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The Obligation of Hallel on Chanukah

Harav Yona Reiss
Av Beth Din



The Centrality of Hallel on Chanukah and the Nature of the Obligation

According to the Talmud (Shabbos 21a), the holiday of Chanukah is celebrated through “*hallel v’hodaah*” – the recitation of *Hallel* and the offering of thanksgiving to Hashem. In fact, the Rambam specifically codifies the laws of reciting *Hallel* in the section of his Mishneh Torah that relates to Chanukah. Clearly, *Hallel* is a centerpiece of Chanukah, and Chanukah is a centerpiece of the mitzvah of *Hallel*.

Is the recitation of *Hallel* a Torah obligation or a rabbinic obligation? There is a disagreement amongst different rabbinic authorities regarding the status of the mitzvah of reciting *Hallel* in general. Some are of the opinion that *Hallel* is a Torah obligation, while others hold that it is a rabbinic obligation, and still others hold that it is an enactment of the prophets (*divrei kabbalah*).

The *Semak* (Mitzvah 146), authored by R. Isaac of Corbeil (13th

century), includes the recitation of *Hallel* in his listing of Mitzvot that are mandated by the Torah, based on the verse (*Devorim* 10:21), “*He is your praise.*” The Rambam writes (*Laws of Chanukah*, 3:5-6) that the recitation of *Hallel* is “*mi’divrei sofrim*” which apparently connotes a rabbinic obligation. Although sometimes the Rambam uses that term to refer to Biblical obligations that are not explicitly recorded in the Torah, the Rambam explicitly states elsewhere (*Sefer Hamitzvot, Shoresh* 1) that the obligation to recite *Hallel* is only rabbinic in nature. The Talmud in *Berachos* (14a) also describes *Hallel* as a rabbinic obligation. Finally, the Ra’avad (*Laws of Chanukah, supra*) records the third opinion (although the *Kesef Mishneh, ad locum*, reconciles his opinion with that of the Rambam), writing that the obligation to recite *Hallel* is *m’divrei kabbalah*, a rabbinic obligation that is of greater force because it is recorded in the words of the Prophets, as articulated by Yeshayahu (30:29), “*there shall be*

singing as on a night when a festival is sanctified.”

The Ramban (*Hasagot l'Sefer Hamitzvot, Shoresh 1*) formulates an intermediate approach, namely that the recitation of *Hallel* on the Torah-ordained holidays of Pesach, Sukkos and Shavuos is a Torah obligation based on a *Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai* (oral tradition from Sinai) or as a part of the mitzvah of “*simcha*” (expressing joy) on these Holidays (see *Devorim* 16:14), but that *Hallel* on the holiday of Chanukah, which is only rabbinic in nature, is also only rabbinic. The *Maggid Mishneh (Laws of Chanukah 3:5)* formulates a different distinction, writing that the recitation of *Hallel* over the occurrence of a miracle is an enactment of the prophets, while the recitation of *Hallel* on set days during the year is rabbinic in nature.

Finally, there is the view of the *Ba'al Halachos Gedolos (BaHag, 8th century)*, who, like the *Semak*, counted *Hallel* amongst the 613 Mitzvot. The Rambam (*Sefer Hamitzvot, Shoresh 1*), without mentioning the *BaHag* by name, takes sharp disagreement with this view, based on his opinion that *Hallel* is only rabbinic in nature. On the other hand, the Ramban (*Hasagos, ad locum*) notes that the *BaHag* also

counted rabbinic laws amongst his compilation of the 613 Mitzvot, so that his view should not present a difficulty even according to those authorities, like the Rambam, who hold that the recitation of *Hallel* is always only rabbinically mandated.

The Chasam Sofer's Opinion about the Special Nature of Hallel on Chanukah

Notably, the *Chasam Sofer (Yoreh Deah 233, Shabbos 22a, s.v. pesulah)* concludes, based on a Talmudic passage in *Megillah* 14a, that even though Chanukah is only a rabbinic holiday, the obligation to recite *Hallel* on Chanukah is indeed mandated by the Torah due to a “*kal v'chomer*” (an a fortiori extrapolation), that since there existed a Torah obligation upon the Jewish people to recite *shirah* (a song) upon being emancipated from the slavery of Egypt (as expressed in the song of *Az Yashir*, as explained by Rashi, *ad locum*), how much more so is there an obligation to recite *Hallel* upon being rescued from death to life.

However, there are a couple of question marks concerning this formulation. First, as R. Naftali Tzvi Berlin points out (*Ha'Emek She'elah, She'eltos, Vayishlach* No. 26), the *kal v'chomer* only seems to be pertinent

at the time that the miracle occurs. Thus, while at the time of the miracle of Chanukah, one could argue that the obligation to recite *Hallel* was indeed a Torah obligation, in all subsequent years the obligation would be based solely on the rabbinic enactment to recite *Hallel* each year as part of the rabbinic holiday of Chanukah. Second, unlike the miracle of Purim, the miracle of Chanukah was essentially a spiritual salvation, rather than a physical salvation from death to life, since the physical lives of the Jewish people were not being threatened by the enemy.¹ Hence, it seems difficult to fit the *kal v'chomer* of the *Chasam Sofer* into the circumstances of the miracle of Chanukah.

