

The Order of Lighting the Hanukkah Candles: The Evolution of a Custom and the Influence of the Publication of the Shulhan Arukh

By: J. JEAN AJDLER

Introduction

The lighting of Hanukkah candles is undoubtedly one of the most widespread and certainly the most recognized custom among the Jewish people.

Nevertheless most Jews are unaware that the ritual of the lighting and more precisely the order in which Hanukkah candles are lit, underwent an evolution over many centuries and that the order which has been adopted by the overwhelming majority of Jewish people was initially a marginal rite originating in France.

In the present paper we examine, through the rabbinical texts, the three major rites that existed in the middle-ages in the three dominant strands of Ashkenazi Jewry and the evolution of these ritual practices until contemporary times.

The emergence of the French rite was the result of an extraordinary combination of circumstances, including: the importance and prominence of R. Joseph Colon; the adoption of his ruling by R. Joseph Caro in *Beit Yoseph* and then in *Shulhan Arukh*; and the adoption of this rite by the Ari and his followers. The successful spread of Hassidism also contributed to the general acceptance of this rite in Eastern Europe, where other traditional rites still prevailed.

Today an overwhelming majority of Jews follow the French rite, while concurrently, the French Siddur, once considered as important as the German Siddur of Rhineland, died out completely and can only be found in rare books and manuscripts.

J. Jean Ajdler has an MS in engineering and works as a civil and structural engineer. He writes about medieval Jewish astronomy, the history of the Jewish calendar, and Talmudic metrology. He is the author of *Hilkhot Kiddush ha-Hodesh al-pi ha-Rambam*, Sifriati 1996, and has published in Tradition and BDD.

The Lighting of Hanukkah Candles

1. Where do we light the Candles?

In *Shabbat* 21b we read “The requirement is to place the Hanukkah light by the doorway of one’s house from the outside. If one lives on an upper floor he should place it in a window that is adjacent to the public domain and in time of danger he should place it on his table and that is sufficient.” *Shabbat* 22a continues in the name of Rabbah: “It is an obligation to place the Hanukkah candles within a hand-breadth from the entrance. And where does one put them? Rav Aha the son of Rava says on the right side. Rav Samuel from Difti says on the left side.” The Talmud concludes: “... on the left side so that the Hanukkah candle will be on the left side while the *mezuzah* will be on the right side”.

This conclusion was adopted by R. Hananel *ad locum* and by all the Rabbis. The Rabbis noted that the only reason to place the Hanukkah candles at the left side of the entrance is the presence of the *mezuzah* on the right side. If, for a good reason there was no *mezuzah* on the right side of the door, then the Hanukkah candles would be placed on the right side because the right side was always preferred.

2. The Number of Candles That Are Lit

The *braita* in B. *Shabbat* 21b writes that the basic obligation of Hanukkah is that a man and his family light one candle on each evening of the eight days of Hanukkah. Those who want to accomplish this obligation with more beauty (*mehadrin*) light one candle per each person present on each evening of the eight days of Hanukkah. Those who want to fulfill their obligation with the greatest possible beauty (*mehadrin min ha-mihadrin*), according to the House of Shammaï, light eight candles on the first evening, seven on the second evening and diminish one candle each subsequent evening until the eighth evening when only one candle is lit. In contrast, according to the House of Hillel, they light one candle on the first evening, two on the second evening and add one candle each subsequent evening until the eighth evening when eight candles are lit.

There are two divergent understandings of how to fulfill *mehadrin min hamihadrin*:

1. According to Maimonides, on the first evening each person present lights one candle, on the second evening, two candles and so on. The rule of Beit Hillel or Beit Shamai thus applies to each person present.
2. According to Tossafot, fulfilling only one series of candles is required for all who are present, i.e. one candle the first evening, two candles the second evening etc.

It is interesting to note that there are Ashkenazim who follow the opinion of Maimonides while, as already noted by Maimonides himself, the Sephardic custom is to light only one series of candles for the entire household and hence follows the opinion of Tossafot.¹

3. Lighting Inside the House

The Rabbinical authors of the Middle Ages abandoned the Talmudic ritual of lighting the Hanukkah candles outside the home in response to the intolerant Christian society of their time. The ritual was moved inside.² The Rabbis of the middle Ages wrote explicitly that all the rules and obligations which applied during Talmudic times about the location of the Menorah outside their houses were now applicable to the placement of the Menorah inside of houses.³ This was done either inside the front door,⁴ inside the back door,⁵ or at the entrance of the living room which was called the “*beit ha-boref*,” i.e. the winter room, the only heated room of the house, in which all the activities of the family were performed (see p. 23, Fig. 1).

Also, during the Middle Ages, for reasons of safety, Jews no longer placed the *mezuzah* at the entrance of their home. Therefore,

¹ R. David ha-Levi in *Magen David* (Taz) on *Orah Hayim* 676 writes that Sephardim follow Tossafot and Ashkenazim follow Rambam!

² See *Mabaẓor Vitry* of R. Simha, vol. I, p. 201; *Sefer Ha-Ittur, Asseret ha-Dibrot: Hilkhhot Hanukkah*; and Mordehai on *Shabbat* 266. See also *Or Zarua* part 2, p. 139:322,323.

³ See *Hagabot Maimoniot* of R. Meir ha-Cohen a disciple of R. Meir of Rothenburg, *Hilkhhot Hanukkah* 4; note 5. See also *She'elot u-Teshuvot Maharil* 40. See *Darkei Moshe* on *Tor Orah Hayim* 671, notes 4 and 9.

⁴ *Sefer ha-Ittur, Asseret ha-Dibrot: Hilkhhot Hanukkah; Toldot Adam ve-Hava, netiv* 9, part 1; *Tor* 671, end and *Darkei Moshe, Tor O.H.* 671, 9.

⁵ *Toldot Adam ve-Hava, netiv* 9, part 1; *Tor O.H.* 671, end and *Darkei Moshe Tor O.H.* 671, 9.

many authors⁶ reported that Rabbi Ephraim of Regensburg⁷ ruled that when there is no *mezuzah* at the main entrance of the house the Hanukkah candles were to be placed at the right of the entrance. Thus the Hanukkah candles were lit inside the house on the right side.⁸ Because the placement of the Hanukkah candles was inside the home they were no longer visible to the pedestrians on the street. As a result, *Sefer Ravia*⁹ stated that we could no longer claim that the candles were lit in order to publicly proclaim the miracle. Thus, there was no longer an obligation to light the candles before pedestrian traffic had ceased. Since the candles were lit only for members of the family to look at, the entire night was suitable for lighting the candles.

