**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT VAYIGASH – CHANUKAH 5778**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The *Shulchan Arukh* rules (O.C. 677:1) that if a person is away from home during Chanukah, he does not have to light Chanukah candles if a family member – such as his wife – lights at home. The traveler is included in his household’s lighting, and thus, strictly speaking, he is not required to light Chanukah candles. (Ashkenazic practice, as the Rama later writes, is for the person to light candles in such a case, but strictly speaking, this is not required.) Later (677:3), the *Shulchan Arukh* writes, based on earlier sources, that if one travels to a place where no Jews are present, and thus nobody lights Chanukah candles, he must light even though he has family members lighting at home. Since he would otherwise not even see Chanukah candles, he must light and recite the standard *berakhot*.

This ruling may affect the more common situation of somebody who arrives home late at night during Chanukah, when there is already nobody outdoors to whom to publicize the miracle through the candle lighting. The *Magen Avraham* (672:6) rules that in such a case, one should light the candles without reciting the *berakhot*, unless other household members are awake, in which case the *berakhot* are recited. If nobody else is present to see the candles, no publicization of the miracle is achieved, and thus the *mitzva* cannot be fulfilled, and the *berakhot* therefore should not be recited. This position is followed by the *Mishna Berura* (672:11), though he cites in his notes (*Sha’ar Ha-tziyun* 672:17) the view of the *Chemed Moshe*, who disagreed. The *Chemed Moshe* claimed that although the Chanukah candles are to be lit in a manner of *pirsumei nisa* – such that they publicize the Chanukah miracle – nevertheless, in situations where one has no possibility of achieving *pirsumei nisa*, the *mitzva* still applies. The *Chemed Moshe* draws proof to this position from the aforementioned *halakha* concerning a traveler who finds himself in a place with no Jews on Chanukah. As noted, the individual in this case is required to light the Chanukah candles, and to recite the *berakhot*. Even though there are no Jews present to whom he could publicize the miracle, he is nevertheless required to light the candles and to recite the standard *berakhot*. Seemingly, the *Chemed Moshe* argues, this proves that the element of *pirsumei nisa* is not indispensable for the candle lighting obligation. As such, one who arrives home late at night, too, should light candles with the *berakhot*, even if there is no longer anyone in the streets or awake in the home.

As Rav Moshe Feinstein discusses in his *Iggerot Moshe* (O.C. 4:105:7), the *Magen Avraham* and *Chemed Moshe* appear to debate the fundamental point of whether or not *pirsumei nisa* is integral to, and thus indispensable for, the obligation of Chanukah candle lighting. The *Magen Avraham* maintained that the obligation is defined as a requirement to publicize the miracle through the kindling of lights, and thus it cannot be fulfilled when such publicization is not possible. Accordingly, Rav Moshe posits that the *Magen Avraham* disputes the aforementioned ruling concerning the case of one who travels to a place with no Jews on Chanukah. In the *Magen Avraham*’s view, the traveler would not have to light, and if he does, he would certainly not recite the *berakhot*.

Rav Moshe does not consider the possibility that these authorities debate the question of whether *pirsumei nisa* is defined as publicizing the miracle specifically to fellow Jews, or even to gentiles. Conceivably, the *Magen Avraham* could argue that in the case of the traveler, he lights candles with a *berakha* because he achieves *pirsumei nisa* by publicizing the miracle to the non-Jews who will see the candles. Whereas the *Chemed Moshe* assumed that *pirsumei nisa* is achieved only by lighting in the presence of fellow Jews, the *Magen Avraham* perhaps felt otherwise, and maintained that even if only gentiles view the candles, this suffices for *pirsumei nisa*. Rav Moshe dismisses this possibility, considering it obvious that *pirsumei nisa* requires that other Jews see the candles burning. This possibility is, however, suggested by Rav Yaakov Rosenthal, in his *Mishnat Yaakov – Zemanim* (vol. 2, p. 298).

Interestingly, Rav Moshe dismisses the view of the *Magen Avraham*, and insists that the obligation of Chanukah candle lighting is not dependent upon the element of *pirsumei nisa*. Rav Moshe therefore rules that if one arrives home late at night, even if there is nobody outside or in the home to see the lights, one nevertheless lights candles and recites the *berakhot*, in accordance with the ruling of the *Chemed Moshe*, and in contradistinction to the *Mishna Berura*, who followed the *Magen Avraham*’s ruling.