It should be noted that the Talmud (*Ta'anis* 28b, *Erchin* 10a), includes the *Hallel* of Chanukah together with the *Hallel* recited on the Biblical holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, in its formulation of the “eighteen days” (twenty-one in the Diaspora) on which the entire *Hallel* is recited (eight days of Chanukah, first day of Pesach, one day of Shavuot, and the eight days of Sukkot and Shmini Atzeret). From this formulation, it seems that all eighteen days share the same

basic character. Since it appears to be the generally accepted opinion that the recitation of Chanukah is fundamentally a rabbinic obligation, its association with all the other days of *Hallel* would seem to buttress the view of the Rambam that the recitation of *Hallel* is always a rabbinic obligation.

Two Different Types of Hallel

The Talmudic description of the eighteen days of *Hallel* differs from that of the *Tosefta* (*Sukkah* 3:2), insofar as the *Tosefta* also includes in its count the nighttime recitation of *Hallel* on the first night of Pesach (during the reading of the *Haggadah*). Perhaps the Talmudic description does not include this specific recitation because the nature of the *Hallel* sung during the first night of Pesach is of a different character. In fact, this difference is spelled out explicitly by the Brisker Rav (*Chiddushei HaGriz al HaRambam*, *Chanukah* 3:8).

According to the Brisker Rav, there are two different types of *Hallel*. There is a special type of *Hallel* that is known as “*shirah*” – as a song to celebrate a miraculous deliverance, and then there is a *Hallel* of “*keriah*” – a recitation of praise in observance

¹ See *Mishna Berurah*, OC 670:6, based on the *Levush*.

of the eighteen days of holidays enumerated by the Rabbis. The *Hallel* of *shirah* is referenced in the Biblical verse from the Prophets cited by the Ra'avad (section 1, supra), while the *Hallel* of *keriah* is purely rabbinic in nature. This distinction also helps to explain the Talmudic passage in *Pesachim* (117a) that indicates that it was an enactment of the prophets to recite *Hallel* upon every miraculous deliverance. According to the Brisker Rav, we can understand that the Talmudic passage in *Pesachim* is referring to the *Hallel* of *shirah*, while the Talmudic passage in *Berachos* (supra, note 1) that describes *Hallel* as rabbinic, is referring to the *Hallel* of *keriah*.

The prime example of the *Hallel* of *shirah*, as the Brisker Rav explains, is in fact the *Hallel* recited on the first night of Pesach, because that is the time of the re-enactment of our miraculous deliverance from Egypt. However, all other days of *Hallel*, including the eight days of Chanukah, are in the *keriah* category. One practical difference is that there is a blessing recited on the *Hallel* of *keriah*, but not on the *Hallel* of *shirah* that is sung

on the first night of Pesach. Rav Moshe Shternbuch (*Moadim u'Zmanim* 2:146) explains that although the *Hallel* of Chanukah also commemorates a miracle like the *Hallel* sung on the first night of Pesach, it was established as a mitzvah of *keriah* based on being part of the annual celebration of the holiday of Chanukah, which serves as a commemoration, rather than as a re-enactment of the miracle. The recitation of *Hallel* at the time of the Chanukah miracle, by contrast, may indeed have qualified as a *Hallel* of *shirah*.²

Nonetheless, perhaps we can suggest that the *Hallel* on Chanukah does contain elements of *shirah* as well. Thus, the *Maseches Sofrim* (20:7) notes that both the *Hallel* recited on the first two nights of Pesach (in the Diaspora) and the *Hallel* of Chanukah are distinctive insofar as they should be recited “*b'neimah*,” with a special degree of sweetness and joy. Based on this passage, the Rogochover Gaon³ indicates that it is appropriate to incorporate a special quality of *b'neimah* into the recitation of *Hallel* on Chanukah. See *Moadim u'Zmanim*, supra.