The Talmudic ruling, that the Hanukkah candles must be placed within a handbreadth from the entrance of the house and on the left side of it, was now applied to candles placed inside the front or back door or at the entrance of the “*beit ha-horef*”.¹⁰ In this last case, the Rabbis provided that the candles be placed either outside the room at its entrance, or in the room itself. It was placed near the left doorpost if there was a *mezuzah* on the right doorpost; otherwise it was juxtaposed to the right doorpost. They took the Talmudic text “*Ner Hanukkah mitzyah lebanikha be-tefah ha-samukh la-petalh*” literally and understood it to require the Hanukkah candles to be placed within a handbreadth from the appropriate doorpost of the entrance.¹¹ Generally,

⁶ *Or Zarua*, book 2:323; *Mordehai Shabbat* 266 (*Hagahah*); *Sefer Ravia* Vol 5, *Shibolei ha-Leket* 185.

⁷ Rabbi Ephraim of Regensburg (1110-1175), *tosafist* and *paytan*; among the first pupils of R. Tam.

⁸ Rabbi Zedekiah ben Abraham Anav of Rome (1225-1297) referred also to the ruling of R. Ephraim of Regensburg but questioned it. He did not understand why the Hanukkah candles must be placed on the right side when the candles are lit inside. Apparently he had a *mezuzah* fixed inside and did not understand that for R. Ephraim there was no *mezuzah* outside or inside.

⁹ Also called *Sefer Avi ha-Ezri* by R. Eliezer ben Joel ha-Levi of Bonn (1140-1225). See *Sefer Ravia* vol. 5, Jerusalem 2004, Jehiel Gershon Grossberg: 972 and *Sefer Ravia* vol. 5. *Benei Berak* 2000, David Debel-ski: 972.

¹⁰ *She'elot u-Teshuvot Maharil* 40; *Terumat ha-Deshen* 106; *Darkei Moshe* 671, 4.

¹¹ *Shabbat* 22a seems to say that the menorah must be near the entrance, within a handbreadth of the threshold of the building and not removed

the Menorah would be placed inside the “*beit ha-horef*”, either perpendicular to the entrance or parallel to it.

Since the original purpose for placing the Hanukkah candles outside the house at its entrance was the public manifestation of the miracle, a house with two entrances required two sets of Hanukkah candles. Now that the lighting of Hanukkah candles was done inside the house, this was no longer necessary¹² even for a winter room with two entrances.

4. The Order of Lighting the Hanukkah Candles

The question of the order of lighting the Hanukkah candles was not raised before the thirteenth century when it was reported¹³ that when R. Meir ben Barukh of Rothenburg¹⁴ (Maharam) was lighting the Hanukkah candles, he began on the left side and then turned to the right, following the Talmudic aphorism¹⁵ “all the rotations that you do, should be to the right.” Maharam thus always began the lighting of the candles by the same left candle, the lighting of which he considered as the basic fulfillment of the *mitzvah*

From that time onward the order of lighting the Hanukkah candles became a recurrent theme among scholars and each author adopted a definite position about this issue. Similarly, the question of whether the Hanukkah candles should still be placed at the left of the entrance when there is no *mezuzah*, or on the right, continued to be debated.

from it in the street. Only later were the words understood to mean that the first and main candle must be close to the doorpost of the entrance of the building or room. But Mordehai still seems to understand the passage of the Talmud as referring to the distance of the menorah to the door as he slightly changes the Talmud’s wording to “*be-tefah ha-samukh li-reshut ha-rabbim*”.

¹² *Mahazor Vitry* of R. Simha, Nuremberg 1923, vol. 1, p. 201.

¹³ *Sefer Tashbets* by his disciple Shimshon ben Tsadok; *Teshuvot, Pesakim u-Minbagim*, Ytshak Ze’ev Kahana, Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 4 volumes, 1957-1977; *Mordehai Shabbat* 268.

¹⁴ R. Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg (c. 1215-1293).

¹⁵ *Yoma* 15b, 17b, 45a. *Sotah* 15b. *Zebahim* 62b.

The Evolution of the Custom

1. The Fourteenth Century

The question of whether the Hanukkah candles must be placed inside on the left or on the right because of the absence of a *mezuzah* was debated throughout the 14th century.

In contrast to Germany, where there were no *mezuzahs* on outside doors, in Spain the Jews did have a *mezuzah* at their back entrance although not at the front.¹⁶

Rabbi Aaron ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Lunel (1270-1340; *Sefer Kolbo*¹⁷ and *Sefer Orhot Hayim*¹⁸) notes the opinion that Hanukkah candles must be placed on the left of the entrance only if there is a *mezuzah* on the right, but otherwise the candles are to be placed on the right. However, this was not the rule in his own town and he maintained that whether there is a *mezuzah* or not, the Hanukkah candles must always be placed on the left and one begins lighting the Hanukkah candles from near the left doorpost. They thus lit the left candle first and proceeded to the right.¹⁹

In *Toledot Adam ve-Hava*,²⁰ Rabbi Jeroham ben Meshulam (c. 1290-1350), a Spanish Talmudist born in Provence wrote that in his time Hanukkah candles were lit inside, either near the front door or the back door (leading to the courtyard). A *mezuzah* was not placed at the front door because the gentiles would then take it away but was placed at the back door, and the Hanukkah candles were placed inside, near the left doorpost. It was preferable to light in the back so

¹⁶ There was no *mezuzah* at the main entrance or it was placed inside.

¹⁷ We follow the assumption of Isaac Benjacob (*Otsar ha-Sefarim*, Vilna 1880, p. 279) that *Sefer Kolbo* is from R. Aaron ben Jacob of Lunel and constitutes a first version of the book *Orhot Hayim* of the same author. R. Hayim Joseph David Azoulay also noted the similarity between the two books and attributed *Sefer Kolbo* to R. Aaron of Lunel. He notes, however, that *Sefer Orhot Hayim* preceded *Sefer Kolbo* (see *Shem ha-Gedolim, Kolbo*). *Sefer Kolbo*, second part, ed. David Abraham, Jerusalem 1993.