(Based on [an article](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/181_57_78.pdf) by Rav Zvi Ryzman)

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the question of whether the *pirsumei nisa* – the publicization of the Chanukah miracle – which the Chanukah candle lighting is intended to achieve can be accomplished by lighting candles in the view of non-Jews. As we saw, if a person finds himself on Chanukah in a place where there are no Jews, he must light candles and recite the *berakhot*, even if his wife or another family member is lighting at home (*Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 577:3). The *Chemed Moshe* (cited by *Sha’ar Ha-tziyun*, 672:17) drew proof from this *halakha* that one must light Chanukah candles even in situations where *pirsumei nisa* cannot be achieved. Conceivably, however, one could argue that *pirsumei nisa* is, in fact, indispensable for the performance of the *mitzva*, but it can be achieved even if only non-Jews view the lit candles.

This possibility should perhaps be explored in light of the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Shabbat (21b) that the Chanukah candles should be lit before “*tikhleh regel min ha-shuk*” – there are no longer people outside. The Gemara says that this refers to the period when people called “*tarmudai*” were still outside. Rashi explains that this is the name of a certain nationality, whose members would remain outside for a certain period after dark, selling firewood. The Rif, by contrast, explained the word “*tarmudai*” as referring to the kind of wood which would be sold outdoors after nightfall.According to Rashi, it seems clear that these merchants were non-Jews, and Rav Soloveitchik (*Harerei Kedem*, 179) noted that Rashi’s comments appear to suggest that one achieves *pirsumei nisa* even by lighting the Chanukah candles in front of gentiles. After all, the Gemara requires lighting as long as the “*tarmudai*” are outside, and according to Rashi, this refers to members of a gentile nation. This point is also made by Rav Moshe Shternbuch in his *Moadim U-zmanim* (2:141), citing his grandfather.

However, Rav Sternbuch refutes this proof, and dismisses the possibility that *pirsumei nisa* can be achieved by lighting in the presence of gentiles. He writes that according to Rashi, the *pirsumei nisa* is achieved not by the gentile merchants viewing the candlelight, but rather by their Jewish customers who see the candles burning in front of their fellow Jews’ home as they purchase their firewood from the “*tarmodai*.” Rav Shternbuch adds that the concept of “*pirsumei nisa*” is that we are to inspire our fellow Jews with faith in God and divine providence by publicizing and celebrating the miracle, and it therefore applies only when other Jews will view the lights.

A different view is taken by Rav Shimon Sofer of Erlau (a grandson of the *Chatam Sofer*), in his *Hitorerut Teshuva* (3:457). He writes explicitly that one who lives in an exclusively non-Jewish neighborhood should light Chanukah candles by his door or window in order to publicize the miracle among his gentile neighbors. He supports his contention by noting that the concept of *kiddush Hashem* – glorifying the Name of the Almighty – is relevant even with regard to non-Jews. Rav Sofer cites the verse in Sefer Yechezkel (38:23) in which God proclaims, “I shall be glorified and sanctified, and I will be known among many peoples; they shall know that I am the Lord.” This and other sources clearly indicate that the obligation of *kiddush Hashem* requires us to bring glory to God not only among the Jewish People, but also among non-Jews. By the same token, Rav Sofer argues, one should publicize the Chanukah miracle through the kindling of lights even if he is among only non-Jews, as this, too, qualifies as *pirsumei nisa*.

This association between *pirsumei nisa* and *kiddush Hashem* is developed by Rav Soloveitchik, as well. He explains on this basis the extraordinary *halakha* requiring a pauper to do whatever is necessary to obtain materials for lighting the Chanukah candles, even if this means asking for charity or selling his clothing (Rambam, Hilkhot Chanukah 4:12). Normally, one is not required to spend more than one-fifth of his assets for the sake of fulfilling a *mitzvat asei*, and yet, when it comes to Chanukah candles, even someone enduring dire poverty must make great sacrifices to fulfill this obligation. Rav Soloveitchik explained that since this *mitzva* involves *kiddush Hashem*, the glorification of God, it is not subject to the same exemptions that apply to other *mitzvot*. Just as one must surrender his life to avoid creating a *chilul Hashem* – defaming God – likewise, one must go to great lengths to create a *kiddush Hashem*, and for this reason, *Halakha* requires even the most indigent members of our nation to fulfill the obligation of Chanukah candle lighting.

