**"Regarding Matters of Sanctity, We Ascend"**

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**The Two Mitzvot of Chanuka**

"Our Rabbis taught: The precept of Chanuka [demands] one light for each person and his household... as for the extremely zealous, Beit Shammai maintains: on the first day eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced; but Beit Hillel maintains that on the first day one light is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased... One opinion maintains: the reason of Beit Shammai is that [the number of lights] shall correspond to the days still to come, and that of Beit Hillel is that it shall correspond to the days which have passed; but another maintains: Beit Shammai's reason is that it shall correspond to the bullocks of the festival; while Beit Hillel's reason is that regarding [matters of] sanctity we ascend but do not descend." (Shabbat 21b)

While the gemara provides the basis for the 'mehadrin' performance of the mitzva, it does not explain why the basic mitzva is fulfilled with only one candle, nor does it state the reason for adding an additional candle each day. Even if we assume that in this case the principle of "ma'alin ba-kodesh" (regarding holy matters we ascend) is applicable (which for some reason is not practiced with the bullocks of the festival), there is still no explanation as to why we may not light one or eight candles each day, and simply avoid "descending in holiness". One could suggest that a unique halakha was stated here that one must ascend in sanctity and not remain static, thereby deeming it unacceptable to light the same number of candles each day. However, this expansion of ma'alin ba-kodesh is difficult to accept.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The Mitzva of Lighting in the Temple**

When the Hasmoneans entered the Temple and found the decanter of oil, they had two options (we assume they were unaware of the impending miracle and assumed that within eight days there would be new oil):

A. Light all the candles on the first day thereby consuming all of the oil.

B. Divide the oil into eight parts and light one candle each day.

To determine whether this second option was indeed a legitimate possibility, two questions must be addressed:

1. Is it acceptable to fulfill the mitzva of lighting the menora in the Temple with only one candle?

2. Even if we assume that it is possible to fulfill the commandment with one candle, it is plausible that there may be an additional aspect (kiyum) of the mitzva which can only be fulfilled by lighting all seven candles of the Temple menora? This would have deemed it necessary to light all the candles on the first day, even though the mitzva of lighting may not have been fulfilled at all for the next seven days.

Let examine some of the verses in the Torah which relate to the lighting of the menora in the Temple:

A. "...and its lamps shall be lit so that they shine towards its center." (Shemot 25:35)

B. "...to bring you clear illuminating oil, made from hand-crushed olives, to keep the lamp constantly burning. Aaron and his sons shall arrange for [the lamps to burn] from evening until morning..." (Shemot 27:20-21)

C. "...instruct the Israelites to bring him clear illuminating oil from hand-crushed olives to keep the lamp burning constantly. Aaron shall light [the lamp] constantly with [this oil]. [It shall burn] before God, from evening to morning, outside the cloth partition in the Communion Tent ... He shall constantly kindle the lamps on the pure [gold] menora before God." (Vayikra 24:2-4)

D. "... When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall illuminate the menora. Aaron did that ... The menora was made of a single piece of beaten gold..." (Bamidbar 8:2-4).

Almost instantly, one notices a sharp difference between the various imperatives. The second commandment (B) contains no reference whatsoever to the menora. Instead, there is a commandment to raise a "ner tamid" (eternal light) in the Temple. This point is especially apparent when compared to the third passage (C), where the passage is very similar in its presentation and vocabulary, yet an additional phrase is added at the end - "on the pure menora ...." The lighting of the ner tamid which was commanded earlier is specific to the menora. We can conclude from this that there is an imperative to light a ner tamid in the Temple. This ner tamid is not intrinsically connected to the menora upon which it is lit. Rather, a menora is simply the most appropriate place to light a ner tamid.

The commandment in A, however, is quite different. There is a commandment to make a menora as one of the Temple's vessels. Integral to the menora are the candles, because a menora by definition requires candles. Therefore, the obligation of the candles stems purely from the commandment of making the menora[[2]](#footnote-2). Based on this analysis, we may explain a number of halakhot which are related to the menora. We shall mention three of them:

**"Ner Tamid" vs. "Menora"**

1. In D, the process of making the menora is described. Here, we may suggest that the commandment to light the candles was placed among the general laws of the menora, because the general commandment is indeed to make the menora, and subsequently to light candles. This is the first time Aaron is commanded to perform this act of lighting[[3]](#footnote-3).