¹⁸ Jerusalem 1986, facsimile of the first edition: *Orhot Hayim*, edition Isaac de Fez, Florence 1750. See p. 118, first column, letter א.

¹⁹ *Sefer Kolbo*, vol. 2, p. 298, n. 156.

²⁰ *Netiv* 9, part 1.

that the candles be juxtaposed to a *mezuzah*. Thus while in Germany the lack of a *mezuzah* caused the candles to be lit on the right side, in Spain and Provence, with or without a *mezuzah*, the candles were lit on the left.

Interestingly, R. Jeroham reported²¹ another variation in lighting in the name of R. Jonah Gerondi. On the first day all three blessings were recited before lighting the first candle, but on the following days of Hanukkah the first blessing was recited and then all of the candles, except the last one, were lit. The second blessing was then recited and the last candle was lit.²² He based his conduct on the fact that the lighting of the last candle represented the miracle of the present day and therefore the blessing of *al ha-nissim*, which refers specifically to the miracle, should come just before lighting that candle. R. Jeroham added however that he had not seen this done in practice.²³ From the description of the practice of R. Jonah Gerondi by R. Jeroham we can deduce that on each evening they began to light the same candle, most likely the left candle, and then they turned to the right until they reached the last candle representing the miracle of the current day. This means that their order of lighting the Hanukah candles was probably the same as R. Meir of Rothenburg.

In responsum 94 Rabbi Jacob ha-Levi Moellin (Maharil, c. 1360-1427), discussed the obligation of placing a *mezuzah* at the entrance of the different rooms of the house. It appears that the Jews of Rhineland used every possible halakhic excuse to be exempted from placing a *mezuzah* on the different internal doors of the house and only had one *mezuzah*, at the front entrance. For example, they did not place a *mezuzah* at the entrance of the “*beit ha-boref*”, the living room,

²¹ In his book *Toledot Adam ve-Hava netiv* 9, part 1.

²² This custom was also mentioned by R. David ben Joseph Abudharam, a Spanish Talmudist of the 14th century and later in *Beit Yoseph, Orach Hayim* 676 with reference to *Sefer Abudharam*.

²³ He also noted that in his time they no longer lit the Hanukkah candles outside but rather, inside, near the front door. Others, he said, were accustomed to lighting the Hanukkah candles inside near to the back door (leading to the courtyard). Indeed it was not the custom to put the *mezuzah* on the right doorpost of the front door because the gentiles would take it away. Therefore the *mezuzah* was put on the right doorpost of the back, probably outside the back door, and the Hanukkah candles were placed inside, near the left doorpost of the back door.

under the pretext that the women were doing their toilette in this room. From the responsum it appears that the Jews of Austria also did not place a *mezuzah* at the entrance of the “*beit ha-boref*.”²⁴ While Maharil considered the behavior of the Jews of Rhineland to be in violation of rabbinic law, he accepted it as irreversible fact.

In responsum 40²⁵ he notes that since the Jews of the Rhineland did not put a *mezuzah* at the entrance of the “*beit ha-boref*” they had to place the menorah near the right doorpost of the entrance of this room rather than at the left doorpost as his interlocutor thought.²⁶ He discusses at length the practice of turning from left to right whether it be around the external altar of the Beit ha-Miqdash, the golden internal altar, lighting the Hanukkah candles or shaking the four species. He rejects another opinion that he once heard requiring turning to the left.²⁷

Maharil made no distinction in the order of lighting the candles, whether the menorah is put at the left side of the entrance of the winter room, or whether it was put at the right side.²⁸ That this was his position is confirmed in *Sefer Maharil*²⁹ Maharil himself lit the Hanukkah candles from the left to the right,³⁰ at the left of the entrance of his [winter] room because he had a *mezuzah* at the right.

²⁴ They did affix a *mezuzah* at the entrance of the other rooms because there were many families living in one house and these *mezuzos* were placed between the domiciles of different families.

²⁵ This responsum was addressed to R. Jacob ha-Levi Geilhauzen, his nephew.

²⁶ We have, however, seen above that two Spanish authorities of the 14th century ruled differently.

²⁷ He also insisted that all the blessings be pronounced before the lighting, *over le-asiyatam*. Perhaps it was a reaction to the opinion of R. Jona Gerondi of which he could have already heard. But it was certainly a reaction to other authorities who began to light the candles after the first benediction and lit the other candles while pronouncing the second benediction.

²⁸ As it should be in most Jewish houses of Rhineland, but probably was not, as we can understand from the question asked in responsum 40.

²⁹ A compilation of teachings and customs of Maharil written by his disciple Zalman of St. Goar.

³⁰ At a height of less than ten handbreadths, *Shabbat* 21b bottom.

Similarly Rabbi Eizik Tyrnau, a contemporary of Maharil, from Tyrnau, Austria, writes that if there was no mezuzah at the entrance of a house, the menorah was placed inside within a handbreadth of the right of the entrance.³¹ He quotes Maharam that one should begin the lighting at the left side and end at the right side rotating to the right as in the Beit HaMiqdash. As with the Maharil, his language implies that this order of lighting, did not depend on whether the candles were placed at the right or the left, outside or inside the entrance. There is no mention of lighting at the entrance of the winter room.³²

2. The Fifteenth Century

The problem of the order of lighting the Hanukkah candles remained a matter of dispute in the 15th century.

Rabbi Israel ben Petahiah Isserlein (1390-1460), (*Responsa Terumat ha-Deshen*): The customs of the important *posek* R. Israel Isserlein are recorded by a student³³ in the compilation, *Leket Yosher*. R. Isserlein lit the Hanukkah candles from left to right, at the entrance, at the right doorpost when there was no *mezuzah*.³⁴ He did not mention the winter room and from his text it seems that the order of lighting, from the left to the right, did not depend on the position of the menorah. He mentions, however, another custom he attributes to the Austrians of lighting the candles from the right to the left.

³¹ Apparently he meant the entrance within the house. People were no longer lighting the menorah at the entrance outside the house, but in the entrance inside the house. This also seems to be the understanding of the anonymous author of the *Hagabot*, the remarks. He referred to the prevalent custom of his time, the beginning of the sixteenth century, of lighting the menorah at the entrance of the *beit ha-boref*. He questioned the finality and utility of lighting the menorah at this place (the entrance inside the house).