(Based on [an article](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/181_57_78.pdf) by Rav Zvi Ryzman)

Monday

The Gemara in Masekhet Shabbat (23b) comments, “One who is accustomed to [lighting] a candle will have sons who are Torah scholars.” Rashi explains that the Gemara refers here to the weekly lighting of Shabbat candles and the lighting of Chanukah candles.

The obvious question arises as to why one would be deserving of special reward for fulfilling these obligations, especially in light of the fact that all generally observant Jews ensure to light Shabbat candles and Chanukah candles.

One answer emerges from the commentary of Meiri, who explains that the Gemara refers to one who is accustomed to fulfilling these *mitzvot* “*derekh chibuv mitzva ve-he’ara*” – in a manner of love and enthusiasm. Special reward is promised not for the mere fulfillment of these obligations, but for observing them with special affection and excitement.

Another answer is indicated by the *Tur*, who cites the Gemara in the context of his discussion of Shabbat candle lighting (O.C. 263), as the basis for his ruling that one should use a “*ner yafeh*” – a “beautiful candle” for this *mitzva*. According to the *Tur*, then, the Gemara refers not simply to lighting Shabbat and Chanukah candles, but rather to fulfilling these *mitzvot* at a high standard, ensuring to use high-quality materials in order to enhance the *mitzva*.

Why would the enhancement of these *mitzvot* render one worthy of begetting children who become Torah scholars?

Chanukah candles are, ideally, lit outdoors, near the entrance to one’s home. Symbolically, they represent our external image, the “light” that we project to those outside. Shabbat candles, by contrast, are intended to illuminate the home. In fact, one of the reasons given for this *mitzva* is *shalom bayit* – creating a joyous, serene atmosphere in the home in order to bring the family members (especially the husband and wife) closer together. And thus whereas Chanukah candles represent our external image, Shabbat candles represent our private lives, the “light” that shines inside our homes.

This distinction perhaps helps explain the meaning and significance of the Gemara’s comment. *Chazal* here might be conveying the educational importance of consistency, of ensuring that our inner, private “light” is as beautiful as our external “light.” Children are very sensitive to hypocrisy and inconsistency, and are not likely to respect or seek to emulate their parents if they see them shining a beautiful “light” in public, but not within the home. If we wish to positively influence our children, we must ensure that our conduct is as “beautiful” within the family as it is outside the home, in our dealings with people outside the family. Projecting warmth, kindness, sensitivity and joy both outward, to the public, and inward, within the home, is our best chance of producing children who will respect and follow our traditions and values that we wish and work to impart to them.

Tuesday

The special *Al Ha-nissim* prayer recited in the *Amida* prayer and in *birkat ha-mazon* during Chanukah begins by recalling how the Greeks sought to prevent the Jews from studying Torah and observing *mitzvot*, and then tells, “But You, in Your abundant mercy, helped them in their moment of distress” (“*ve-Ata be-rachamekha ha-rabim amadeta lahem be-eit tzaratam*”).

Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro of Piaseczno *Hy”d*, in *Eish Kodesh*, suggests reading this phrase to mean that God assisted the Jews of the time precisely because they experienced that period as a “moment of distress.” The Greeks, as opposed to enemies of *Am Yisrael* such as Assyria and Babylonia, who sought dominion over the Land of Israel, and Haman, who set out to eliminate the Jewish People, waged war solely against the Jewish religion. Their intent was not to capture territory (Judea was already under the Greeks’ control) or to kill members of the Jewish Nation, but rather to eradicate the Jews’ beliefs and practices. And while many Jews of the time succumbed to pressure and abandoned Judaism, others refused to surrender, and thus experienced a true “moment of distress.” They suffered persecution because of their firm belief and unwavering commitment to Torah. And it was precisely for this reason, the *Eish Kodesh* explained, that God assisted the Jews of the time and enabled them to miraculously triumph over the Greeks. In the merit of their experiencing the Greeks’ edicts as “*eit tzaratam*,” a period of distress, they earned special divine assistance. Due to their great love for and unconditional subservience to the Torah, the laws enacted by the Greeks were a source of great anguish and pain, and this itself rendered them worthy of a miraculous victory.

