**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**CHANUKA 5781**

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Dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky z"l, whose yahrzeit falls on the 19th of Kislev. May the world-wide dissemination of Torah through the VBM be a fitting tribute to a man whose lifetime achievements exemplified the love of Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

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Dedicated in memory of Abraham Gontownik z"l   
on the occasion of his twenty-first Yahrzeit, 

The Gontownik Family

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[**Chanuka: Holiness in the Temple and at Home**](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/chanuka-holiness-temple-and-home)

**Dr. Alan Jotkowitz**

In memory of Shlomo ben David Tzvi *z"l* and Mordechai ben Shlomo *z"l*

The Rambam devotes the last two chapters of *Hilkhot Megilla Ve-Chanuka* to the laws of Chanuka. He begins with the historical background of the holiday, which culminates in the military victory of the Chashmona’im over the Greeks and the miracle of the small flask of oil lasting eight days, because of which we light candles and celebrate for eight days. The Rambam continues:

Whoever is obligated to read the *Megilla* is also obligated to kindle the Chanuka lamp. On the first night, one lighting [the lamp] recites three blessings. They are: “Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to light the Chanuka lamp”; “...who wrought miracles for our ancestors...”; “...who has granted us life, sustained us...”

When a person who did not recite a blessing [on his own Chanuka lamp] sees a lamp, he should recite the latter two blessings. On subsequent nights, a person who kindles the lamp should recite two blessings and one who sees a lamp should recite one, for the blessing *Shehechiyanu* is recited only on the first night. (*Hilkhot Megilla Ve-Chanuka* 3:4)

In the next *halakha* (3:5), the Rambam begins discussing the laws of reciting *Hallel* on Chanuka; he returns to the laws of kindling the Chanuka lamp only in the next chapter (e.g. How many candles should one light, etc.).

Why did the Rambam splits the laws of the Chanuka candles between two chapters?

It is further notable that the Rambam seems to present two different reasons for the *mitzva* of lighting the candles in the two different chapters*.* In the third chapter he writes:

Candles should be lit in the evening at the entrance to the houses on each and every one of these eight nights to **publicize and reveal the miracle.** (3:3)

But in the fourth chapter he writes:

One should **acknowledge the miracle** and thus increase our praise of God and our expression of thanks for the miracles which He wrought on our behalf. (4:12)

A deeper understanding of the fourth chapter of *Hilkhot* *Chanuka* can help explain this discrepancy.

A recurring theme in the fourth chapter is the motif of *bayit*, house or household. This theme presents itself already in the opening line: “It is a *mitzva* that each house and house (i.e., each and every house) should light a single candle” (4:1). Why does the Rambam repeat the word “house” if not to emphasize the centrality of the household in the observance of the *mitzva*?

There are a number of halakhic ramifications of the centrality of the house in the *mitzva* of lighting candles:

1. Following the *gemara* in *Shabbat* (21b), the Rambam defines the *mitzva* as an obligation on the household, rather than the individual. This is somewhat unique, as most *mitzvot* are the obligation either of the individual or the community; there are very few *mitzvot* where the primary obligation falls on the household. The *mitzvot* of *mezuza* and building a fence around a roof also fall in that category, but in those instances the obligation on the household is readily understandable, as the *mitzva* is related to the physical structure of the house. What is the connection between the lighting of Chanuka candles and the household?
2. The *gemara* (*Shabbat* 23a) rules that a guest of the household is also obligated in the *mitzva* of lighting the candles. Why did the *gemara* need to inform us of this law? Would anyone think that a guest is not obligated to eat *matza* at the *seder* or make *Kiddush* at the Shabbat meal? Apparently, the *gemara* felt that a guest who is not part of the household might not be obligated – again demonstrating the centrality of the household to the *mitzva*. The *gemara* continues that a quest is not automatically obligated; he needs to contribute a small amount of money to the expenses in order to be considered part of the household.
3. The *gemara* (*Shabbat* 21b) rules:

The *mitzva* is to place the Chanuka candles at the entrance to one's house, outside. If one lives upstairs, he should place them in a window facing the public thoroughfare. And in time of danger, he should place them on his table inside, and that suffices.