³² Or of lighting from right to left which we will shortly see is recorded as being the Austrian custom.

³³ The compilation written by his pupil R. Joseph ben Moses of Munster.

³⁴ The text is unclear and repetitious, and the editor, R. Jacob Freiman, should fix it. He notes that he could not decide whether to suppress the redundant text. According to this text R. Isserlein lit the candles from left to right even if he had to place the Hanukkah candles on the right because of the absence of a *mezuzah*.

In his celebrated responsa *Terumat ha-Deshen*. R. Isserlein devotes an entire responsum (106) to the order of lighting the Hanukkah candles. He notes that while the Jews from Rhineland light from left to right following the opinion of Maharam, the Jews from Austria began with the right candle and turned to the left as Jews do when they write Hebrew. R. Isserlein attempted to justify the Austrian custom in the following way: the overwhelming majority of the Jews and even the scholars had no *mezuzah* at the entrance of their winter room where they lit the Hanukkah candles. Therefore they put the Hanukkah candles to the right of the entrance within a handbreadth of the doorpost³⁵ and the right candle is then always the candle nearest to the right doorpost. R. Isserlein seems to understand the expression “within a handbreadth of the entrance” in a new way, that the menorah and especially the first lighted candle should be immediately close to the doorpost of the entrance. They viewed it as obligatory to begin with this right candle because it constitutes the basic obligation, i.e. it was in fact sufficient to light only this one candle if one does not perform the mitzvah according to the *mehadrin*.³⁶ On this basis R. Isserlein explained that the difference between the two customs depended on the presence of a *mezuzah*. Maharam had a *mezuzah* at the entrance of his winter room. Therefore he was obligated to light his candles on the left side³⁷ of the entrance; for him the candle near to the left doorpost was always to his left.³⁸

³⁵ As the Mordehai requires. In *Shabbat 22a* this expression means that the menorah is not removed from the entrance more than one handbreadth; the position of the menorah with regard to the doorposts of the entrance, left or right, is considered separately.

³⁶ This justifies the Austrian custom.

³⁷ This justifies, in his opinion, the custom of Maharam and apparently of the Jews of Rhineland who follow him. Note that R. Isserlein has not yet made use of the main argument of Maharam that one must turn from the left to the right.

³⁸ In fact Mordehai and Maharil do not develop the first part of R. Isserlein's argument and apparently all their justifications of the custom are based on the rule that one should turn to the right. Because of this new rule, introduced by R. Isserlein, there was no need for Maharam to justify his conduct by the necessity to turn from left to right. Therefore R. Isserlein introduces the case where the Hanukkah candles are oriented east-west (see Fig. 1) to prove at which side from the candles one must

R. Isserlein thus proposed an historical and sociological explanation of the difference in custom between the Jews of Rhineland and Austria. But this explanation seems questionable since we know, from the testimony of Maharil,³⁹ that the Jews of the Rhineland also did not put a *mezuzah* at the entrance of their winter room, and hence placed the menorah on the right just as their Austrian brethren, and nevertheless lit from left to right, as did Maharam. Even R. Isserlein, according to Leket Yosher, followed this custom.

R. Isserlein is the first to mention this Austrian custom of lighting from right to left. It was not mentioned even by R. Abraham Klausner and R. Eizik Tyrnau, the two compilers of *Minbagim* in Austria of the preceding generation. While R. Isserlein tried to explain the divergent opinions in Austria and the Rhineland by the absence of the *mezuzah* on the right doorpost, the truth is probably that there were two different ancient traditions. Nevertheless, the explanation proposed by R. Isserlein to explain the origin of the two different customs became a new standard of halakha. Thus it was decided that one begins to light the candles within a handbreadth from the right doorpost if there is no *mezuzah* and from the left doorpost if there is a *mezuzah* on the right doorpost.

R. Joseph ben Solomon Colon, Maharik⁴⁰ (c.1420-1480): In responsum 183⁴¹ R. Joseph ben Solomon Colon relates the tradition of R. Meir of Rothenburg quoted by Mordehai. But he interprets it differently: on the first night, one lights the candle on the right and on the second night, one adds a second candle to the left of the first candle and pronounces both blessings before lighting this added candle, and then proceeds to turn to the right, to light the other candle. On the third evening, a new candle is added to the left of the two first candles, and once again the lighting begins with the newest candle over which the blessings are pronounced and the lighting then proceeds to the right. This routine is then followed during the remaining nights of

stand, using the principle that one must turn from left to right. One must turn one's face to the south and begin with the candle near to the doorpost of the entrance, at one's left.

³⁹ In responsa 40 and 94.

⁴⁰ Sometimes the abbreviation Maharik refers to R. Joseph Caro, but today Maharik refers exclusively to R. Joseph Colon.

⁴¹ *Tshivot Maharik*.

Hanukkah. The blessings are always pronounced on the new candle, because with each new day the miracle became greater!⁴² However, R. Colon states that if one begins to light with the left candle on the first night, one must begin with the same left candle on the different nights of Hanukkah in order to turn to the right in accordance with the primary requirement of R. Meir! In this case, during the whole Hanukkah one would always pronounce the blessings upon the same left candle.

R. Joseph Colon's new approach to the lighting sequence, reminiscent of that of R. Jonah,⁴³ puts the emphasis on the additional candle of the current day. R. Colon's preference of beginning the lighting with this last candle contradicted what had at that point become the mainstream:⁴⁴ the custom of Rhineland, Austria and probably of Spain was to begin each day with the same candle that represented the basic mitzvah. While R. Colon writes his opinion in accordance with the Mordehai's citation of Maharam, he in fact differs from the Maharam's way of lighting. While Maharik preferred beginning with the new, supplementary candle, all his German predecessors, (as R. Isserlein explained in responsum 106) began with the left candle, near the left doorpost,⁴⁵ representing the basic *mitzvah*.

3. The Sixteenth Century.

We note the emergence of three different customs of the three branches of Ashkenazi Judaism. R. Colon represented the remnants of the French tradition surviving in Savoy⁴⁶ and some Italian com-

⁴² Here lies the difference between Maharik and R. Isserlein. The latter requires that the benedictions be pronounced on the same candle; it represents the basic obligation of Hanukkah. According to him, the other candles are only a *biddur*, an embellishment of the *mitzvah* made by those who want to perform their obligation in the most beautiful manner.