2 See *Emek Beracha*, section on *Haggadah*, note 3; R. Yonason Sacks, *Sefer Yemei Chanukah*, pp. 124-127.

3 See *Tzafnas Paneach al HaRambam*, *Avodah Zarah* 3:3.

Repeating Hallel in Cases of Doubt

In any event, we generally assume like the opinion of the Rambam that *Hallel* is a rabbinic obligation, both on Chanukah and on the other days on which *Hallel* is recited.⁴ Accordingly, many authorities argue on this basis that we would apply the principle of “*safek d’rabbanan l’kula*” (any doubtful situation regarding the fulfillment of a rabbinic law is resolved leniently) – so that if a person is not sure if he recited *Hallel*, or whether he recited *Hallel* properly, we would not require him to recite *Hallel* again.⁵

However, according to the opinion of the Ramban (section 1, *supra*) that *Hallel* on the Torah-ordained holidays is either a Torah fulfillment of the mitzvah of *simcha* or a *Halacha L’Moshe M’Sinai*, whether one would have to repeat *Hallel* in a situation of doubt may depend on the reason for the enactment of *Hallel*. If *Hallel* is based on the mitzvah in the Torah of *simcha*, one would need to be strict in cases of doubt (*safek d’oraysa l’chumra*). If,

however, *Hallel* on such days is a *Halacha L’Moshe M’Sinai*, there is a dispute among commentators whether one would be strict or lenient in cases of doubt regarding a *Halacha L’Moshe m’Sinai*.⁶ However, even the Ramban would concede that *Hallel* on Chanukah is certainly only a rabbinic obligation.

Are Women Obligated in Hallel on Chanukah?

Another possible ramification is whether women are obligated in the Mitzvah of *Hallel*. In general, women are exempt from positive time-bound commandments. However, women are obligated in certain rabbinic commandments, such as lighting Chanukah candles, drinking the four cups of wine on the first night of Pesach, and listening to the Megillah, based on the principle that “they too were included in the miracle.” According to the *Tosafot* in *Pesachim* (108b, *s.v. hayu*), this principle is only applicable to rabbinic obligations, but not to Torah obligations such as sitting in the Sukkah (however, according to the *Tosafot* in *Megillah*

⁴ See, e.g., *Sha’agas Aryeh*, *Siman* 69.

⁵ *Sha’arei Teshuva* 488:1; see, however, *Nitei Gavriel*, *Laws of Yom Tov*, chapter 45:19, n.22, who records a dissenting minority opinion that it is best to repeat *Hallel* anyway without making a blessing.

⁶ See *Chazon Ovadiah*, *Chanukah*, p. 210.

4a, *s.v. she'af*, there might still be a rabbinic obligation in such cases). Therefore, it would seem to follow that if *Hallel* is a rabbinic obligation, women would be obligated in its recitation. However, if *Hallel* is a Torah obligation, then women would be exempt.

Nonetheless, the Rambam, who ruled that *Hallel* is only a rabbinic obligation, rules (*Laws of Chanukah* 3:14) that women are exempt from reciting *Hallel* (accordingly, the Rambam rules, in accordance with the Talmudic passage in *Sukkah* 38a, that a woman who recites *Hallel* for a man would not exempt him, unless he repeats every single word on his own). Similarly, the *Tosafot* (*Sukkah* 38a, *s.v. mi*) rule that women are exempt from reciting *Hallel* altogether, other than with respect to the *Hallel* of the first night of Pesach, which is an extension of the drinking of the four cups, in which women are obligated based on the principle of “they too were included in the miracle.”

Some commentators explain that the Rabbis modeled the rabbinic obligation of *Hallel* during the holidays in the manner of a Torah law, and therefore also exempted

women since it is a time-bound obligation that *Hallel* be recited on specific days, including Chanukah, even though the *Hallel* of Chanukah was initially established based on the occurrence of a miracle.⁷ Rav Moshe Shternbuch (*Moadim u'Zmanim* 2:146) explains, based on the distinction of the Brisker Rav (*supra*, section 3) regarding the two different types of *Hallel*, that women are exempt from *Hallel* of *keriah*, including Chanukah, because ultimately such *Hallel* is time-based, as opposed to *Hallel* of *shirah*, such as the recitation of *Hallel* on the first night of Pesach, which is miracle-based and therefore incumbent upon women as well.

However, some commentators argue that the principle of “they too were included in the miracle” should really dictate that women are obligated to recite *Hallel* on Chanukah. Rabbi Refael Shapiro of Volozhin (*Toras Refael, OC Siman* 75) avers that when *Tosafot* (*Sukkah* 38a, *supra*) stated that women are obligated in the *Hallel* of the first night of Pesach, the import of this ruling was also to obligate women in reciting *Hallel* on Chanukah, because that too commemorates

⁷ See Chazon Ovadiah, *Chanukah*, pp. 214-215; R. Daniel Z. Feldman, *Binah B'Seforim, Chanukah*, p. 160.

a miracle.⁸ According to this interpretation, *Tosafot* only ruled that women are exempt from *Hallel* on the other holidays (not including the first night of Pesach), but not on Chanukah. This opinion may also support the possibility that there still resides an element of *shirah* in the recitation of *Hallel* on Chanukah, which would remove it from the realm of a time-bound commandment and make it more akin to the recitation of *Hallel* on Pesach night.

