YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**CHanuka Candles and the *Menora* in the *Mikdash***

**Based on a shiur by Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein**

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### I. Introduction

The *gemara* in *Shabbat* (22b-23a)states:

For the scholars propounded: Does the kindling or the placing constitute the *mitzva*?… Come and hear: For R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: With regard to a lantern that was burning the whole day [of Shabbat], at the conclusion of Shabbat, it is extinguished and then [re-]lit. Now, this is well if you say that the kindling constitutes the *mitzva*; then it is correct. But if you say that the placing constitutes the *mitzva*, is this [lantern in this case merely] extinguished and [re-]lit? Surely, it should [have stated]: It must be extinguished, lifted up, replaced, and then relit! Moreover, since we pronounce a blessing, “Who sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us to kindle the lamp of Chanuka,” it proves that the kindling constitutes the *mitzva*. This proves it.

And now that we say that the kindling constitutes the *mitzva*, if a deaf-mute, imbecile or minor lights it, he accomplishes nothing. But a woman may certainly light [it], for R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: The [*mitzva* of the] Chanuka lamp is obligatory upon women, for they too were concerned in that miracle.

Rashi (ad loc., s.v. *hadlaka osa mitzva*, *ve-i hanakha osa mitzva*) explains that if the kindling constitutes the *mitzva*, this is because that was the case when it came to the *menora* in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. Rashi does not, however, offer a rationale as to why the placing should possibly constitute the *mitzva*. It therefore stands to reason that he understood that our natural inclination would be to say that the placing constitutes the *mitzva*, and there is thus no need to explain the matter. The reason for this is that the entire *mitzva* of lighting Chanuka candles follows from the requirement to publicize the miracle of Chanuka (*pirsumei nisa*), and this requirement depends on the placement of the candles at an entranceway facing the public domain, irrespective of the kindling.

Many *Acharonim* discuss the principle of "similar to the *Mikdash*" with respect to the Chanuka candles, but the *gemara* itself makes no mention of it. According to Rashi, it may be assumed that if the kindling constitutes the *mitzva*, the *mitzva* is based on the principle of "similar to the *Mikdash*."[[1]](#footnote-1)

We will presently discuss the laws governing the lighting of the *menora* in the *Mikdash*, after which we will return to matters relating to Chanuka. We will see that with respect to the *menora* in the *Mikdash*, there is room to suggest that both the placing constitutes the *mitzva* (concerning the seven lamps) and the kindling constitutes the *mitzva* (concerning the western lamp). In light of this, we can also explain the passage from the *gemara*. We will also see that there are two primary ways to explain the character of the holiday of Chanuka, and that these two ways correspond to the two aspects of the *mitzva –* kindling the candles and placing them.

### II. The role of the *menora*

The Rambam writes in *Hilkhot Bi'at Mikdash* (9:7):

Similarly, the kindling of the lamps [of the *menora*] is acceptable if performed by a non-priest. Therefore, if a priest cleaned the lamps and brought them outside, a non-priest is permitted to kindle them.

The Ra'avad comments:

"And brought them outside, a non-priest is permitted [to kindle them]." He went too far when he said that a non-priest is permitted to kindle them. Rather, if he kindled them, they are acceptable.

The Rambam's position is based on the *gemara* in *Yoma*, which seems to state that if a non-priest kindled the lamps of the *menora*, they are still acceptable. The *Rishonim* express their amazement about the Rambam's ruling that a non-priest may kindle the *menora* lamps even *le-khatchila.*

In order to understand the Rambam's ruling, we must understand the very obligation to light the *menora*. The *mitzva* of lighting the lamps of the *menora* is mentioned in the Torah in various contexts.