⁴³ Quoted earlier by R. Yeroham, but differentiating between *al ha-nissim* and the first blessing.

⁴⁴ See *Terumat ha-Deshen* 106 who writes clearly that the basic *mitzvah* is the lighting of the first candle, the one nearest to the left doorpost of the entrance or the right doorpost if there is no *mezuzah*.

⁴⁵ If there is a *mezuzah* on the right doorpost.

⁴⁶ Where he was born.

munities; Maharam and Maharil represented the West German customs; and R. Isserlein represented, or at least mentioned the East European custom (East Germany, Bohemia, Moravia, Lesser and Great Poland). One might imagine that this put an end to this discussion. In fact, the Rabbis continued to ponder the issue, offering even more sophisticated solutions for lighting the Hanukkah candles so as to satisfy contradictory requirements.

Already in his *Beit Yoseph*,⁴⁷ R. Joseph Caro⁴⁸ adopted the opinion of R. Joseph Colon that diverged from the mainstream understanding of Maharam's opinion by all the Jews of Rhineland. He then maintained the opinion in his *Shulhan Arukh*.⁴⁹ This ruling of *Shulhan Arukh* was pivotal in the evolution of the custom of the lighting of the Hanukkah candles. Indeed the opinion of R. Joseph Colon, although the main authority in Italy in the fifteenth century, was a marginal opinion. But its support by R. Joseph Caro in *Beit Yoseph* and the *Shulhan Arukh*, propelled it to the foreground. The revolutionary development of printing at this time, assured a wider readership of R. Joseph Caro's publications. The custom was soon adopted by the cabbalists of Safed⁵⁰ and Sephardic communities. Despite fierce resistance in Germany and Eastern Europe, in less than a century it became an important and eventually, the mainstream practice. As a result of the success of the *Shulhan Arukh*, the marginal old French custom became the standard.

R. Solomon Luria (c. 1510-1574, Maharshal),⁵¹ wrote that in his day no one placed a *mezuzah* at the entrance of the winter room.

⁴⁷ Written on the *Tor* and completed by 1542 but edited only from 1555 onwards.

⁴⁸ R. Joseph Caro (1488-1575) was the author of *Beit Yosef* on the *Tor*, of *Kesef Mishneh* on Maimonides' *hibbur*, the *Yad ha-Hazakah* and finally of his own *Shulhan Arukh*.

⁴⁹ *Orah Hayim* 676. The *Shulhan Arukh* was edited in 1565 and had a tremendous success which helped to impose its opinion in many instances and even to change many accepted rulings and many traditions.

⁵⁰ In *Sefer Peri Ets Hayim*, R. Hayim Vital (1542-1620) mentions that his teacher R. Yitshak Luria Ashkenazi lighted the candles according to the order of *Shulhan Arukh* and the ruling of R. Joseph Colon.

⁵¹ Responsa of Maharshal, Lemberg 1859: Responsum 85. The first edition of his responsa was issued in 1578, only 13 years after the *Shulhan Arukh*.

Therefore the Hanukkah candles were placed near the right doorpost of the winter room. If the candles were aligned near this doorpost, parallel to the entrance,⁵² then one was required to light the candle near to this doorpost first, i.e. the right candle, and then turn to the left⁵³ contrary to the instructions of Maharik.⁵⁴ To satisfy the most meticulous who wanted to begin with the left candle and turn to the right in spite of the fact that we are lighting near the right post, Maharshah advised placing the menorah in the entrance of the room, perpendicular to the entrance⁵⁵ and against the right doorpost.⁵⁶ All candles were now at the same distance from the doorpost and could be considered as being “*be-tefah ha-samukh la-petah*.”⁵⁷ There was no longer a right or left of entrance issue. One was now able to begin, on each evening, with the left candle and turn to the right.⁵⁸ With this solution, Maharshah found a way to maintain the custom of the Rhineland and the ruling of the Maharam. Thus for areas where Jews had no *mezuzah* in their living rooms, he still satisfied the principles of:

- Beginning with the candle placed nearest to the doorpost of the entrance (R. Isserlein).
- Beginning with the left candle (Maharam).
- Turning from left to right (Maharam⁵⁹).

⁵² In the direction north-south, see Fig. 2.

⁵³ Like the Austrians, according to the explanation of R. Isserlein which is now the rule.

⁵⁴ It is not certain to whom he refers, R. Colon or R. Caro; probably the former.

⁵⁵ In the direction east-west, see Fig. 2.

⁵⁶ Old editions of the responsa of Maharshah, have a strange expression describing the disposition of the candles: *כמו שפורד*. The new edition of the responsa of Maharshah, Jerusalem 5753, does not contain this expression; it was probably a mistake and it was suppressed. Beginning with *Magen Avraham* all Rabbis and commentators of *Shulhan Arukh* had copied this expression without trying to explain it.

⁵⁷ According to the concept of R. Isserlein.

⁵⁸ Maharshah lit the candles according to the old German custom defined by R. Meir of Rothenburg. He was not influenced by the method supported by R. Joseph Caro in his *Shulhan Arukh*.

⁵⁹ The Gra writes that this solution does not seem genuine. I suppose that Gra is following the unification theory of R. Isserlein and feels that

While it seems that R. Moses ben Israel Isserles (Rema, c. 1525-1572),⁶⁰ in his *Darkei Moshe*, notes the old Rhineland tradition^{61 62} in *Shulhan Arukh* O.H. 676, 5, where the order of lighting the candles according to Maharik is explained, there is no gloss from Rema, implying that he accepts this ruling.⁶³

R. Mordehai Jaffe⁶⁴ (Levush c. 1535-1612), championed the custom of the Austrian Jews following the reasoning of R. Isserlein. He explained “turning to the right” to mean to begin with the right and then by necessity, after this first movement to the right, to turn to the

when you have a *mezuzah* you begin lighting on the left side like Maharam and turn to the right; and when you do not have a *mezuzah* you begin by lighting the candles at the right like the Austrians and turn to the left. You don't create artificial and sophisticated solutions.

⁶⁰ Rema wrote *Darkei Moshe* on *Beit Yoseph* and *Hagabot ha-Rema* on *Shulhan Arukh* to defend the Ashkenazi rulings and traditions.

