



We are All Kohanim on Chanukah!

After lighting Chanukah candles, we have the custom of reciting the passage הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ. According to Masechet Sofrim,¹ we recite it *after* the *beracha* לְהַדְלִיק וְנֵר שֶׁל הַנְּכֵחַ and *before* שְׁעֵשָׂה נְסִים and שְׁהַחֲיֵנוּ.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach² explains that from this passage we see that the purpose of lighting the candles is “in order to express thanks and praise,” an inherent part of the purpose of the *mitzvah*. Therefore, after the blessing לְהַדְלִיק, we say הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ, so that during the lighting we know to focus on the miracle of the salvation and on the triumph in the war (and since this is a fundamental part of performing the *mitzvah*, it is not an interruption between the blessing and performing the *mitzvah*).

However, according to the reading of the Tur, we say הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ *only after* lighting the candles, and thus rules the Shulchan Aruch:

“After one lights, one should say: ‘These lights we kindle upon the salvations, the miracles, the wonders... (הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ)’”.

The Maharil³ explains that since reciting הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ is only a custom, it certainly should not be said in between the *brachot*, but only after the lighting.

The Approach of the Maharshah

Another approach is that of the Maharshah:⁴ after we recite the blessings, we light the first candle. We then recite הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ while lighting the rest of the candles.

This approach seems odd. If there is no problem of interruption, we could have said הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ before lighting the first candle, and if there is a problem of interruption, it would have been necessary to wait until after finishing lighting the candles!

One could indeed fulfill one’s obligation with just one candle, but there is *hidur*, glorification, in lighting multiple candles. The *berachot* must also involve the additional ‘glorified’ candles; one must not create an interruption between the blessings and lighting them.⁵

How then does the Maharshah understand this?

It is possible that in his opinion, although one must not interrupt between the *berachot* and the beginning of the observance of the *mitzvah*, one may stop during the performance of the *mitzvah* for things related to the *mitzvah*.

Chanukah Candles and Mikdash Candles

It could be that the Maharshah’s approach is connected to something deeper.

The Shulchan Aruch does not mention the basic level of obligation for lighting (one candle per household) or even the *mehadrin* ruling, but only the *mehadrin min hamehadrin* custom. It turns out that the fundamental tradition of the whole Jewish nation has been the *mehadrin min hamehadrin* standard, and therefore the Shulchan Aruch does not bring the alternative customs. Why does everyone keep the *mehadrin min hamehadrin* standard specifically for this *mitzvah*?

There is a comparison between the *Menorah* in the *Mikdash* and Chanukah candles.⁶ One such comparison is tied to the holiness of the Chanukah candles and the prohibition of utilizing their light. The Rishonim explain that despite the fact Chanukah candles are *tashmishei mitzvah*, objects

used to fulfill a *mitzvah* (which may be used for purposes other than the *mitzvah* itself), our Sages instituted that the Chanukah candles are like the candles of the *Menorah* and therefore they have a certain holiness.

In light of this (excuse the pun), we could say that by instituting the comparison between Chanukah lights and *Mikdash* lights, our Sages were implying that a person’s home is like the *Mikdash*, and that the person lighting them is like the *Kohen*. As a result, the *mitzvah* of lighting candles is not like any other personal *mitzvah* a person does in his home. It is a shared *mitzvah* which belongs to all of *Am Yisrael*, and it is certainly worthy to glorify a shared *mitzvah*!

Now we can understand the Maharshah. The reason for glorifying the *mitzvah* is the holiness of the lights and their similarity to the *Mikdash*, and therefore the most appropriate thing is to say הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ immediately after the basic lighting and before the additional ‘glorified’ lighting, to explain why we are lighting the extra candles.

1 20:4.

2 Minchat Shlomo, Part 2:54.

3 Responsa 145.

4 Responsa 85.

5 The Pri Megadim asks this on the Maharshah.

6 See my book, “Chanukah – *Halacha Mimkora*,” published this year.

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Appreciate the Miracles

“**W**hat is Chanukah?... When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all of the oils. When the *Chashmonai* dynasty arose and defeated them, they searched but only found one cruse of oil which retained the stamp of the *Kohen Gadol*, and which contained enough oil to light for no more than one day. A miracle occurred, and they lit from the oil for eight days. The next year, they instituted those days as a holiday of praise and thanks.” (Shabbat 21b)

Why did our Sages choose to emphasize the miracle of the oil more than the miracle of the military victory? The miracle of the victory is what saved the Jewish nation, an incredible marvel of the few against the many that changed the face of Jewish history. If so, isn't it more appropriate to mention that as the essence of Chanukah?

This question is magnified in light of the text of **עַל הַנִּסִּים**, which specifically emphasizes the victory over the Greeks: “You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, the wanton into the hands of the diligent students of your Torah. For Yourself, You made a great and holy Name in Your world, and for Your people Israel you worked a great victory and salvation as this very day. Thereafter, Your children came to the Holy of Holies of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified the site of Your Holiness and kindled lights in the courtyards of Your Sanctuary.”

The Maharal explains that although the victory over the Greeks is the main reason for celebrating the holiday, every military victory can be



explained naturally. The importance of the miracle of the cruse of oil is that it teaches us G-d's role in the miracle of the military victory.

This idea is significant not only for Chanukah but for our everyday life. The Ramban explains that the purpose of the revealed miracles of the Torah is so we understand that every single thing that happens, happens through G-d. So we can acknowledge the miracles and wonders that G-d does for us each day.

It seems we can delve even deeper in explaining this. Sometimes we expect a miracle to save us from a certain situation, or to prove G-d's existence or love for us. This stems from the premise that a miracle is a high level of connection with G-d. Indeed, a miracle is an overt Divine intervention that changes the order of nature. G-d's presence is very obvious in miracles.

However, when we focus on miracles that G-d has performed for *Am Yisrael*, we discover something fascinating. Miracles were performed during periods of hardship and suffering, not during the better times.

So it was with the 10 Plagues and the splitting of *Yam Suf*, the various miracles in the desert, the miracles of Eliyahu and Elisha, and also with Chanukah. When the Jews are in severe distress, physically

or spiritually, there is a need for a miracle to save them from their suffering, or to prove G-d's Providence and existence in the face of the heresy that rules the world.

Should we hope for revealed miracles?

No. As we have mentioned, revealed miracles were performed during times of crisis. In good times, G-d reveals Himself to us through nature. In good times, we act on our own, and we feel G-d's Hand on our shoulder.

We are privileged to celebrate Chanukah in an uplifting reality in which *Am Yisrael* have the opportunity to live in their homeland, *Medinat Yisrael*, with a strong Israel Defense Forces.

When we light Chanukah candles and contemplate their light, let us remember the cruse of oil and G-d's great love for us. That is what protects us from generation to generation, every hour and every moment. Recognize the Hand of G-d that guided us in the war of the *Chashmonaim*, that guides us in the process of the redemption we are privileged to be part of, and that illuminates our path morning, noon and night.

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To be a Jew is to be part of a history touched, in a mysterious yet unmistakable way, by the hand of Providence.

RABBI SACKS