1) In *Parashat Beha'alotekha*, the Torah emphasizes the *menora*: “Speak unto Aharon, and say unto him: When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the *menora*” (*Bamidbar* 8:2). The verses here imply that the lighting of the lamps is part of the definition of the structure of the *menora.*

2) The verses in *Parashat Emor* emphasize a different aspect, the oil:

Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto you pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually. Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, shall Aharon order it, from evening to morning before the Lord continually; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure *menora* before the Lord continually. (*Vayikra* 24:2-4)

The focus here is on the lamps themselves, and not on the *menora*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

3) In *Parashat Tetzaveh*, there are two additional verses, one supporting the idea emphasized in *Parashat Beha'alotekha*, and the other supporting the idea emphasized in *Parashat Emor*:

And you shall command the children of Israel, that they bring unto you pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually. In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aharon and his sons shall set it in order, to burn from evening to morning before the Lord; it shall be a statute for ever throughout their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel. (*Shemot* 27:20-21)

This is similar to what is stated in *Parashat Emor*, emphasizing the lamps and their kindling. But later in that *parasha* we read:

And Aharon shall burn thereon incense of sweet spices; every morning, when he dresses the lamps, he shall burn it. And when Aharon lights the lamps at dusk, he shall burn it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. (*Shemot* 30:7-8)

These verses support the idea highlighted in *Parashat Beha'alotekha*, as they are an appeal to Aharon, who lights the *menora*.

### The western lamp

We see, then, that there are two dimensions to the lighting of the *menora* in the Temple. To better understand the matter, let us consider the status of the western lamp:

R. Sheshet raised an objection: "Outside the veil of testimony… shall [Aharon] order it" (*Vayikra* 24:3). But does He require its light? Surely, during the entire forty years that the Israelites travelled in the wilderness they travelled only by His light! Rather, it is a testimony to mankind that the *Shekhina* rests in Israel. What is the testimony? Rav said: That was the western lamp [of the *menora*], in which the same quantity of oil was poured as into the rest, and yet he kindled [the others] from it and ended with it. (*Shabbat* 22b)

The *gemara* in *Menachot* (98b)records a dispute as to whether the *menora* stood along the length of the Temple or along its width. If the *menora* stood along its length, then the western lamp is the lamp closest to the Holy of Holies. Rashi (s.v. *medikhtiv bener maaravi*), however, does not explain the passage this way. He argues that the western lamp is not the westernmost lamp, which is closest to the Holy of Holies, but rather the second lamp in the row. The “eastern lamp” is the easternmost one, and the “western lamp” is the lamp next to it. Most of the *Rishonim* accepted the view of Rashi.[[3]](#footnote-3) This, of course, is very difficult. Why doesn't the "western lamp" stand in the west? These *Rishonim* explain that this lamp is to the west of one of the lamps, and thus it has a certain "western" nature.

What is surprising is that there is no conclusive proof that the "western lamp" is not the lamp closest to the Holy of Holies, which would appear to be the simple explanation. The *Rishonim* seem to make their statements based on some logical reasoning, but it is not clear what that reasoning is.

In order to clarify the matter, we must turn to the *gemara* in *Yoma*. Two main actions take place with regard to the *menora*: kindling (*hadlaka*)the lamps in the evening, and trimming (*hatava*) the lamps in the morning.[[4]](#footnote-4) The *gemara* in *Yoma* describes the process as follows:

Abaye related the order of the [daily] priestly functions in the name of tradition and in accordance with Abba Shaul… the removing of the ashes from the inner altar precedes the trimming of the five lamps; the trimming of the five lamps precedes the blood of the daily-offering; the blood of the daily-offering precedes the trimming of the two lamps; the trimming of the two lamps precedes the incense… (*Yoma* 33a)

The *gemara* distinguishes between the *hatava* of the five lamps and the *hatava* of the remaining two lamps. Later in the passage, the *gemara* explains the matter:

This is well according to Resh Lakish, who said: The lamps were trimmed and [after interruption] trimmed again, in order to keep the whole Temple courtyard animated. But according to R. Yochanan, who interprets "In the morning, in the morning," i.e., divide it into two mornings, what is there to say? (*Yoma* 33a)

According to Resh Lakish, the interruption in the *hatava* was a simple requirement introduced by the Rabbis to keep the Temple courtyard animated. R. Yochanan, on the other hand, learns from the twofold appearance of the word “morning” in the verse that the trimming of the lamps must be divided into two parts. What is the meaning of the split in the trimming of the lamps?