⁶¹ One must light the Hanukkah candles within a handbreadth near the entrance of the house or of the winter room—on the left if there is a *mezuzah* and otherwise on the right. Furthermore one must begin each evening by lighting the candle on the left side and then must turn to the right according to the accepted custom. He thus maintained the rule according to the old Rhineland custom and lit the candles from left to right.

⁶² In *Hagabot ha-Rema*, *Shulhan Arukh Yore Deah* 287, 2 he criticized the custom that most people had only one *mezuzah* in their house, generally at its entrance

⁶³ This is somewhat surprising because there is some evidence that Rema might disagree with this ruling. In *O. H.* 674, 2 we find the following gloss of Rema: “We are accustomed to be strict and forbid lighting one Hanukkah candle from the other because the basic obligation is to light only one candle (the first one) whereas the other candles are of a lesser obligation.” It appears that Rema was still attached to the principle expressed by R. Isserlein that one begins by lighting the first candle representing the basic obligation and the additional candles are only an embellishment of the *mitzvah* and we do not light those additional candles of *hiddur* with the candle of the *mitzvah*. Gra on *O. H.* 676, 5 alludes to this gloss of Rema in order to contradict the ruling of *Shulhan Arukh* to begin with the additional candle. The Gra championed the custom of Rhineland.

⁶⁴ In *Levush*, *Orah Hayim* 676.

left. The menorah was placed against the right doorpost, and one lit the right candle first and proceeded by turning to the left.

4. The Seventeenth Century

The order of lighting the Hanukkah candles continued to be debated in the 17th century and new sophisticated suggestions were developed.

R. Joel Sirkes⁶⁵ took exception to the rule of Maharik and *Shulban Arukh*. He wrote that the correct rule was R. Isserlein's in *Terumat ha-Desben* to always begin by lighting the candle within a handbreadth from the doorpost of the entrance. Although this meant that when there was no mezuzah the lighting began on the right and turned left, it was of no concern because one must begin with the candle nearest to the right doorpost of the entrance. As we have seen there are those who considered this way of lighting the candles the true way of *turning to the right*. He did not accept the ruling of *Shulban Arukh*.

R. David ha-Levi⁶⁶ proponent a solution aimed at satisfying the following principles:

- To begin with the additional candle (Maharik).
- To turn from right to left (Levush).
- To begin with the candle nearest the doorpost (R. Isserlein).

From his language we can determine that the menorah was at the left side of the entrance of the winter room and that he had a *mezuzah* at the entrance of this room.⁶⁷ Therefore if the door of this room was on the east wall of the room, he placed the menorah parallel to the left doorpost from east to west, like Maharshah,⁶⁸ so that all the candles were at the same distance from the doorpost of the door. The head of the family stood in the entrance of the room facing south. On the first evening he lit the left candle, on the second evening he

⁶⁵ R. Joel Sirkes (1561-1640) in *Bait Hadash on Tor Orab Hayim* 676. *Bait Hadash* was published for the first time in Cracow between 1631 and 1639.

⁶⁶ R. David Ha-Levi (1586-1667), R. Joel Sirkes' son-in-law, in *Tourei Zahav, Taz*, on *Shulban Arukh*.

⁶⁷ See Fig. 2.

⁶⁸ Maharshah had his menorah on the right doorpost but Taz must have had a *mezuzah*, and the menorah was thus affixed to the left doorpost. The text of Taz is not easy to understand.

placed the additional candle on its right. The additional candle was thus the western candle, nearest to the empty space of the room, to his right. He began by lighting the right candle and went on to the left.

Since Taz wanted to begin with the candle nearest to the doorpost, he placed the menorah in the entrance in the direction east-west similarly to the Maharshah.⁶⁹ However, there is a fundamental difference between the two approaches. Maharshah aimed to begin with the primary candle. It represented the basic *mitzvah*, and had to be within a handbreadth of the doorpost. Taz, however, wanted to begin with the last additional candle⁷⁰ and wanted it to be within a handbreadth from the doorpost. It is somewhat surprising that Taz couples the position of beginning the lighting with the last additional candle with the requirement that this additional candle be the nearest to the doorpost.⁷¹

Taz also considered the possibility of placing the Menorah along the east wall, in the north-south direction, at the right of the entrance,⁷² if it was impossible to light the menorah in the first manner. The head of the family stood, facing east. On the first night he lit one candle, immediately to the right of the entrance and to his own left. On subsequent evenings, he placed the additional candles to the right of the first and began lighting from the last candle furthest to his right and continued to the left. Taz considered this solution acceptable provided one candle was within a handbreadth from the doorpost. Since according to Taz one always begins by lighting the additional candle, therefore the presence of a *mezuzah* was irrelevant. The presence of the *mezuzah* would only effect which side of the entrance to light the menorah on.

⁶⁹ As mentioned above, Gra criticized this solution but others like *Arukh ha Shulhan* and *Mishnah Berurah* have, on the contrary, praised this solution.

⁷⁰ Like Maharik.

⁷¹ Nevertheless, *Arukh ha-Shulhan* and *Mishnah Berurah*, who followed *Shulhan Arukh*, praised this solution to put the menorah in the “space of the door.” From his notes on Hanukkah in his *Siddur*, we see that R. Shneur Zalman also hung his menorah in the “space of the door” against the doorpost of the entrance like the *mezuzah*’.

⁷² See Fig. 2.

By contrast, in *Yoseph Omets* 1074,⁷³ R. Joseph Jouspa Hahn, a champion of the German tradition, accepted without any reservation the ruling of *Shulban Arukh*.

R. Abraham Gombiner sums up the various opinions but does not take a personal position on the subject^{74 75}.

5. The Eighteenth Century.

In the 18th century, the *Poskim*⁷⁶ remained divided on the issue of the order of lighting the Hanukkah candles. Among the most notable R. Jacob Emden,⁷⁷ R. Abraham Danzig⁷⁸ and R. Schneur Zalman⁷⁹ fol-

⁷³ R. Joseph Jouspa ben Pinehas Seligman Hahn (1570-1637) is the author of the book of Minhagim, *Yoseph Omets*. He was probably one of the first German rabbis to accept the new system. According to his testimony the community of Frankfort accepted some other novelties: see 588 where he stated that the *Kabalat Shabbat* is recent and he praises it. In 605 he spoke about the customs of the Ari.

