



When to light Chanuka candles

1. The ideal time to light Chanuka candles is a dispute amongst the Rishonim, with opinions ranging from sunset to Tzeit HaKochavim. Some Poskim suggest lighting 10 minutes after sunset.¹
2. If one did not light at the beginning of the night, some say that he may light any time that night, while others say that he may do so as long as people are walking in the streets.²
3. If a person is in the middle of a seder of learning or in class, many poskim hold that one should wait until the end of the seder or class to light Chanuka candles.³

1. The Gemara (Shabbat 21b) writes that one should light the Chanuka candles “MiShetishka HaChamah.” The Mordechai (Hagahot Mordechai 455) writes that one should light Chanuka candles at Tzeit HaKochavim, because a candle isn’t noticeable during the day. The Tur and S”A 672:1 rule like the Mordechai. However, on the basis of other Rishonim the Gr”a 672:1 argues that one should light at sunset. See Bei’ur Halacha s.v. lo, who adds that perhaps the Rambam holds one should light at sunset. Mishna Brurah 672:1 quotes both the opinion of the S”A and Gra. Yalkut Yosef 672:1 writes that Sephardim should light 15 minutes after sunset, which is considered Tzeit HaKochavim according to some.

In order to satisfy all opinions, Rav Moshe (Igrot Moshe 4:101) writes that one should light 10 minutes after sunset, which he considers to be after Tzeit HaKochavim of the Geonim, with enough oil to last an hour (see Shemaytata DeMoshe 672).

2. According to one answer in the Gemara (ibid.), if one did not light at the proper time, one should still light as long as it is before the time that people have left the marketplace. Tosfot (21b) understand that according to the other answer in the Gemara, one may light all night long. Tosfot conclude that if one did not light before people left the marketplace, he should be strict to light even afterwards.

The Rambam (Chanuka 4:5), however, writes that after the people have left the marketplace, one may not light. The Bach 672:1 explains that the Rambam understood the two answers of the Gemara to be complementary rather than in disagreement. However, the Ri (Tosfot ibid.) raises the point that since nowadays we light indoors and there is pirsumei nisa for the family members, one may light even after the time that people have left the marketplace. S”A 672:2 rules that if one did not light before people left the marketplace, he nevertheless should do so later on.

The Magen Avraham 672:6 explains that one is allowed to light after people left the marketplace with

a bracha as long as the family members are awake. Thus, Mishna Brurah 672:11 says that if one is lighting after the time that people have left the marketplace, it is proper to awaken family members so that one may light with a bracha. Igrot Moshe 4:105:7, however, argues that even if all family members are sleeping, one may recite the bracha, because pirsumei nisa isn’t an absolutely essential part of the mitzvah.

The Rif (9b), Rambam (ibid.), and Rosh (2:3) all write that the time that people leave the marketplace is one half-hour after the time for lighting begins. Tur and S”A 672:2 codify this as halacha. However, the Ritva 21b s.v. Ad points out that this amount of time is not an objective time period, but rather is dependent on the time and place. Therefore, Rabbi Mordechai Willig (Hilchos Chanuka and Purim #1, min 19-20) rules that although the minhag of some yeshivot is to light about 20 minutes after sunset (see note 1), one may light as long as people are walking in the streets, which in a yeshiva could be very late indeed.

3. Me’iri (Shabbat 21b) writes that in France, the minhag of bnei yeshiva was to wait to light Chanuka candles until after they finished learning in the beit midrash. Rav Hershel Schachter (oral communication) quoted Rav Soloveitchik as having ruled that if someone is in middle of a seder of learning, such as the kollel’s afternoon seder, one should wait until the end of the seder in order to light Chanuka candles. Yalkut Yosef (Chanuka p. 80-1) quotes Rav Ovadia Yosef and Rav Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg to the same effect. See, however, Halichot Shlomo p. 296, where Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is cited as ruling that kollel members should go home to light at the right time even at the expense of interrupting a seder.

Rav Hershel Schachter said that if one is in middle of a class, he need not leave in order to light. Rather, one should wait until afterwards so that he will be able to sit by the candles for a short while.