As we saw above, the *gemara* in *Shabbat* establishes that the western lamp remained lit all the time, as testimony to mankind. The *gemara* in *Yoma* explains:

Our Rabbis taught: Throughout the forty years that Shimon the Righteous ministered, the lot ["For the Lord" on Yom Kippur] would always come up in the right hand; from that time on, it would come up sometimes in the right hand and sometimes in the left. And [during the same period] the crimson-colored strap [on Yom Kippur] would become white. From that time on, it would at times become white, at others not. Also: Throughout those forty years, the western lamp was lit; from that time on, it was sometimes lit and sometimes extinguished. (*Yoma* 39a)

Rashi (*Chagiga* 26a) writes that they would not relight the western lamp. Other *Rishonim*, however, maintain, that after the lamp became extinguished, it would be relit. If so, the western lamp differs fundamentally from the other candles.

### Two aspects of the *Menora* in the *Mikdash* – the kindling and the placing

It is reasonable to assume that if we have two sets of verses and also two sets of *halakhot*, we must find a connection between them. Some *Acharonim* explain that the *menora* played a twofold role in the Temple, but it appears that the issue is discussed already among the *Rishonim*. The *Da'at Zekeinim Mi-Ba’alei Ha-Tosafot* (beginning of *Parashat Teruma*) advances a fundamental argument: The *menora* constitutes an intrinsic portion of the *Mikdash* itself.

This idea rises also in the *gemara* at the end of *Chagiga*,which deals with the impurity of the land during a Festival and after a Festival. The last *mishna* in the tractate states:

How did they clear up for the purification of the Temple courtyard? They immersed the vessels that were in the Temple, and they used to say to them: Take heed that you not touch the *shulchan* [and thus render it impure]…

The *gemara* there states:

A Tanna taught [in a Baraita]: Take heed that you not touch the *shulchan* or the *menora*. Why does our *Tanna* not mention the *menora*? In connection with the *shulchan*, there is written [the word] *tamid* (perpetual); in connection with the *menora*, there is not written [the word] *tamid.* And the other [*Tanna*]? Since it is written: "And the *menora* opposite the *shulchan*" (*Shemot* 26:35), it is as though [the word] *tamid* were written in connection with it. And the other [*Tanna*]? That [verse] comes merely to fix its place. (*Chagiga* 26a)

According to one opinion, the *menora* is required to be "*tamid"* because it stands opposite the *shulchan*. This is exceedingly difficult, as the word *tamid* is in fact mentioned several times in the verses cited above regarding the *menora* itself! Apparently, *Chazal* understood that the aspect of the *mitzva* of the *menora* of *Parashat Beha'alotekha* is an independent aspect, and there is no mention there of *tamid*, apart from the parallel to the *shulchan*. Of course, that *tamid* is connected to the presence of the *menora* in the *Mikdash*, and not to the *mitzva* of kindling the lamps. What this means is that the *shulchan*, and perhaps also the *menora*, are part of the structure of the *Mishkan*, and the *Mishkan* must maintain that form at all times.

In this context, let us consider the Ramban's stricture regarding positive commandment 33 in the Rambam's *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*:

Therefore, we do not count the making of the *shulchan*, and the *menora*, and the altar as a *mitzva*, because we are commanded to place bread before God at all times, and He commanded us as preparation for this service, which is to put it on the *shulchan* and arrange it there, and He commanded us to kindle a lamp before Him, and He arranged for us that this kindling be on a *menora* of gold of such-and-such weight, and these are accessories of holiness. The reason offered by the teacher is not correct in my eyes, in that he said (positive commandment 20) that they are parts of the Temple; for the vessels are not part of the Temple, but rather two *mitzvot*, and they are not a hindrance to each other, and one may offer sacrifices in the Temple even if it lacks these vessels.