⁷⁴ R. Abraham Gombiner (1637-1683) in *Magen Abraham* on *Shulban Arukh*.

⁷⁵ The text of *Magen Avraham* is often difficult to understand. He writes here: “and so wrote the Bah”, but this remark is related to the penultimate proposition about beginning by the right candle but not about the artifice of Maharshal. In the commentary *Be'er Hetev*, the passage of *Magen Avraham* is reproduced, about the artifice of Maharshal followed by “and so wrote the Bah.” This is quite misleading.

⁷⁶ Decision makers.

⁷⁷ R. Jacob Emden (1697-1776) in his *siddur*.

⁷⁸ R. Abraham Danzig (1748-1820) in *Hayé Adam*, followed the ruling of *Shulban Arukh*. He was nevertheless aware of the different customs and he mentioned the Austrian custom and praised those who placed the menorah parallel to the doorpost of the entrance of the room like Maharshal and Taz.

⁷⁹ R. Schneur Zalman (1745-1813) says in his *siddur* that he lit the candles according to *Shulban Arukh*. The laws of Hanukkah are not extant in his *Shulban Arukh* but in his *siddur* he says to hang the menorah in “the thickness of the doorpost” i.e. parallel to the doorpost of the door or perpendicular to the wall to of the door and in the doorway. This prescription is of course inspired by Maharshal. He did not reveal along which doorpost the *menorah* should be placed; we don't know if he had a *mezuzah* at the entrance of his winter room.

lowed the ruling of the *Shulhan Arukh*. By contrast R. Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna,⁸⁰ expressed his criticism against the ruling of *Shulhan Arukh* and remained faithful to the old Rhineland custom. The *Perushim* of Jerusalem until today follow this order of lighting the Hanukkah candles, beginning with the left candle.

R. Joseph Teomim⁸¹ asserts that he followed the Taz.⁸²

R. Jacob Lorbeerbaum⁸³ ruled according to the rules of the Taz but required the lighting of the menorah to the left of the door.⁸⁴

6. Modern Times

By the 19th century, the order of lighting the Hanukkah candles as proposed by R. Joseph Colon and adopted by the *Shulhan Arukh* became more widely accepted.

R. Solomon Gansfried⁸⁵ followed the rules of the *Shulhan Arukh* but began with the words: “according to our custom” showing that concurrent customs were still known in Hungary at the end of the nineteenth century.

R. Jehiel Michal Epstein⁸⁶ ruled according to the *Shulhan Arukh*, and takes issue with the argument raised against the ruling of *Shulhan Arukh* by the Gra⁸⁷ and *Bait Hadash* that one must place the primary candle against the left doorpost.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ See *Biur HaGra* OH 676:5.

⁸¹ R. Joseph Teomim (1727-1792) in *Peri Megadim, Mishbeẓot ha-Zahav* on *Shulhan Arukh*.

⁸² He did not mention at which side of the entrance he placed the menorah.

⁸³ R. Jacob Lorbeerbaum of Lissa (1760-1832) in his *Derekh ha-Hayim*.

⁸⁴ The *mezuzah* being certainly at the right; otherwise he should light the menorah at the right.

⁸⁵ R. Solomon Gansfried (1804-1886) in *Kizzur Shulhan Arukh*.

⁸⁶ R. Jehiel Michal Epstein in *Arukh ha-Shulhan*.

⁸⁷ He alludes clearly to him without naming him.

⁸⁸ He also disagreed with the position of the Levush of rotating from right to left. He does mention the opinions corresponding to the Rhineland and the Austrian customs but omits to relate them to the presence or the absence of a *mezuzah*. He praised, without clear explanation, those who placed the menorah against the doorpost of the door of the room according to the solution proposed by Maharshal.

R. Meir Israel Ha-Kohen Kagan⁸⁹ followed the *Shulhan Arukh* but accepted other customs. He mentioned the orders of lighting of Rhineland and of Austria without relating this to the presence or the absence of a *mezuzah*. He especially praised, without clear explanation, those who placed the menorah against the doorpost, while keeping the doorway open during the half-hour of the burning of the candles.

Conclusions

The order of the lighting the Hanukkah candles was not raised until the thirteenth century. In this era the customs of R. Meir of Rothenburg (c.1215-1293) and R. Jonah Gerondi (c.1200-1263) were recorded by their disciples.

From two responsa⁹⁰ of the fourteenth century we know about two other customs; the Austrian custom and the custom of Maharik corresponding in all likelihood, to the old French custom. Separate traditions evolved from amongst the three main strands of Ashkenazi Jewry, the Rhineland, the French and the Austrian (and East European). Apparently the Spanish tradition was similar to that of the Rhineland.

It is well known that the French tradition which was most influential during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the leadership of the French Tossafists lost its influence under the persecutions and the expulsions of the Jews of England⁹¹ in 1290, of the Jews of France in 1306 and the final expulsion of the Jews of Provence in 1498. The departure of R. Joseph Colon to Italy is connected to the worsening conditions of the Jews of Savoy during the fifteenth century. The French tradition remained alive in the small communities of Northern Italy (Piedmont and Lombardy) and it disappeared slowly, first by assimilation to the mainstream and then with the disappear-

⁸⁹ R. Meir Israel Ha-Kohen Kagan (1838-1933) in *Mishnah Berurah* on *Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayim*.

⁹⁰ *Terumat ha-Desben* 106 and Maharik 183.

⁹¹ Who belonged to the French Jewry.

ance of the small communities in the nineteenth century following industrialization and the rural exodus.⁹²

R. Joseph Caro made extensive use of the responsa of Maharik in his *Beit Yoseph*, and in this case of the order of lighting of the Hanukkah candles he accepted his ruling. The success and the increasing influence of *Shulhan Arukh*, made it possible for this ruling to gain popularity and enabled this custom to spread quickly. It was adopted immediately into the Sephardic world, and more slowly but steadily into the Ashkenazi world.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries new lighting schemes were developed in order to satisfy contradictory halachic requirements. Today the ruling of the *Shulhan Arukh* is practically universally accepted with only very few, small communities behaving differently, e.g. *Perushim* of Jerusalem who still follow the Rhineland custom of the Gra. This evolution of customs may seem surprising to a society which is not at all accustomed to changes and evolution. In our everyday life, we have the impression that Jewish traditions are immutable. Even in issues where an adaptation is desired by a significant part of the community,⁹³ change seems impossible and scholarly rabbinical initiatives remain theoretical, without practical consequence.