The *gemara* continues that the candles should be placed within a *tefach* (approximately 8 cm) of the door, in order to make it clear that the *menora* was placed there by the occupants of the home. Although the *gemara* appears to be discussing the optimal place for the lighting of the candles, some *Acharonim* infer from this discussion that candles may only be lit in close proximity to a house; without a house, there is no obligation to light.

1. The *gemara* (*Shabbat* 21b) rules that one may light Chanuka candles until there are no longer any passersby in the marketplace. The simple understanding of this law is that there must be people in the street to see the lit candles. The Rif (*Shabbat* 9b in *dapei ha-Rif*) slightly alters the meaning of the *gemara* in his citation of the discussion, such that it reads that one may light until “everyone returns home” – emphasizing not that there are no longer people in the street, but rather that all of the people are in their homes.

Why is there such an intrinsic connection between the *mitzva* of lighting and the house? A careful reading of the Rambam may provide us with an answer. The Rambam writes:

In [the era of] the Second Temple, the Greek kingdom issued decrees against the Jewish People, [attempting to] nullify their faith and refusing to allow them to observe the Torah and its commandments. They extended their hands against their property and their **daughters**; they entered the Sanctuary, wrought havoc within, and made the sacraments impure. (*Hilkhot Megilla Ve-Chanuka* 3:1)

What decree against the daughters of Israel is the Rambam referring to? It may be the midrashic tradition that any Jewish girl prior to her wedding had to stay the night first with the Greek ruler, until Yehudit the daughter of Yochanan the High Priest used the occasion to slay the ruler, inspiring the Chashmona’im to rebel. This decree of the Greeks was a direct attack against the purity of the Jewish home. According to this interpretation, not only was the Temple defiled by the Greeks, but also the Jewish home.

The Chashmona’im in general were very concerned about the purity of the Jewish home and family. The *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (82a) tells us that the *beit* *din* of the Chashmona’im was very strict about forbidding relations with a gentile woman.

This explains why the *mitzva* of lighting is intimately connected with the home, and it also explains why the Rambam separated the *mitzva* of lighting the candles into two chapters. In the first chapter, he was concerned with the redemption and purification of the Temple, which is a *mitzva* worthy of public glorification; hence, the reason for the *mitzva* is to **"publicize and reveal the miracle,"** and even one who merely sees the candles can participate in the *mitzva*. In the second chapter, in contrast, he was concerned with the lighting of the candles as a symbol of the purification of the Jewish home, in which case only a member of a Jewish household can share in the *mitzva*.

Accordingly, the final *halakha* of *Hilkhot* *Chanuka* is readily understandable. The Rambam writes (based on *Shabbat* 23b):

If [a person has the opportunity to fulfill only one of two *mitzvot*,] lighting a lamp for one's home [i.e., Sabbath candles] or lighting a Chanuka lamp – or, alternatively, lighting a lamp for one's home or reciting *Kiddush* – the lamp for one's home receives priority, since it generates peace within the home, and even God's name can be erased to create peace between a husband and his wife. Peace is great, for the entire Torah was given to bring about peace within the world, as the verse states (*Mishlei* 3:17): "Its ways are pleasant ways and all its paths are peace." (*Hilkhot Megilla Ve-Chanuka* 4:14)

Rashi understands that the reason for the preference of the Shabbat candles is simply that people need light in their house on Shabbat. But the Rambam explains it on the basis that attaining peace between a husband and wife, as symbolized by the Shabbat candles, overrides the lighting of the Chanuka candles. According to Rashi, there is a conflict between the candles of Shabbat and the lighting of the *menora*, and we decide in the favor of the Shabbat candles. According to the Rambam, there is no conflict between the two *mitzvot*; it is self-evident that the Shabbat candles have primacy, because the message of the Chanuka *menora* is the centrality and holiness of the Jewish home, which is best symbolized by the Shabbat candles. This might also explain the *minhag* of women not doing work while the Chanuka candles are lit.