The Rambam understands that the *menora* and the *shulchan* are part of the structure of the Temple itself, whereas according to the Ramban, the *shulchan* and the *menora* are merely the prerequisites for the fulfillment of two different *mitzvot.*[[5]](#footnote-5)

We are dealing, then, with two different aspects of the *mitzva* of the *menora*:

1) The *menora* in the *Mikdash* must be a fitting and distinguished *menora.* How is this tobe achieved? At night this is accomplished by way of a lit *menora*, whereas during the day this is accomplished through the cleaning and shining of the *menora.* In other words, there is no need for light, but there is a need for beauty.

2) The *menora* is testimony to all of mankind that the *Shekhina* rests in Israel. Standing in the *Mishkan* is standing before God, and the way to mark that standing is by arranging the perpetual lamps. Of course, here the emphasis is not on the *menora*, but on the burning; we signal, as it were, that we are standing before God.

According to what we have said, we can explain the laws governing the western lamp. Among the lamps of the *menora*, there is a unit of the two eastern-most lamps, among which the second lamp from the east is indeed the western lamp. The *menora* as an entity consisting of seven lamps is part of the form of the Temple. It must be lit in the evening and trimmed in the morning, so that the *menora* should look attractive and distinguished all hours of the day.[[6]](#footnote-6)Trimming the lamps is certainly a service that must be performed by a priest, and therefore a non-priest who did it is liable to death at the hand of heaven, as is stated explicitly in the *gemara* in *Yoma.* The verses that view the lamps as part of the form of the *Mikdash* are addressed directly to Aharon the priest; this parallels the law that states that the placing constitutes the *mitzva* – the *menora* must be set in its proper place, and thereby it becomes part of the form of *Mikdash*.

There is, however, an additional aspect of the *menora*, according to which the people of Israel stand before God, and God, as it were, "returns a signal" and performs a miracle with the western lamp. This aspect relates exclusively to the western lamp, which must burn perpetually, as explained in *Parashat Emor.* There we find the expressions, "before the Lord," and "outside the veil," teaching us that we are dealing here with a law regarding Israel and their connection to the Creator, and not with the structure of the *Mikdash*.[[7]](#footnote-7) This aspect parallels the law that the kindling constitutes the *mitzva*. We are dealing with a command directed at all of Israel, one that even a non-priest is qualified to perform – to light the lamps in order to give expression to the connection between the people of Israel and God.

### III. The Nature of the holiday of CHanuka – the holiday of the covenant and the holiday of the rededication of the temple

Thus far, we have seen that there is a difference in understanding between Rashi and the Rambam regarding the issue of whether the kindling or the placing constitutes the *mitzva.* According to Rashi, the kindling constitutes the *mitzva*,as this is "similar to the Temple." In other words, in the Temple there is one aspect, and the *gemara* is in doubt regarding whether this aspect is found also with regard to the Chanuka candles or whether there it is simply a matter of publicizing the miracle. According to the Rambam, on the other hand, in the *Mikdash* there are two aspects, and the *gemara* is in doubt regarding which of these two aspects lies at the heart of the lighting of Chanuka candles.

On this point, we must add another important layer regarding Chanuka. The Maharal, in his book "*Ner Chadash*" on Chanuka, discusses the problematic nature of the celebration of the days of Chanuka. On the one hand, we commemorate the war, while on the other hand, we commemorate the miracle of the cruse of oil. Regarding each of these events, a question may be raised. Regarding the war, we note that this was certainly not the only military victory in Jewish history. The *gemara* (*Rosh Hashana* 18b) describes *Megillat Ta'anit*, which records various salvations (political, physical, and others) during the Second Temple period. The *gemara* states that in our time, the special days recorded in *Megillat Ta'anit* are no longer valid, with the exception of Chanuka or Purim. However, most of the *Rishonim* and *Posekim* maintain that Chanuka and Purim as days of military victory are indeed cancelled, but they are nevertheless celebrated because they also have an additional dimension. In other words, the celebration of the days on which Israel were saved from their enemies has been cancelled.

Regarding the miracle of the cruse of oil, there is an even more significant problem, as we do not celebrate miracles. The Maharal notes that many miracles were performed for our forefathers (from the manna that fell from heaven, to the stones the fell at Beit Choron, to the submission of Sancheriv at the gates of Jerusalem), but we do not celebrate them. The obligating factor of the various festivals is the standing before God.

