

Shoel U'Mashiv

Lighting the Wrong Number of Chanukah Candles

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Q - I got a call from someone confused and concerned. He told me that he had accidentally lit an extra Chanukah candle the night before and wanted to know what he should do?

A - What is the actual *Mitzvah* of lighting on Chanukah?

To answer this question, we have to start by defining the parameters of the *Mitzvah*. The *Gemara Shabbos* 21B says the requirement on Chanukah is *נר איש וּביתו*, meaning every family needs to light a single candle. The *Rambam* in *Hilchos Megillah V'Chanukah* 4:1 presents an idea of *Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin* that every single person in the household lights a *Menorah* with the number of candles corresponding to the night of Chanukah. The *Rema* in *Orach Chaim* 671:2 says that is our practice.

Does the number of candles need to be exact?

At first glance, the *Mitzvah* of *Sefiras HaOmer* is very similar to the *Mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles since they are both centered around computing days. When it comes to *Sefiras HaOmer* the *Mishnah Berurah* 489:32 tells us that one who counted incorrectly must go back and count again with a *Bracha*. If they did not do so, then they must count without a *Bracha* for the rest of the *Omer*. The difference, however, between these two *Mitzvos* is that by *Sefiras HaOmer* the basic obligation is counting the individual day and every day has a different count to it. Whereas by Chanukah the basic obligation is just to have one candle per night and everything beyond that is *Hiddur*--is extra used to beautify the *Mitzvah*.

What should a person do if they make a mistake in the number of candles?

As we saw, even by putting in the wrong number of candles a person nevertheless performs the basic *Mitzvah* of lighting one candle for the night. Therefore, they can proceed as normal for the rest of the nights. Practically a person will have a problem since every pack of candles gives an exact amount for Chanukah. The remedy is not to add a *Shamesh* candle one night since the *Shamesh* is just there as a precaution so that if one accidentally gets benefit from the light (i.e., to see) it will be from the extra light of the *Shamesh* candle (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1).