2. There are places where the Torah employs a singular tense - "ner" (candle) and other places where the Torah uses the plural. When the Torah refers to the commandment of ner tamid, the reference is quoted in the singular, since the focus of ner tamid is the lighting of only one candle (sources B-C). When the reference is to the candles as a part of the menora, the reference is in the plural - each candle assumes an independent obligation.

3. One candle assumed a special status: the western candle. If there is a commandment to light seven candles, it is unclear as to how the western candle received a special status. Furthermore, what was the nature and significance of this status? According to what we discussed earlier, the issue is clear. The western candle represented the ner tamid. The halakha of the ner tamid, in its essence, is a halakha mandating that a candle remain lit through the night ("from dusk to dawn"). The candles lit fulfilling the mandate of "menora" are specific to the day[[4]](#footnote-4). Even those Rishonim who are of the opinion that some of the candles must burn all day and all night derive this from the commandment which is mentioned regarding ner tamid in conjunction with the menora (C); an idea which is not mentioned in the first commandment which only describes the general obligation of a ner tamid (B)[[5]](#footnote-5).

If we now study the commandments in the Torah, we shall see that each commandment contributes an additional element to our understanding of the menora.

A. The menora requires candles.

B. There is a need for one candle in the Temple to burn through the night.

C. The candle which burns through the night must be on the menora. Some opinions maintain that it should burn through the day as well.

D. The lighting of the candles which is commanded in A must be performed by Aaron.

**The Two Miracles of Chanuka = Two Mitzvot of Chanuka**

The Hasmoneans who entered the Temple found enough oil to last one day. This oil was enough to burn for the equivalent of eight candles for one day. (Six candles were lit at night and one candle during the day as well. Generally, when the western candle is extinguished, it is necessary to relight it in the morning. The Rashba notes a subsequent need for a double portion of oil). The menora, as all vessels in the Temple, received its standing as a keli sharet (vessel of service) only after its initiation. This initiation is accomplished by lighting seven candles on the menora. The Hasmoneans preferred not to initiate the menora with all the candles, for then they would have no candles the second day, thereby causing them to fail in performing a positive commandment (mitzvat aseh).

In a case where the menora has not been initiated, the situation is different. In this instance, we are not required to light those candles whose obligation stems purely from the fulfillment of the commandment to have a menora. Subsequently, the Hasmoneans lit one candle at night which is the commandment of source B. Without an initiated menora there was also no requirement of day and night for the ner tamid, because this commandment was only applicable once the menora is designated as the location of lighting. Therefore, the core obligation was to light only one candle per day.

The essence of the miracle was that the candle burned for a full day (24 hours), which is the "standard miracle" in the Temple. This showed that the Almighty was pleased with their actions. The uniqueness of the miracle was the recognition that the status of the Temple had once again returned to its original pure state. The fact that the candle burns day and night reflects a divine recognition that the menora, although not initiated, is considered a complete menora, thereby denoting God's approval of the Hasmoneans' actions.

Perhaps the daily addition of candles was to commemorate an additional miracle. Being that this miracle was far less important than the other, it was not strictly mandated for all.

The oil at the end of each day did not run out. Subsequently, they could in fact have lit two candles on the second day and so on and so forth every day. The initiation of the menora was on the seventh day. The eighth day was the day when the Temple began to function in its normal routine, as we find on the eighth day of consecration (milu'im). This day was also characterized by the fact that all candles burnt by miracle. Therefore this day symbolized the synthesis in the Temple, for outwardly it appeared to function normally; however, its entire existence was based on a miracle.

1. Compare to Megilla 21b where the gemara is not concerned with maintaining an equal number of verses for each person called to the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It should be noted that this situation is similar to that of the show bread. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For in the previous accounts, the topic is limited to discussing the mitzva of lighting the ner tamid by Aaron, and not the lighting of the menora's candles. Therefore in this instance Chazal said (Tanchuma, Beha'alotkha 8. see carefully Ramban ad loc.), that Aaron received a unique commandment here regarding lighting candles to appease his conscience, even though he was ostensibly commanded to light them already and in this there is no appeasement whatsoever. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Mishneh Torah, Temidin U-musafin ch. 3; Rashba, Responsa sec. 1:309. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It is plausible that even according to the opinion of the Sifri who derived this from "lifnei Hashem tamid," "constantly before the lord," his intent is for Vayikra 24:4 and not 24:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)