Others argue that even according to the Rambam, women are obligated in reciting *Hallel*, but nonetheless they cannot exempt a man because their obligation, based on being included in the miracle, is only to recite a short segment of *Hallel*, while men are obligated to recite the entire text.⁹

Amongst contemporary *halakhic* authorities, many rule (including Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l, *Kobetz Tesuvos* 3:105; Rav Yaakov Kaminetzsky zt"l, *Emes L'Yaakov, OC Siman* 683; Rav Shlomo Zalman

Auerbach, *Minchos Shlomo* 2:54; and R. Ovadia Yosef zt"l, *Chazon Ovadia, supra*, pp. 215-216), that women are exempt from reciting *Hallel* on Chanukah, consistent with the simple reading of the Rambam. However, other authorities¹⁰ rule that women are obligated, since the recitation of *Hallel* also comprises an essential part of commemorating the miracle of Chanukah, akin to the lighting of Chanukah candles, concerning which women are certainly obligated (Rav Shmuel Kaminetzky, *Kobetz Halachos, Chanukah*, 17:10, n. 9, is also inclined towards this position). Either way, according to Ashkenazic practice, it is permitted for women to make a blessing on the recitation of *Hallel* during Chanukah even if they are strictly exempt.¹¹

Additional Considerations

Another question that arises is why we recite *Hallel* for all eight days of Chanukah, as opposed to Pesach, when we only recite the full *Hallel* on the first day, since the sacrifices

⁸ This understanding of *Tosafot* is also shared by some other rabbinic authorities, including Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, *Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim* 1:190.

⁹ See *S'dei Chemed, Chanukah* 9:2, quoting R. Shlomo HaKohen M'Vilna.

¹⁰ Rav Shmuel Vozner zt"l, *Shevet HaLevi* 1:205 [*Siman* 683]; Rav Shimon Sofer zt"l, *Hisorrerus Teshuva* 1:51.

¹¹ See *Biur Halacha*, 422:2, s.v. *Hallel*.

were identical on each day of the holiday (see *Erchin* 10b). The *Arukh Hashulchan* (OC 683:1) explains, *inter alia*, that the reason we recite a full *Hallel* on all eight days of Chanukah is because each day is different in terms of the number of candles that are lit (similar to Sukkot on which the number of bulls that were offered differed on each day), and also because there was a new miracle of an insufficient amount of oil burning for the entire night on each night of Chanukah.

There is a striking comment by Rav Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmos Shlomo*, OC 683:1) that a Jewish prisoner who is given the opportunity either to light the Chanukah candles or to daven at a morning *minyán* on Chanukah should choose the option of *davening* with the *minyán* because the main observance of Chanukah is *Hallel* and *Hoda'ah*. The *Nitei Gavriel* (*Chanukah*, 49:17, and n.28) explains that Rav Kluger must have been addressing a situation where the person was incapable of *davening Hallel* on his own, but nonetheless derives from his ruling the vital importance of both reciting *Hallel* on Chanukah and of making an extra effort during Chanukah of saying *Hallel* with a *minyán*.

Conclusion: Refocusing on *Hallel*

We rightfully focus on the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles as a focal observance of the Chanukah holiday, as it serves as *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle), and it certainly constitutes according to all opinions a commemoration of the miracle of Chanukah incumbent upon both men and women. Nonetheless, it emerges from the above discussion that the recitation of *Hallel* is also a key part of the Chanukah holiday, and even has the status of a Torah-mandated observance according to some opinions.

The act of praising Hashem for delivering us from the *Yevanim* (Syrian-Greeks) through the recitation of *Hallel* on Chanukah is an important fulfillment of our obligation to show appreciation to Hashem for every miracle that brings us closer to redemption. We should revitalize our fervor and excitement to recite *Hallel* each day of Chanukah, and make sure that in the process, we celebrate Chanukah to the fullest, and demonstrate our worthiness for more miracles and the full redemption, may it happen speedily in our time.

Discovering the Miracle Jugs of Today

Rabbi Dovid Flinkenstein

Chabad of Wilmette, IL - Center for Jewish Life & Learning



We celebrate Chanukah for eight days because the *Chashmonayim* found a hidden tiny jug, sealed with the seal of *Kohen Kadol*, that had enough oil to burn for one day and it miraculously burned for eight days. The *Beis Yosef* famously asks, if the jug had enough oil for one day, the miracle was really only for seven days, why do we celebrate for eight days, with eight lights? To this question there are over one hundred answers!

One answer, given by the *Meiri*, is that finding the sealed jug itself was a miracle, and that's what we celebrate on the first day. However, one can further ask, once it's already miraculous, why couldn't Hashem have them find a container that had enough oil for eight days? Why was there an additional miracle that the one day supply of oil should last for eight days?!

Also, why was the jug sealed with the seal of the *Kohen Kadol*? Any *Kohen*

could have sealed it, why the *Kohen Gadol*?! The *Bnei Yisaschar* (מאמרי חודש כסלו-טבת ד:טו) points out that for a jug of oil to have the seal of the *Kohen Gadol* was unheard of (“דבר שלא נראה ולא נשמע מעולם”), and this unusual find was the miracle of the first day. But why was such a miracle necessary?

