

DAY-TO-DAY HALACHIC GUIDE

Detailed instructions on the
laws and customs for
Nittel 5782

**FROM THE BADATZ
OF CROWN HEIGHTS**



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NITTEL NACHT

Nittel this year is on Friday night, the eve of 21 Teves. Be sure to complete daily study of Chitas and Rambam—and also *shnayim mikra v'echad targum* before sunset. (This may take extra planning as it is a short Friday).

If you didn't manage to do do before sunset, it should be done after midnight. *Shnayim mikra* may be recited Shabbos morning as well.

Kabbalas Shabbos and Maariv are recited earlier than usual, considering, however, that Shema of Maariv must be recited after nightfall. Despite the general ban on Torah learning, a mourner recites the usual Mishnayos.

Make Kiddush early, as close to the onset of Shabbos as possible. This would mean, practically, to return from shul and recite Kiddush immediately. Keep in mind that we refrain from making Kiddush in the seventh hour from midday (5:56-6:56 pm in Crown Heights).

During the Shabbos seudah we may sing *niggunim* and *zemiros* as usual and tell stories of tzaddikim⁷⁹, but refrain from saying words of Torah including Chassidus.

Playing chess is not halachically restricted on Shabbos, though it is problematic to arrange the playing pieces in order after the game due to the prohibition of *borer* (sorting). However, due to the fact that playing games on Shabbos is generally considered *bittul Torah* and chess is not a *Shabbosdik* activity, grown-ups should certainly avoid playing, even on *Nittel Nacht*.

Regarding the deferment of marital relations on *Nittel*, see the footnote.⁸⁰

WHAT IS NITTEL?

The name *nittel* alludes to an absence, a euphemism for birth. Some suggest it is related to the word *nitleh* and *taluy*, “the hanged one”, a reference to *oso ha'ish*, the individual who is the focus of worship in the *notzri* religion. The date officially marks the birth of that man. Accordingly, the term *nittel* can be related to the Latin *natal*, “birth.”

It is an ancient Jewish practice (which thereby becomes a venerated part of Torah) and it is also the Chabad custom,

79) Indeed, Rabbi Weinberg would tell *Sippurei Chassidim* on *Nittel* over the radio, in place of his weekly Tanya shiur.

80) This topic is discussed in *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 12 p. 424. If it is *mikvah* night, it is better to wait until after *chatzos* (halachic midnight).

to refrain from studying Torah on *Nittel Nacht*, from sunset until halachic midnight. The reason is “to avoid adding vitality to the forces of impurity.” Other reasons, offered by great Torah sages, are recorded in the books that explain the reasons for *minhagim*. The Rebbe mentions these in *Igros Kodesh* and *Likkutei Sichos*.⁸¹ In other sources, it is explained that the phrase “to avoid adding vitality to *kelipos*” is directed at “that man” who was deified by the non-Jews as well as those who presently follow his path. See the above *Igros Kodesh* to understand how it is possible for Torah study to produce negative results.

WHEN IS NITTEL?

The timing of *Nittel Nacht* does not follow the Jewish calendar, but rather, the secular calendar. The date must be determined by the observance of the local non-Jewish population. The Jews of each country observe this custom on the eve of *yom eidam* (lit. the day of their calamity, used as a metonymy for festival) as it is celebrated by the non-Jews of their country. In the United States, this sets the date as December 25th. In a location with variances in the dates for the non-Jewish *yom eidam*, *Nittel Nacht* is observed on the date that the majority of the local non-Jews celebrate.⁸²

The willful avoidance of Torah study is a surprising and unprecedented concept. It must not be extended beyond the strict duration set by Jewish custom just one night, until midnight.

THE REBBEIM & NITTEL

Regarding the conduct of the Rebbe Rashab on *Nittel Nacht* and the implied directive, see *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayeishev* 5750: “From this we derive a directive as well as an infusion of ability to utilize the duration of *nittel*, not to waste our time, G-d forbid (simply in order to avoid adding vitality to *kelipos*), but rather for a practical benefit. It is especially appropriate to use this time for matters that lead to increased wisdom ... or to increase in acts of *tzedakah* and *chessed*, or to take care of the home, and the like.”⁸³

In his notes from the winter of 5695, recorded in Vienna, the Rebbe relates that the Rebbe Rashab would also refrain from studying *Chassidus* on *Nittel Nacht*, even in a cursory manner. When *nittel* coincided with the eve of Shabbos, he would

81) *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14, p. 351; *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 15, p. 554

82) See footnotes to *Sefer Hasichos* 5750, vol. 1, p. 192

83) Printed in *Sefer HaSichos*. See further in the original *sichah*.

defer the delivering of his customary *ma'amar* to Shabbos morning instead.⁸⁴

NEW YEAR'S DAY

In a *yechidus* with Mr. Peter Kalms, the Rebbe spoke about a Jew's approach to the secular new year. See the book, *Guidance from the Rebbe*, for a record of this discussion.

84) For more on this topic, see *Heichal Menachem*, p. 268. However, refer to the *reshimah* of Chof Kislev 5693. Also take note of a short *Sichah* delivered on *Leil Gimmel D'Chanukah* 5750.