

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

THE CORRECT WAY OF LIGHTING THE MENORAH? FUGGEDABOUDIT!

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During Hannukkah you'll find a lot of folks worrying about the details of how to light their menorahs correctly. Should they put the candles in from the right or the left? Should they light them from the left or the right? Is it permissible to have a menorah in which the candle holders are of different heights? When do you light the Hannukkah candles on Friday night and Saturday night? (You light the menorah before the Shabbat candles on Friday and after havdalah on Saturday evening.)

The advice of the Talmud is: "Don't worry about it! The minimal requirements for fulfilling the mitzvah of lighting the Hannukkah menorah are surprisingly easy:

The mitzvah of Hannukkah [requires only] one lamp for a man and his household. The zealous may [kindle] a lamp for each and every one [in the household]. [Concerning] the zealous among the zealous, Beit Shammai say: [On] the first day one lights eight [lamps] and from then on he continually minimizes [the number of lamps]. And Beit Hillel say: [On] the first day one lights one light and from there on adds [a light per day]....The reasoning [behind] Beit Hillel[s ruling] is that we raise things in holiness but do not diminish their holiness. (B. Shabbat 21b)

You really only need one candle per house per night as long as you don't make use of the light of that candle. If you really want to go all-out, each person can light one candle. If you want to do it in the fanciest way possible then you do as outlined above and have a menorah as we do today. But the basic mitzvah is still just one candle per house per day of Hannukkah.

Discussion Questions:

1. Lately there has been a real explosion of growth in Jewish ritual objects as pieces of art. There are beautiful collectible dreidels, menorahs of gold, glass and silver, and decorations of many kinds to be put up around the house. In what ways are these developments good? In which ways might they be bad?
2. The principle that we raise things in holiness rather than diminish them becomes an important principle in Jewish life. Have you experienced this in your own life? Did you raise some part of your life to a new level of holiness? Did you slide backwards from that level? What happened when you did?