This comment of the Rebbe of Piaseczno perhaps calls upon us to honestly ask ourselves whether we are sufficiently “distressed” by our spiritual limitations and shortcomings. Many of us feel frustrated, anxious and despondent when we suffer financial losses, when we experience physical discomfort, or when we endure some unwanted inconvenience. We are far less troubled, generally speaking, by our moral and religious failings. The *Eish Kodesh* here reminds us that our most important concern should be our spiritual achievements, our pursuit of excellence in all areas of *avodat Hashem*. We should feel more “distressed” by our inadequacies in Torah study, in sensitivity and kindness towards other people, in our meticulous observance of *Halakha*, and in all our religious obligations, than we are by the difficulties and challenges we face in other areas of life. We must view our religious responsibilities as our highest priority, and ensure that this is the area of our primary concern, focus and attention throughout our lives.

Wednesday

The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 672:2) rules that one who did not light Chanukah candles at the proper time (at the beginning of the night) may still fulfill the *mitzva* later, at any time throughout the night. The clear implication of the *Shulchan Arukh*’s ruling is that one lights with the *berakhot* even if he kindles the Chanukah lights late at night. As we saw earlier this week, the halakhic authorities debate the question of whether one recites the *berakhot* if he lights the candles at a time when there is nobody else present to see them.

Irrespective of this debate, the *Magen Avraham* raises the question of why the *Shulchan Arukh* would require reciting the *berakhot* in a case of one lighting late at night. After all, the author of the *Shulchan Arukh* (Rav Yosef Karo) himself, in *Beit Yosef*, notes that it is uncertain whether one fulfills the requirement of Chanukah candle lighting if he lights the candles past the time of “*tikhleh regel min ha-shuk*” (generally defined as approximately a half-hour after nightfall). This issue depends on two different possibilities raised by the Gemara, and has not been conclusively resolved. It thus seems surprising that the *Shulchan Arukh* would require lighting with the *berakhot* when lighting late at night. Generally, whenever there is some uncertainty regarding the recitation of a *berakha*, *Halakha* requires omitting the *berakha* in order to avoid the risk of reciting a *berakha le-vatala* (blessing in vain). And, the *berakha* recited over the performance of a *mitzva* is not indispensable for the fulfillment of the *mitzva*, and thus it is preferable to omit the *berakha* in situations of uncertainty. Why, then, does the *Shulchan Arukh* require reciting the *berakhot* over the lighting of Chanukah candles when one lights late at night – when it is questionable whether the *mitzva* can still be fulfilled?

A novel and surprising answer to this question is suggested by Rav Yaakov Emden, in his *Mor U-ketzia* (672). Rav Yaakov Emden advances the novel theory that the *berakhot* recited over Chanukah candle lighting differ fundamentally from the *berakhot* recited over other *mitzvot*, and constitute an integral part of the performance of the *mitzva*. He explains that since the obligation of Chanukah candles is defined as an obligation of *pirsumei nisa* – to publicize the Chanukah miracle – it by definition requires the recitation of *berakhot*. Lighting candles – which, at least before the age of electric illumination, is something which is commonly done for a variety of reasons – cannot on its own serve to publicize a miracle. In order for the Chanukah lights to achieve the goal of *pirsumei nisa*, they need to be formally designated as special lights kindled especially to commemorate the Chanukah miracle. As such, Rav Yaakov Emden asserts, the *mitzva* of Chanukah lights requires the recitation of *berakhot*, and thus even in situations of uncertainty, we have no choice but to recite the *berakhot*, for otherwise, the lighting does not publicize the miracle and is thus valueless as far as the halakhic obligation is concerned.

Rav Yaakov Emden’s theory yields the novel and controversial conclusion that if a person lit Chanukah candles without reciting the *berakhot*, he has not fulfilled his obligation, and must light the candles again with the proper blessings.

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, in *Mikra’ei Kodesh* (Chanukah, 24), suggests drawing proof to Rav Yaakov Emden’s theory from the Rambam’s discussion of the *berakha* recited over the *mitzva* of *Hallel*. The Rambam presents the laws of *Hallel* in Hilkhot Chanukah (chapter 3), and there he writes that a *berakha* is recited before the recitation of *Hallel*, because even *mitzvot* enacted by the Sages require the recitation of an introductory *berakha*. As examples of this rule, the Rambam points to the *Megilla* reading on Purim, and the designation of an *eiruv*, both of which constitute rabbinic obligations and require the recitation of a *berakha*. Rav Tzvi Pesach finds it significant that in a chapter written in the section dealing with the laws of Chanukah, the Rambam chose not to point to Chanukah candles lighting as an example of a rabbinic obligation requiring the recitation of a *brerakha*. Seemingly, this would have been the natural choice of such an example, as the Rambam is discussing *Hallel* in the section dealing with Chanukah. Possibly, Rav Tzvi Pesach suggests, the Rambam did not use this example because the *berakhot* over Chanukah candle lighting differ from the *berakhot* recited over other *mitzvot*, for the reason explained by Rav Yaakov Emden. When it comes to the Chanukah lights, the *berakhot* are integral to the *mitzva* due to the need to make it clear that the candles commemorate the Chanukah miracle, and thus these *berakhot* cannot serve as a precedent for the *berakhot* recited before other *mitzvot*.