The reasoning presented by the Rambam for the *mitzva* of lighting Shabbat candles in *Hilkhot Chanuka* is particularly interesting, given that he provides different reasons elsewhere:

Both men and women are obligated to have a lamp lit in their homes on the Shabbat. Even if a person does not have food to eat, he should beg from door to door and purchase oil to kindle a lamp, for this is included in [the *mitzva* of] *oneg* *Shabbat* [delighting in the Shabbat]. (*Hilkhot Shabbat* 5:1)

One should prepare one's house while it is still day, as an expression of honor for the Shabbat. There should be a lamp burning, a table prepared [with food] to eat, and a couch bedecked with spreads. All of these are expressions of *kevod Shabbat* [honor for the Shabbat]. (*Hilkhot Shabbat* 30:5)

In *Hilkhot Shabbat*, candle-lighting is presented as a fulfillment of *oneg Shabbat* or *kevod Shabbat*. But which is it? And what happened to the Rambam’s explanation of the primacy of Shabbat candles in order to create peace between husband and wife, as so beautifully expressed in *Hilkhot Chanuka*? And how exactly do the Shabbat candles create between peace between the husband and wife?

To understand this, we must distinguish between the requirements of *oneg* and *kavod*. *Oneg Shabbat* is fulfilled by enjoying the experience of Shabbat:

What is meant by *oneg*? This refers to our Sages' statement that a person must prepare a particularly sumptuous dish and a pleasantly flavored beverage for Shabbat… and marital relations are considered a dimension of Shabbat pleasure. Therefore, Torah scholars who are healthy set aside Friday night as the night when they fulfill their conjugal duties. (*Hilkhot* *Shabbat* 30:7, 14)

*Kavod* reflects the idea of respecting and dignifying the Shabbat through human actions – creating the mood of Shabbat:

What is meant by honor? This refers to our Sages' statement that it is a *mitzva* for a person to wash his face, his hands, and his feet in hot water on Friday in honor of the Shabbat. He should wrap himself in *tzitzit* and sit with proper respect, waiting to receive the Shabbat as one goes out to greet a king. The Sages of the former generations would gather their students together on Friday, wrap themselves [in fine robes] and say, "Come, let us go out and greet the Shabbat, the king.” (*Hilkhot* *Shabbat* 30:2)

The Shabbat candles fulfill both aspects. In order to enjoy the Shabbat, light is necessary, and a table adorned with candles and light adds an element of dignity and honor to the feast.

Which aspect of the Shabbat candles, *kavod* or *oneg*, is crucial for maintaining the peace between husband and wife that the Rambam refers to in *Hilkhot Megilla Ve-Chanuka*? The Rambam is telling us that the element of mutual respect, as exemplified by the *kavod* aspect of Shabbat candles, as opposed to the physical pleasures of *oneg*, is the key element in attaining marital harmony. As the Rambam writes:

Our Sages commanded that a man **honor** his wife more than his own person, and love her as he loves his own person. (*Hilkhot* *Ishut* 15:19)

The understanding of the Chanuka candles as emphasizing the centrality of the Jewish home may help explain a widely accepted *minhag*. The optimal way to perform the *mitzva* according to the Rama is for everyone in the house to light the number of candles corresponding to the night of Chanuka. The Maharshal writes, "But of course a husband and wife only light one candle," without giving a reason for this ruling. The *Mishna Berura* (671:9) explains that this is because a man's wife is like himself (*ishto* *ke-gufo*). But this reason is difficult to understand. We don’t say that a woman doesn’t have to eat *matza* or the *korban* *Pesach* because of *ishto* *ke-gufo*! Why should Chanuka candles be different?

If the rationale for Chanuka candles is a celebration of the purity and holiness of the Jewish home, then it becomes obvious why a husband and wife should share their *menora*. This act of sharing is itself a manifestation of the deeper message of the holiday.

We previously mentioned the redundancy of the word "*bayit*" in the opening of the fourth chapter of *Hilkhot Chanuka*, which we explained emphasizes the centrality of *bayit* in these *halakhot*. But maybe there is another reason as well. The word *bayit* appears in these two chapters 25 times, perhaps alluding to the primary importance from both a halakhic and hashkafic perspective of the *bayit* to the holiday, which begins on the 25th day of Kislev. The redundancy is necessary to reach the number of 25.