chanuka is also Rosh Chodesh. This occurs almost 75% of the time. When Kislev is CHASEIR, only 29 days, then R"Ch is only on the sixth day of Chanuka.

2nd SHABBAT CHANUKA
8th day, 2 Tevet - Dec 12th

Three possibilities for what sedra is read on Shabbat Chanuka. The most common is only Mikeitz (71.5% of the time). When Chanuka is Shabbat to Shabbat (as it is this year), we read Vayeishev on the first Shabbat Chanuka, and Mikeitz on the second one (18.4%). Rarest is when Chanuka is Friday to Friday, in which case only Vayeishev is Shabbat Chanuka and Mikeitz is the day after Chanuka (10.1%).

Two Torahs. In the first Torah, this year, we read Parshat Mikeitz. Seven Aliyot, as usual.

In the second Torah, we read the parsha of the Nasi of the 8th day, Gamliel b. P'datzur of Menashe. we continue with the portions of days 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the dedication of the Mizbei'ach - Avidan b. Gid-oni of Binyamin, Achiezer b. Amishadai of Dan, Pag-i-el b. Achran of Asher, Achira b. Einan, and then the summary of the gifts from all twelve days, and then the first part of B'haalot'cha, the portion of the Menora. That's a 40-pasuk Maftir, the longest we've got. Added to the 153 p'sukim of Mikeitz brings us to 193 p'sukim, which is second longest Torah reading, behind Matot-Masei's 244 p'sukim.

The HAFTARA for the second Shabbat Chanuka, is Melachim Alef 7:40–50, eleven p'sukim that describe the furnishings of Shlomo HaMelech's Beit HaMikdash. The Gemara calls it NEIROT SHLOMO, "the lamps of Shlomo" (Megila 31a). The pasuk that gives the haftara that name comes almost at the end, in 7:49. Shlomo had ten menorot of pure gold, five on the right and five on the left in front of the D'vir, the Kodesh HaKodashim.

With the description of the Menora in the Zecharya portion on the first Shabbat Chanuka this year, we have a matched pair of haftarot at both ends of Chanuka.

At Mincha of this Shabbat Chanuka, we read the first part of Parshat Vayigash.

This is Chanuka!

Yes, we call the 8th day, ZOT CHANUKA because the Torah reading of that day has the phrase ZOT CHANUKAT HAMIZBEI'ACH. That would explain "This is Chanuka", but there is more to it than that. We need to explain the "!"

We sing in Ma'oz Tzur: B'NEI VINA Y'MEI SH'MONA, KAV'U SHIR URNANIM - Men of deep understanding established 8 days for joyous celebration.

It does not take "deep understanding" to make an 8-day holiday because a miracle lasted 8 days. And

if it lasted 5 days or 12 days? How long would Chanuka be?

The Greek oppression was designed to take us away from Torah. Banning Shabbat, Torah learning, other mitzvot... that was the Greek's plan.

There was one part of their challenge to Judaism that wasn't based 'merely' on attempting to strip us of that which makes us different. It was a serious philosophical issue. The Greeks venerated the human body and considered it a mutilation of that body to be circumcised. They banned Mila under penalty of death partly because that made us different, but partly because they actually considered Mila highly offensive (there's probably a better word).

Our Sages, men of BINA, deep understanding, created an 8-day holiday to make the statement that Mila is that which G-d commanded us to complete the human physical form and raise us to greater spiritual heights, as well.

The practice of lighting one candle the first night and counting to 8, says to the world, ZOT CHANUKA, this is what Chanuka means. We are still here. The Greeks are gone. Thank G-d!

Way before there was Chanuka

The Gemara in Masechet Avoda Zara tells us that when Adam HaRishon noticed that the day was getting shorter and shorter (as winter approached), he said: Woe unto me, perhaps because I sinned (by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), the world is getting darker and darker and is returning to TOHU VAVOHU (chaos and nothingness), and this is the death for me declared by Heaven. He stood (decided) and sat for 8 days in fasting and prayer. When he noticed that the days were beginning to get longer after T'kufat Tevet (the winter solstice), he said, this is the way of the world. He went and made an 8-day holiday. The following year, he made both 8-day periods into holidays. He acted for the sake of Heaven, but they (future genera- tions) turn them (the mid-winter holidays) towards paganism and idolatry.

That's the Gemara. Here's an added thought... Adam HaRishon established an 8-day holiday in the middle of the winter, when the days begin to get longer. Pagans and idolaters perverted Adam's sincere motives with their mid-winter holidays.

More than 3600 years after Adam's holiday, the Chashmona'im declared an 8-day mid-winter holiday, for the sake of Heaven, to thank G-d for victories and miracles... and perhaps to restore Adam's original celebration, that for so long had lost its way, to the original goal of thanking the One G-d. Gives you something to think about (and another DT for one of the nights.