

Women's Rites

December 7, 2023

Q From what kind of work should women refrain while the Chanuka lights are burning?



A The Shulchan Aruch (670:1) cites a minhag that women refrain from *melacha* during the first half-hour that the Chanukah lights are burning, as a reminder not to use them for personal benefit (Bais Yosef *ibid.*). Although the Mishnah Brurah (*ibid.* 2) says that in some places men share this practice, the prevailing minhag is that it is observed only by women, in commemoration of the contribution to the Chanukah miracle of Yehudis, daughter of Yochanan Kohein Gadol, in beheading the cruel general Holofernes.

Poskim disagree about what kind of *melacha* should be avoided. R' Moshe Feinstein held that it is the *melachos* forbidden on Chol Hamo'ed, e.g., sewing and laundry (cited by R' Shimon Eider, *Halachos of Chanukah B*, 8). According to R' Shmuel Vosner (Mibais Levi *cheilek* 10), tedious work—like sewing, mopping, and sorting laundry—is forbidden, but light work is permitted, including cooking, baking, and washing a small number of dishes. Some say to refrain from any work that causes distraction, including cooking and baking (cited in *Rivevos Efraim* 1:426), unless the food is to be eaten shortly (*Halichos Shlomo*, Chanukah 16 n. 14).

A woman may do *melacha* to avoid financial loss, in the way that *davar ha'aveid* is permitted on Chol Hamo'ed. One may be lenient in other pressing situations as well, because this is a minhag rather than a prohibition (R' Moshe *ibid.*).