Nevertheless given the breadth of Jewish history we must acknowledge that changes occur periodically without us really knowing exactly when and how. An example of one such change is expressed by one the great medieval Provencal rabbis, R. Zerahia ha-Levi. He writes:⁹⁴ “And do not be astonished about what I said, that the custom (of the blowing of the *shofar*) changed in later generations... I remember myself that I saw in my youth that the whole community was praying the *Amidah* of *Mussaf* of Rosh ha-Shannah and recited only seven blessings and only *the chazan* recited nine blessings. They were relying on the custom of the two Babylonian Yeshivot of the Gaonim because they found this written in their books. You also find

⁹² The last remnant was the special ritual prayer of AFAM (Asti, Fossano and Moncalvo, three small towns in Piedmont, Northern Italy) that was used by the Jews of these communities who settled there in the 14th century after the expulsion from France.

⁹³ E.g., the problem of *agunot*.

⁹⁴ *Ha-Maor ha-Kattan* on *Rif*, *Rosh ha-Shannah* p. 11a.

this old custom in the *halakhot* of R. Isaac ben Giyat. But today we see that every one prays nine blessings”. Similarly he writes:⁹⁵ “and so did all the generations that were preceding us (they observed only one day Rosh ha-Shanah in Israel). But now, recently, sages of Provence arrived there and taught them to celebrate two days of Rosh ha-Shanah according to the requirements of the *Halakhot* of the Rif.”⁹⁶ ❧

⁹⁵ *Ha-Maor ha-Kattan* on *Rif, Beitsab* p. 3a.

⁹⁶ I know of no rabbinic writings acknowledging changes in rite and ritual except a text in *Yoseph Omets* 588 concerning the entry of *Shabbat* (introduced at the end of the sixteenth century, under the influence of the new custom of the *Kabalists* of Safed, of the entire section preceding *Barehu*, beginning with Psalms 95, 96, 97, 98, 99 and 29, followed by the hymn *Lekha Dodi*, and ending with Psalms 92 and 93). Similarly, around the period 1925-1950 the Jewish world adopted the Gaonic position, instead of that of R. Tam, about the fixing of the limits of the *Shabbat* and contradictorily it adopted the principle of temporary hours based on a symmetric complete day lasting from daybreak until the end of twilight, when the solar depression is 16.1°, for calculating the rabbinical Jewish time (time schedule of the daily prayers and of the eve of Passover).

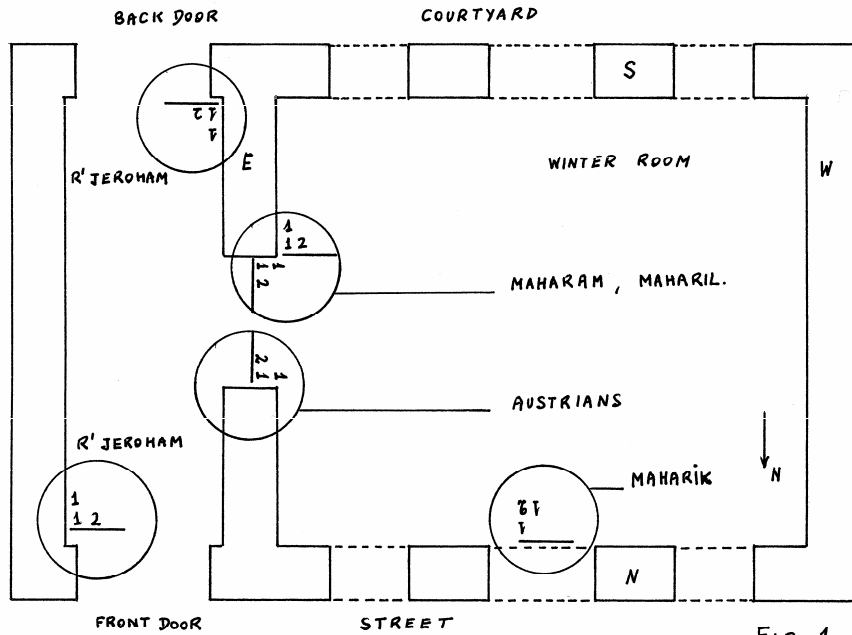


FIG 1.

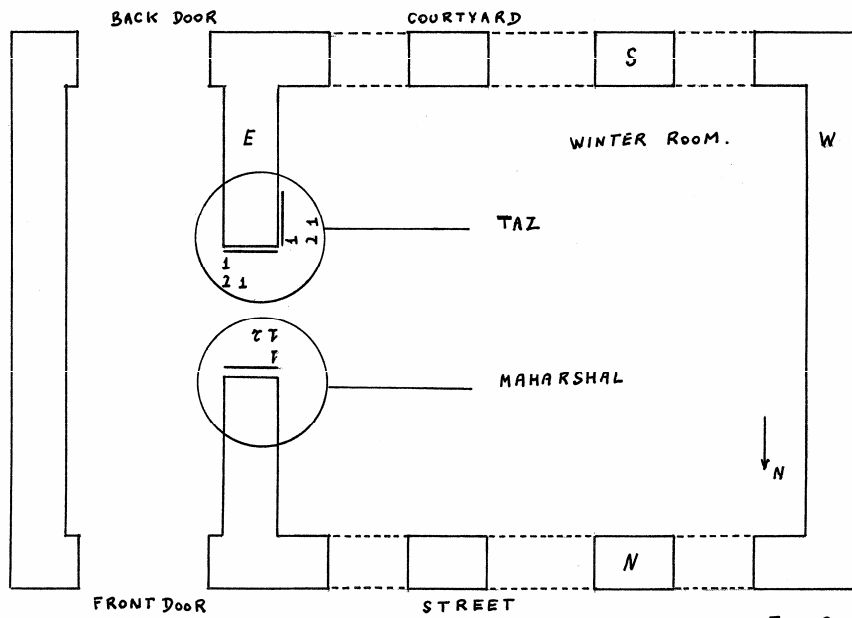


FIG 2.