If so, it is difficult to base the celebration either on the miracle of the cruse of oil or on the victory in war. Therefore, we must find another way to understand the nature of the holiday, and here there are two possibilities.

1) On Chanuka, the *Mikdash* was rededicated.

2) Before Chanuka and on Purim, there was a certain cancellation of the covenant between the people of Israel and God, and it was necessary to renew that covenant. The Torah describes, "And they will forsake Me and break My covenant" (*Devarim* 31:16). There are two types of treachery: treachery within the framework of a relationship and treachery that totally destroys the relationship. The Torah at the end of *Devarim* warns against a situation of "And I will surely hide My face on that day" (*Devarim* 31:18) – total exile.

In the Persian exile, the people thought that the Torah was cancelled and that the exile implied the total negation of the Torah and of the covenant between God and Israel. Thus, the drama in the book of *Esther* is whether or not Israel will renew that covenant – whether "you will be silent at this time," or perhaps you will maintain a connection to God. As *Chazal* say about "the Jews ordained and took upon themselves" (*Esther* 9:27) – "they once again accepted [the Torah] upon themselves during the days of Achashverosh."

In the time of the Chashmonaim as well, the people of Israel came into contact with a very rich and sophisticated cultural and technological system, and they began to think that the Torah was cancelled. As long as they lived among the pagan nations of Canaan, there was room for the Torah, but now the Torah was cancelled because they encountered a nation that was sufficiently developed even without the Torah. In other words, the intention of the Jewish People was to replace the Torah with Greek wisdom.

These two possibilities correspond to placing and kindling. If we say that placing constitutes the *mitzva*, this means that the essence of the day is the dedication of the *Mikdash*, constructing its form. If, however, renewal of the covenant is the focus, we need a western lamp, which attests to the fact that the *Shekhina* rests upon Israel.

The *Acharonim* raised various questions regarding the miracle of Chanuka. For example, they note that since *tuma hutera be-tzibbur*, given the fact that everyone was impure, impure oil could have been used. According to what we have said, the matter is very understandable. It was necessary to kindle the lamps in the Temple and renew the covenant between God and the people of Israel. As we explained above, when the relations between God and Israel were good, God would respond with a miracle and enable the western lamp to burn an entire day. On Chanuka as well, God wanted to renew the covenant with a miracle connected to the lighting of the lamp. According to this approach, the kindling, i.e., the kindling of the western lamp, constitutes the *mitzva*.

1. Another expression of this aspect of lighting Chanuka candles is found in the words of the *Ba'al Ha-Ma'or*, who explains that one is forbidden to derive benefit from Chanuka candles because they have holiness similar to those of the *Mikdash*. Other *Rishonim* used this idea to explain secondary practices, but according to Rashi, this is the very foundation of the *mitzva* of lighting Chanuka candles. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Based on a *Tosafot* in *Menachot*, some *Acharonim* concluded that the oil is a sort of sacrifice, but I am making a different claim: that the kindling is focused on the lamps and not on the *menora*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Chiddushei Ha-Ramban*, ad loc., s.v. *zo ner ma'aravi*, who notes that Rashi himself retracted the first explanation, which he had offered in *Menachot*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Some explain that this involves the removal of the oil and wicks that had been burning from the previous evening, while others explain that this refers to the preparation of new oil and new wicks. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The *Yerushalmi* (*Shekalim* 4:2) cites a dispute regarding whether the presence of the menora is indispensable for a sacrifice. It would seem that the view that the *menora* is indispensable understands that the *menora* is part of the structure of the Temple, and without the *menora*, the structure is lacking. The view that maintains that the *menora* is not indispensable understands that the *menora* is not part of the structure of the Temple itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It would seem that this is also the way to understand the role of the incense that was burned in the morning and in the evening – it is part of the *Mikdash* itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This may explain the view of the Rambam cited above, that if a non-priest lit the *menora* and a priest brought it inside, it is valid. R. Chaim Brisker explains that there is no act of service here, and that we must focus exclusively on the result: the lit *menora*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)