Let's answer these questions in the traditional Jewish way, by asking another question. Why was there a need for all these miracles in the first place? The *halacha* is that if there isn't any pure oil to be found, the *menorah* can be lit with impure oil?!

On countless occasions the Lubavitcher Rebbe זי"ע pointed out that the objective of the Hellenist Greeks was not to destroy the *Beis Hamikdash*, or even forbid the study of the Torah's wisdom. After all, the Greeks appreciated the arts, culture and wisdom. They simply wanted to remove Hashem from the picture. As it says in the *V'al Hanissim* prayer, their motive was:

להשכיחם תורתך ולהעבירם מחוקי
רצונך.

To make them forget **Your** Torah
and violate the decrees of **Your**
will.

To the Hellenist, there was nothing above nature and logic. The notion of believing in a suprarational and infinite G-d is totally absurd, and has no place in a modern and advanced society.

So, essentially the Greeks didn't pose a physical threat to the Jewish people. They could identify as Jews, have a *Beis Hamikdash*, observe cultural traditions, and even study Torah as Jewish wisdom. Yet, the Jewish people went to battle with total self-sacrifice because they did not want to be severed from Hashem, ה'ו".

When they miraculously won the battle, and entered the *Beis Hamikdash* to rededicate it, they couldn't find any pure oil without an unbroken seal. To the Greeks, oil is oil, what difference is there if they touched it or not? They felt that this spiritual purity stuff was irrational. That's exactly the reason why the *Chashmonayim* insisted on searching for pure oil and could not think of kindling the menorah with impure oil. After all, this is what they went to battle against! How

could Hashem grant them such a miraculous victory over Hellenism, and then have them kindle the *menorah* with oil that has the "Greek touch"?? Impossible! So, they searched and searched, until they found one tiny sealed jug of pure oil. And then they realized, this wasn't just any pure oil, this jug had the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*, the highest level of holiness! And on top of that, the oil itself was miraculous in nature, that it lasted for eight days (as the Ramban explains in *Beraishis*, that the number seven represents nature, while the number eight represents the supernatural)!

The Chanukah miracle substantiated in every way, that Torah is divine, *mitzvos* are divine, and the essence of the Jew is divine! Essentially, the miracle of Chanukah represents the greatest miracle of all – the Jewish people.

How many nations and civilizations looked at the Jewish people and pompously declared that this tiny people, like the tiny jug of oil, has no tomorrow and no future ר"ל. Yet, that tiny, one-day-supply of oil essentially had a supernatural and miraculous quality, as does the Jewish people. *Am Yisrael Chai!*

The same is true about every individual Jew. We may look at a Jew

and presume that he or she seems totally secular and assimilated with no connection to their Judaism ב"ר. Yet, if we dig a little deeper within them, we will discover a tiny jug of pure oil, the *neshameleh*. They may attend a Yom Kippur service, light Chanukah candles or attend a Passover *seder*. Still we may conclude, that this tiny discovery of *Yiddishkeit* may have no future and will soon extinguish ב"ר. Just look at the grim predictions of the recent Pew report. Yet, we take a closer look and behold this isn't just any jug of pure oil, this jug has the seal of none other than the *Kohen Gadol* himself - the one who would enter the Holy of Holies, where no other Jew would have the ability to enter! Imagine the archeological discovery of such a seal!! This is the archeological find

within each and every Jew, that their *neshamah* comes from the Holy of Holies. And, although it seems that this Jew's holiness is a one-day-wonder, essentially, like the number eight, it is infinite, because it can never be severed from Hashem!

We all have the tremendous *zechus* of interacting with fellow Jews. The upcoming Yom Tov of Chanukah reminds us all to be like the *Chashmonayim* and remember the great responsibility that, if Hashem created such a miracle, i.e. the Jew that I am now encountering, I must do everything I can to help them reveal their precious and infinite light within.

Let's keep digging deep for those precious jugs. And together, we'll uncover the infinite!

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Inclusion in the Chanukah Miracle

Rabbi Micah Greenland
International Director of NCSY



The Mishna (*Kiddushin* 29a) teaches that women are exempt from all מצוות עשה גרמה: all positive, time-bound *mitzvos*. Some examples of these *mitzvos* include *sukkah*, *tefillin*, *shofar*, and *tzitzis*. There are a few specific exceptions to this rule, obligating women in the positive *mitzvos* related to Shabbos observance, such as קידוש ר"ן (according to the ר"ן in *Shabbos* 44a in the דפי הר"ף), as well as in eating *matzah* on Pesach.