Regardless, most *Acharonim* dispute Rav Yaakov Emden’s novel theory, and do not believe that the *berakhot* recited over the Chanukah candle lighting are indispensable for the fulfillment of the *mitzva*.

Thursday

We read in Parashat Vayigash of the prophecy Yaakov received when he stopped in Be’er Sheva on his way to Egypt. God assured Yaakov that he had nothing to fear, and promised, “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will certainly bring you back up” (46:4). Rashi and Ibn Ezra explain this promise as referring to Yaakov’s interment in Canaan, that although he would die in Egypt, his remains would be transported back to his homeland for burial. The Radak (46:3) explains this promise differently, claiming that it refers to Yaakov’s descendants’ eventual return to *Eretz Yisrael* after a lengthy exile in Egypt.

Seforno likewise understands this promise as a reference to the future Exodus from Egypt, and explains on this basis the poetic style in which it was formulated – “*a’alkha gam alo*” (literally, “I shall bring you back up, and also up”). This repetitious expression, Seforno writes, refers to the fact that Yaakov’s family would leave Egypt in a better condition that it was in when it went to Egypt. God promised not only to bring the family back from Egypt, but to bring them to victory over the peoples of Canaan so they could possess, settle and flourish in their homeland.

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, in *Kedushat Levi*, sees in the expression “*a’alkha gam alo*” an allusion to a different concept – to the need for constant growth and progress. After “*a’alkha*,” once a person has grown and achieved, he must then proceed to “*gam alo*” – to reach even higher. No matter how far we have advanced, there is always room for improvement. And thus even after we’ve “risen,” we must continue to work towards rising to greater heights.

The Egyptian exile is often seen as a symbol of all “exiles” that we experience, including periods of spiritual decline. Rav Levi Yitzchak here teaches us that we should be striving for more than just being brought back from “Egypt,” recovering from failure and elevating ourselves from the abyss of sinful conduct. Even after we’ve achieved this return, we must continuously strive to grow and improve, always setting our sights upon greater achievements without ever feeling fully satisfied with what we’ve accomplished.

Friday

Parashat Vayigash tells of the emotional reunion between Yaakov and his beloved son, Yosef, after over twenty years of separation. The Torah relates that Yosef wept for a long time on Yaakov’s shoulder when the two finally met (46:29), and *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel* presents a fascinating explanation for Yosef’s tears. *Targum Yonatan* writes that when Yosef went out to greet his father, Yaakov saw him from afar and bowed to him. It appears that Yaakov mistook Yosef for Pharaoh, as he was dressed in royal garb, and thus prostrated before him. When they reached one another, Yosef wept, lamenting having caused his father to bow to him, an act of disrespect towards Yaakov. *Targum Yonatan* further notes that Yosef was punished for causing his father to bow to him, and a number of years were taken off his life.

This Midrashic account of Yaakov and Yosef’s reunion, and the criticism of Yosef for what was, apparently, an innocent mistake, is perhaps intended to warn against giving false impressions and appearing greater than our true selves. Symbolically, Yosef’s appearing as Pharaoh might represent the common phenomenon of people projecting an exaggerated image of stature and importance. *Chazal* criticize Yosef for his having mistakenly caused his father to show him honor which he did not deserve, perhaps warning that we should ensure to not even inadvertently present ourselves as somebody who we aren’t. Yosef certainly deserved respect and honor by virtue of his position of vizier, but he did not deserve the level of respect that was reserved only for Pharaoh. Likewise, while we all deserve basic human dignity, as well as some degree of respect and recognition for our qualities and achievements, we must ensure not to project a false image and invite honor and accolades of which we are not worthy.

The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (72b) famously teaches that a Torah scholar must be “*tokho ke-varo*” – the same inside and out. Just as the *aron* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* was plated with gold on both its interior and exterior (Shemot 25:11), the Gemara instructs, people who project the noble image of a serious student of Torah must ensure that this image is an accurate reflection of their true selves, and that the respect they receive for their presumed stature is truly deserved.

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