



Simcha and the Chanukah Candles

In his first *halacha* of Hilchot Chanukah (OC 670), the Shulchan Aruch codifies the custom to abstain from engaging in labor while the Chanukah candles are burning,¹ despite the fact there is no prohibition enjoining labor on Chanukah. Let us suggest an explanation for this *minhag*.

The Rambam writes that the days of Chanukah were established as days of *simcha*. Since we don't know the Rambam's source (we only know of such an obligation on Purim), we need a definition of this *mitzvah* of *simcha*.²

The Gemarah (Sukkah 41a) establishes an obligation incumbent upon *Chazal* to establish *mitzvot DeRabbanan* that will encourage us to remember the Mikdash. This is fulfilled on Sukkot when we take the *lulav* for the entire holiday or during the period of *Sefira* when we count the days of the Omer. One would doubt that the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles could be classified as *זְכוֹר לְמִקְדָּשׁ*; rather, the essence of the *mitzvah* is *זְכוֹר לַיהוָה*, to remember and thank *Hashem* for the great miracle of the lights of the *Menorah*.

Rabbeinu Zerachya HaLevy, in his opening comment on the second chapter of *Masechet Shabbat*, explains the prohibition of using the light of

the candles for one's personal benefit. The halachic status of the Chanukah candles is identical with that of the *ner* of the *Menorah* in the Mikdash, and is therefore *אֲסוּר בְּהִנְאָה*.

This ruling would seem to indicate that the *mitzvah* of *נֵר הַתְּנִיָּקָה* is not only a *zecher* for the miracle but also a *zecher* for the Mikdash.

The same conclusion would seem to underlie the statement of the Ramban (Commentary on the Torah, beginning of Parashat Beha'alotcha): *Hashem* told Aharon that his obligation to light the *ner* of the *Menorah* in the Mikdash was an eternal one. It would continue even after the destruction of the Mikdash in the *mitzvah* – incumbent upon every Jew – to light the Chanukah candles. Apparently, *נֵר הַתְּנִיָּקָה* is a continuation of the *mitzvah* of *זְכוֹר לְמִקְדָּשׁ*!

The obligation is not simply to remember the Mikdash but rather to imagine oneself as if one were standing in the Mikdash and one's *mitzvah* act is defined as a replication of the *mitzvah* performed in the Mikdash.

Perhaps the custom of abstaining from labor while the Chanukah candles are burning is an extension of the ruling of Rabbeinu Zerachya HaLevy. Not only does the *זְכוֹר לַיהוָה*

engender a legal status vis-à-vis the candle itself, but even the status of the house where the candles are lit is transformed. The *בֵּית* takes on the complexion of the *הֵיכָל* in the Mikdash, where the *Menorah* was lit. Hence, the obligation of *מוֹרָא מְקַדָּשׁ* (awe for the Mikdash) applies to the *בֵּית*, which in turn precipitates an *אֲסוּר מִלְאֲכָה*.³

We can now understand the requirement of *simcha* on Chanukah. Once the home is transformed into a Mikdash and one is standing in the presence of *Hashem*, one must be in a state of joy.⁴

עַזָּ וְחֵדוּהָ בְּמִקְדָּשׁוֹ!

“Might and joy are in His place” (Chronicles 1 16:27).

1 The Maharil includes both men and women in this custom.

2 The Ra'avya assumes an obligation to eat a meal with bread on each day of Chanukah!

3 See Rambam, Hilchot Tefilla, 11:8.

4 See Shiurim LeZecher Abba Mori, Vol. 2, pages 193-4. Just as the *minhag* of *Yom Tov Sheini* extends *kedusha* in זְמַן, so does the *minhag* of *איסור מלאכה מלפני ה' מלפני ה' מלפני ה'* during *ner Chanuka* generate *kedusha* in מְקוֹם.

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