The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 23a) quotes Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi saying that women are indeed obligated to light Chanukah candles “שאף הן היו באותו ההנס,” *because they were also included in that miracle*, i.e. the miracle of Chanukah. A similar ruling is issued elsewhere (*Megillah* 4a) to obligate women in reading the *megillah* on Purim for the same reason. The same rationale is used to obligate women in drinking four cups of wine on Pesach (*Pesachim* 108a). As such, women who live on their own must be careful to light Chanukah candles each night of the holiday. The *Ashkenazic* practice is that

married women generally fulfill their obligation through their husband’s lighting and single girls living with their parents fulfill their obligation through their father’s lighting.

Tosfos (*Megillah* 4a שאף ה"ה) quote two opinions as to the definition and parameters of “*inclusion in the miracle*.” Rashbam explains that שאף הן היו באותו ההנס means that women played an integral role in the performance of the miracle related to each holiday; through Esther on Purim, Yehudis on Chanukah, and all the righteous women on Pesach, as the redemption from Egypt took place in the merit of נשים צדקניות, pious women. The second opinion takes issue with that explanation and instead posits that the explanation regarding women’s “*inclusion in the miracle*” is that women were equal beneficiaries of the miraculous salvation inherent in each celebration.

According to that second explanation, this concept would obligate women in any rabbinic commandment related to their

miraculous salvation as part of the Jewish nation, such as Chanukah candles, reading *megillah*, and ארבע כוסות on Pesach. Moreover, for commandments that are biblical in nature, אף הן היו באותו הנס would impose a rabbinic obligation on women to perform those commandments.

Based on this formulation, many are bothered as to why women are exempt from the mitzvah of *tefillin*. After all, the Torah's commandment to wear *tefillin* provides the rationale; because Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a strong Hand. Given the position of Tosfos that women would be obligated on a rabbinic level in biblical commandments that are related to miraculous national salvation, women should presumably be obligated in the mitzvah of *tefillin* due to אף הן היו באותו הנס.

The Rav, Rabbi Y.D. Soloveitchik, suggests an answer to this question in the name of his father, R' Moshe. There is a distinction to be made between *mitzvos* for which the fulfillment of the commandment itself publicizes the miracle (“עצם הקיומם הוא בכדי לפרסם את הנס”), versus *mitzvos* that are set up in order to commemorate a miracle (“זכר לנס”). While *tefillin* are indeed a commemoration of our exodus from Egypt, there is no inherent

publicity of a miracle in donning *tefillin*. As such, the obligation would not extend to women as a result of אף הן היו באותו הנס. Conversely, the other holiday-related *mitzvos* we listed above (Chanukah candles among them) are entirely designed to publicize the miracles inherent to those holidays. They are all about פירסומי ניסא.

This formulation sheds additional light on the nature of our fulfillment of the rabbinic commandments to read *megillah* on Purim, drink four cups of wine on Pesach, and light candles on Chanukah. Anytime we have a mitzva which obligates both men and women, that is a clear signal that the mitzva is designed to publicize a miracle inherent to the seasonal salvation. This פירסומי ניסא notion even has *halachic* ramifications: it obligates even spending more of one's resources (יותר מחומש) on these commandments than is ordinarily required for other מצוות עשה; and it necessitates a special blessing of שעשה נסים, which doesn't apply to *mitzvos* which are only commemorations of a miracle.

As we light candles this Chanukah, may we merit to appreciate and to meaningfully publicize the miraculous nature of our ancestors' salvation from the hands of our enemies. *Chanukah sameyach*.

Two Great Lights Shared the Miracle of Optimism

Rabbi Wes Kalmar

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This past year has seen many losses of great individuals of the Torah world. Most recently we have seen the passing of HaRav Moshe Tendler *zt"l*, and we are now marking the 1st *yahrtzeit* of HaRav Gedalia Dov Schwartz, *zt"l*. I would like to share a few words of Torah on Chanukah from these two Torah giants that are complementary in nature.

The Gemara in Shabbos asks the famous question: ‘*Mai Chanukah?*’ What is Chanukah? The Talmud goes on to explain the background of the story and the miracle that occurred, namely the oil burning for eight days when it should only have lasted one. Why did this merit a holiday? Since when do we make a holiday in response to a miracle? In our long history we record many miracles, of the open, revealed variety, *neis niglah*, and the more private, hidden variety, *neis nistar*. But miracles come and go, and history records that they do not believers make. If one is motivated

to be close to God, then a miracle is a great sign of God’s interaction in the world. If one is distant from God, then miracles can be explained away. We do not put them at the center of our belief system. Why then do we attach so much importance to this miracle to create a holiday to remember it? *Mai Chanukah?*

Rabbi Moshe Tendler *zt"l* explains that the symbolism involved in this miracle gives it such importance. The message is that one never realizes how much potential there is inside one’s self until they tap into it. Every person, even the smallest flask, has the potential to burn brightly. God wants us to fulfill our potential and to believe that we can accomplish so much more that we give ourselves credit for. According to the *halacha*, a poor person must sell the shirt off his back in order to buy Chanukah candles. The reason for this is that all people, no matter their situation, must strive to reach their potential. We all have the ability to make our own miracles, both hidden and

open. At the same time that we seek to fulfill the requirement of *pirsumei nisa*, of publicizing the miracle of Chanukah, we are inspired to develop the miracles within ourselves.

