

# Chanukah Shofar

## Kislev-Teves 5784 / December 2023



*We wish all our readers a happy & enlightening  
Chanukah!*

**חנוכה שמחה ומאירה!**  
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## Publicity

There are three Mitzvos associated with the principle of “Pirsumei Nissa” (publicizing the miracle): 1) lighting Chanukah lights; 2) reading Megillas Esther on Purim, and 3) drinking the four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder. Despite being Rabbinical commandments, the obligation to fulfill them is very strict. Even a person who is so impoverished that he does not have the necessary means is obligated to beg for funds to fulfill the Mitzvah. Why is there such a strict obligation for these three Rabbinical commandments?

Perhaps it could be suggested that “publicizing the miracle” is what inspires the strictness of these mitzvos. Recognizing the hand of G-d in an event and appreciating it as a miracle is an obligation that needs to be publicized. Too many people attribute the success of their endeavors to human skill and ingenuity. Therefore, we must make extra effort to fulfill these Pirsumei Nissa mitzvos in order to bring about public awareness when G-d performs a miracle on our behalf.

With my best wishes for an enjoyable and enlightening Chanukah.

*Yisrael Gettinger*



## Chanukah Lighting & the Jewish Home

The Mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights requires having a home - “נר איש וביתו”, “a Light for a person & his household” (Maseches Shabbos 21b; see also the last Tosafos on 46a, Maseches Sukkah). Much like the Mitzvah of Mezuzah requires a home & in the absence of a home one is not obligated in the commandment of Mezuzah - so too with the Mitzvah of Chanukah lights. Even if one is present at the synagogue lighting, one is nonetheless obligated to light at home. It would behoove us to question this condition attached to Chanukah lighting. What is there about the Mitzvah that necessitates having a home to fulfill it?

Upon reflection one could discern a lesson conveyed in attaching the kindling to one's home. It is true that with our Chanukah lighting we are commemorating the miracle of the oil kindled in the Beis Hamikdash & all the associated purification of the service therein as it was returned to Jewish autonomy. Nonetheless, even of greater importance is the removal of the spiritual threats to Jewish homes. The Greeks facilitated a massive campaign to assimilate the Jewish people into the Hellenist culture. The institution of a unique Jewish home & its foundational Torah practices had been threatened. Even more important than the victory on the battlefield & even greater than the restoration of Jewish service in the Bais Hamikdash was the sanctity of the Jewish home. Attaching the Mitzvah of kindling to our homes highlights this significant message.



## The Site of the Chanukah Miracle

The focus of Chanukah lighting is "Pirsumai Nissa" – publicizing the miracle. The miracle was not one of salvation; rather, it was an expression by the Almighty of His love for the Jewish people - how He appreciated their rising to defend the honor of G-d & the Torah.

It is puzzling therefore that this miracle took place with the Menorah lights in an area that was limited to Cohanim. Why couldn't a miracle occur in the courtyard where all Jews would be able to see it & thereby make the publicity all the greater?

Perhaps inherent in the "thank you" from HaShem with the miracle was a special thanks to the Cohanim who normally would not be the ones to be leading the Jewish people in battle. The role of leading an army would not normally fall to Cohanim, whose primary role was to perform the service in the Beis Hamikdash (Temple) & serve as a resource for Torah scholarship for the Jewish people. Led by the Chashmonai family, the Cohanim acted out of character & assumed a responsibility not normally assigned to them. Maybe even in hindsight, their decision might have been questioned. However, the Almighty gave them so to speak, a "Y'yasher Kochachem", an affirmation; for indeed they fulfilled the dictum of Pirkei Avos (Chapter 2) - "in a place where there is no leader, strive to be a leader." Therefore, the miracle necessarily took place in an area set aside only for Cohanim to indicate a special thank you to those who undertook a responsibility that normally was not theirs.

We should learn from the example of the Chashmonai family to undertake assignments that are not necessarily ours, if the situation demands it of us.



## The Beauty of the Chanukah Lights

We are all familiar with the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights. On the first night of Chanukah one light is kindled & on each subsequent night an additional light is kindled so that by the eighth night eight lights are lit.

Interestingly, this procedure far exceeds the minimum requirements of the mitzvah.

The Talmud (Shabbos 21b) prescribes the lighting in the following manner:

- On each night of Chanukah one light for the entire household should be lit.
- For those who perform Mitzvos in a more optimum fashion, let them kindle one light for each member of the household.
- And for those who seek the most outstanding way, let them add another light on each successive night.

Thus, we find that the procedure commonly used for lighting Chanukah candles is in accordance with that reserved for those who generally perform Mitzvos in the most outstanding way. What is there about the Mitzvah of Chanukah that inspired everyone to adopt the most stringent fashion suggested?

We can gain an insight into this practice after first acquainting ourselves with the miracle upon which the mitzvah was based & the necessity for the occurrence of the miracle.

After the Jews were successful on the battlefield & defeated the Greek army stationed in Eretz Yisrael, they returned to the Temple in Jerusalem to reinstate the service therein. When it came time to light the Menorah with pure olive oil that had not been defiled, they found sufficient oil to burn only one day. A miracle occurred & the oil burned for eight days, allowing time for a new supply of pure oil to be produced. In commemoration & publication of this miracle it was decreed that Jews should kindle lights on each of those eight nights during which the miracle occurred.

But why the need for a miracle at all? Why couldn't defiled oil be used? While it is true that the Torah requires undefiled olive oil for use in the Menorah, it is also true that the Torah permits the usage of defiled oil in the event there is no other alternative.

The answer given by several Talmudic commentators is that G-d demonstrated His love for His people. Granted, a miracle halachically was not an imperative. However, this was G-d's way of manifesting His eternal love to the Jewish nation.