Rabbi Gedalia Dov Schwartz, *zt"l* gave an address on Chanukah in 5776 about the connection between Mikeitz and Chanukah. Rav Schwartz talked about the highs and lows of the life of Yosef. Yosef had moments of greatness and had lots of success. He also had dark days and much tragedy in his life. Rav Schwartz *zt"l* mentioned the 'dungeon mentality' that could overtake a person like Yosef who was forced into the bottom of a pit and then into a real dungeon in Egypt. He could have given up on himself and his future and his life. But Yosef did not give up. Yosef represents coming out on top despite all the troubles one faces.

This is also the story of the holiday and the miracle of Chanukah. In spite of everything that took place – '*Mai Chanukah*' says the Gemara – What is Chanukah? What is the

celebration for? Not so much for the wars, but for the neis of Chanukah. The miracle, which symbolizes light, and the nature of what it means to be a Jew, which champions the optimistic view of illumination out of darkness. When a person is in a dark place – it's very depressing. But when one sees light, it brings forward good feelings and optimism.

The words of Rav Tendler *zt"l* and Rav Schwartz *zt"l* are two sides of the same *gelt*. The miracle inspires us to see ourselves as *keilim*, utensils, *pachim ketanim*, small vessels maybe, which are involved in the greatest enterprise in the history of mankind: the spreading of the light of *devar Hashem*, the word of God. We all have the potential to be involved in that miracle, in big and small ways. We are the ultimate optimists, believing in humankind, in our people, in our destiny and in *LiShana HaBa BiYerushalayim*. May our optimism help bring the *Bias Goel Tzedek*, the coming of the true redemption, speedily and in our days.

A Freilichin Happy Chanukah.

A Rose Among the Thorns

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In most Jewish homes, after lighting the Chanukah candles, it is customary to sing מעוז צור ישועתי. This song praises Hashem for constantly saving us from our enemies throughout all of history. There is one stanza that focuses on the miracle of Chanukah. It begins with “יוונים נקבצו עלי אזי בימי חשמנים, *In the times of the Chashmonayim, the Greeks gathered against me.*” ופרצו חומות מגדלי, *and they made breaches in my towers.*” What are the towers and breaches that the author is referring to? The song then continues to describe how the Greeks defiled all the oil needed for the lighting of the *menorah*, except for one small jug that was found to be pure. The oil found in that jug miraculously burned for eight days. When referring to this miracle, the author states “נעשה נס לשיושנים” “*a miracle was performed for the roses.*” Why are the Jewish people being referred to as “roses” in this song?

Harav Matisyahu Solomon *shlit"a*

(*Matnos Chaim, Moadim* p.83) provides the following explanation to this stanza. The Rambam (הלכות דעות פ"ו ה"א) tells us about a very important insight into human behavior. A person's philosophies and actions are strongly influenced by those they associate with, their friends and neighbors as well as the people of their country. The Rambam continues that it is therefore imperative for one to choose righteous people to live amongst, and to distance themselves from the wicked. The Rambam goes as far as to say that if all the people are wicked, one should live as a hermit in a cave or desert, rather than live amongst people who will be a bad influence.

In the times of the *Chashmonayim*, the Greeks were not looking to destroy the Jewish people. Rather, they wanted to impart their Hellenistic philosophies, culture and way of life upon their Jewish neighbors. Unfortunately, many

Jews fell prey and integrated with the Greeks and their culture. The *Chashmonayim* fought to keep the Jewish people apart from these influences and restore a Torah lifestyle that is pure and holy.

Let's return to our question as to what are the "towers and breaches" in the song referring to. The *Mishna* (מדרות ו:ג) states that there was a curtain in the *Beis Hamikdash* known as the סורג that was a mere 35 inches high. When the Greeks were able to gain entry, they punctured thirteen openings in this curtain. Eventually when the Greeks were defeated, the *Chachomim* established that we bow thirteen times when departing from the עזרה in the *Beis Hamikdash* as a way of thanking Hashem for saving us from the Greeks. Why did the Greeks tear this curtain? After all, it was only 35 inches tall and was not in their way. This curtain was set up in the *Beis Hamikdash* as a boundary. Non-Jewish people were allowed to enter the *Beis Hamikdash* but were not allowed to go beyond this curtain. This separation bothered the Greeks, as their goal was to assimilate the Jews into their culture. They tore this curtain as a symbolic measure of showing that there is nothing that separates the Greeks and Jews, that we all share

the same Greek and Hellenistic values. After the *Chashmonayim* defeated the Greeks, the sages enacted a decree to bow thirteen times as a way of thanking Hashem for enabling us to remain holy and preserve our Torah way of life. The "towers and breaches" are referring to the puncturing of the סורג in the *Beis Hamikdash*, as the Greeks tried to overstep their boundaries and infiltrate their philosophies and culture into our lives.