In light of the above, we can understand the popular style of Chanukah lighting. True, it is technically proper to light only one candle each night. But if the miracle that occurred was an expression of G-d's unique relationship & special love for His people, it then logically follows that His people want to reciprocate and demonstrate their love & commitment in return. Thus, the most stringent fashion of candle lighting is adopted in order to publicize the miracle of Chanukah in a most loving and beautiful manner.



## Days of Praise & Thanks

The Talmud in Masseches Shabbos states that only after waiting a year did our Sages institute the celebration of Chanukah. This is strikingly in contrast to Purim where it would appear that they celebrated immediately. Why was there a need to wait a year before announcing the holiday of Chanukah?

The manner in which Chanukah is celebrated is in sharp contrast to that of Purim. Chanukah is termed “Yimay Hallel Vihoda’ah” - days of praise & thanks, while Purim is called “Yom Mishteh Visimcha” - a day of feasting & rejoicing. The specific form of celebration parallels the miraculous salvation which each holiday commemorates.

Haman attempted to physically annihilate the Jews, and therefore Purim is celebrated in the physical manner of feasting & rejoicing. The Greeks, on the other hand, did not persecute the Jews physically but, rather, waged a campaign of spiritual oppression. In their attempt to eradicate the Jewish religion they outlawed among other Mitzvos, the observance of Shabbos & the performance of circumcision. Chanukah is a holiday which commemorates our miraculous spiritual salvation & is therefore celebrated as such. They are days when we recite Hallel in thanksgiving to the Almighty & light candles in proclamation of the miracle.

In light of this distinction, we can understand why our Sages waited a year before proclaiming Chanukah a holiday. It was crucial to first ascertain that the Greek efforts had not in any way succeeded. The victory on the battlefield would have remained a hollow one had there not been a revitalized commitment to Torah. My grandfather, Rabbi Riff of blessed memory, would link this idea to a verse in the 9th chapter of Tehillim. “Ha’oyaiv Tamu, Chorovos Linezach” - “the enemy is vanquished but the destruction is eternal.” Only after realizing that the Jews had not suffered any permanent spiritual harm could Chanukah be designated as a joyous holiday. If we approach the celebration of Chanukah with this attitude, we too will experience a strengthened commitment to Torah & Mitzvos.



## Holiday Notes

On the 25th of Kislev, the eight days of Chanukah begin. The following, taken from the Rambam's famous work, "Yad Hachazakah", provides an introduction to the holiday of Chanukah. "During the period of the Second Temple, the Greek kings issued harsh decrees against the Jewish people; outlawed their religion, forbade them to engage in the study of the Torah & the practice of Mitzvos, laid hands on their money & their daughters, entered the sanctuary and ravaged it & defiled all that had been ritually pure. They caused the Jewish people great anguish, until the G-d of our Fathers granted them mercy & delivered them from the hands of their enemies. The Chashmonai Cohanim prevailed & delivered the Jewish people from their hands. The Sages of that generation, therefore, decreed that the eight days beginning with the 25th day of Kislev should be days of rejoicing, that the Hallel be recited & that lights be lit at the entrance to the homes each of the eight nights, in order to publicize the miracle."

## The Miracle of the Oil

The Rabbis of the Talmud relate the inspiring story that when the moment came for the Cohanim to kindle the lights of the Menorah which stood in the Beis Hamikdash, they could not find pure oil because the Greeks had defiled all oils of the Temple. However, one small bottle of pure oil was found which contained enough to last for one night. But a miracle happened & the oil lasted for eight nights - long enough to be able to prepare fresh, pure olive oil.

## Lighting

The preferred way to perform the mitzvah is to light the Chanukah lamps with pure olive oil, since it recalls the light of the Menorah in the Holy Temple which was lit with olive oil. All oils & wicks are permissible if they burn well. Candles made of wax or paraffin are also permitted. On the first night one light is lit & every successive night another light is added until the eighth night when eight lights are lit. At the time of kindling the entire household should gather so that "the miracle might be publicized." The blessings are pronounced before the first light is kindled, and "Haneros Halalu" is recited as the remaining lights are kindled. When the lighting is (cont.)

## Lighting (Cont.)

concluded, Chanukah songs are sung in accord with the local custom.

If one has a Menorah that could accommodate eight lights, on the first night he lights the one at the extreme right. The following night he adds one immediately to the left & kindles it before the light of the previous night. He follows the same procedure each night, always adding from right to left, but always lighting from left to right.

It is customary to light one extra light in addition to the required number of lights for the given night. The extra light is called "the shamash" (the server). The "shamash" is used to kindle other lights and is separated from the Chanukah lights.

## Where the Lights are Placed



The Sages originally prescribed that the Chanukah lights are to be placed at the entrance to one's home - the left side of the entrance - so that the Mezuzah might be to the right and the Chanukah lights to the left. In this manner upon entering the home one would be "surrounded by Mitzvos". For many generations most people place their Chanukah lights in a window facing the street or in a noticed place inside the home.

## The Time for Lighting

The Chanukah lights are to be lit immediately at nightfall. If one has not done so, he may still perform the mitzvah throughout the remainder of the night as long as members of the household are awake. However, on Friday night, lighting should be before sunset & before Shabbos candle lighting time so as not to desecrate Shabbos.

The lights should burn for half an hour at a minimum. Therefore, at the time of lighting there should be sufficient oil in the Menorah for the prescribed period of time. If a Chanukah light accidentally goes out in the midst of its prescribed time for burning, it is to be rekindled again, but without a blessing.

On Friday evening one would not be allowed to rekindle a Chanukah light once Shabbos has begun. Since the lighting takes place earlier on Friday, one should make sure to have enough fuel to last one half hour after nightfall.

*Happy Chanukah!*