With this we can understand why the author chooses to refer to the Jewish people as roses. In *Shir Hashirim* the *possuk* says "כשושנה" – 'Like a rose among the thorns, so too is My beloved (the Jewish people) among the nations.' Rashi explains this to mean that the other nations come and try to entice us to follow their culture and values, in the same way that the thorns of a rosebush threaten to mar the beauty of the roses by pricking them. However just as the rose maintains its beauty, so too the Jewish people stay steadfast in their belief in Hashem and remain committed to Torah and *mitzvos*.

This is the message of Chanukah, to be proud of our Jewish heritage and stay committed to Torah values and *mitzvos*.

Of Water, Snakes, and Scorpions

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The Talmud (*Shabbat* 22a) teaches us in the name of three rabbis that the maximum height that a Chanukah menorah can be is twenty *amot*, about thirty feet. On the same page in the Talmud as this passage, we also note the famous comment regarding the pit into which Yosef was thrown. "*The pit was empty - there was no water,*" says the Biblical text. The same three rabbis all comment in that *sugya*, "*There was no water, but there were snakes and scorpions.*" Other than the fact that the same rabbis issue both quotes, and that the *sidra* (*Vayeshev*) from which the quote is taken always falls out near Chanukah, (including this year), what possible connection could there be between these two subjects? What does Chanukah have to do with the unfortunate conditions in Yosef's pit?

Some of the commentaries, such as the *Torah Temimah*, suggest that the pit was twenty *amot* deep, the same amount as the maximum

menorah height. However, I would like to suggest a deeper approach coming from the symbolism of the elements involved - water, snakes, and scorpions.

Water is the constant symbol of the Torah. The *Midrash (Bereshit Rabba* 84:16) suggests that the pit was devoid of Torah, symbolized by water. And, as the *Gemara (Kiddushin* 30a) points out, "In a place where there is no Torah, there are all sorts of snakes and scorpions."

Snakes are symbolic of negative forces in life such as the *Yetzer Hara*, the human inclination to do evil. (See *Zohar* 1:35, and other references in *Hazal*.) One might suggest that the snake, as a symbol of the *Yetzer Hara*, represents internalized evil influences which are always dangerous. As the final *Mishna* in the first *perek* of *Baba Kamma* teaches us, "*Nahash muad l'olam,*" a snake is always considered a potentially damaging and dangerous beast. The Torah in *Bereshit* describes the snake as *arum* - brazen and clever. On a

national scale, this was precisely the problem of the Chanukah era - the oppressive Greek Syrians, but also their Hellenist Jewish allies who followed their *Yetzer Hara*, their own impulses, to blatantly adopt a hostile and foreign culture which led to the pain and suffering of our people and the erosion of Torah and *mitzvot*.

What of the scorpion? The *Midrash* (*Bamidbar Rabba* 10) compares the scorpion to wine, "Just as the scorpion stings with its tail, so too does wine strike at the end." There are copious references in *Hazal* (see Rashi on *D'varim* 1:19, also see *Nedarim* 25a, *Shemot Rabba* 24:4, and many other places) to "snakes like house-beams and scorpions like bows." In other words, if the snakes are unabashed and straight in their threats, then the scorpions are far more subtle in their attacks - and sometimes more dangerous.

What is the rabbinic antidote to these dangers? The *Yerushalmi* (*Brakhot* 5) teaches, "For one who is bitten by a snake, the sooner he arrives at water, the sooner he is saved." And also, (*Avoda Zara* 28a) "For a scorpion (injury), hot water (helps to heal)." If we have defined snakes as the symbol of open and clever negative forces such as the *Yetzer Hara*, and the scorpion as

a symbol of more subtle negative forces, then Torah symbolized by water must be the antidote. And precisely when the negativity is more subtle, symbolized by the scorpion, the warmer the water, i.e., the warmer the Torah, the better! Therefore, the victory of Chanukah was a victory of Torah over the snakes and scorpions of those days. Thus, we kindle the Chanukah lights within twenty *amot* of our visual level to publicize the miracle.

Today, there are still many parts of our world in which anti-Semitism and anti-Semites, the snakes of today, want to obliterate Jewish life. If water symbolizes Judaism, then this would be the primary response - internal strength before we face external threats. A scorpion might represent more subtle threats - internal threats. These could be seen as the threats of assimilation, or internal division. *Hazal* suggest that for these threats, the water needs to be even warmer. Thus, we need to recommit ourselves to warmth in how we connect to each other and our Torah. How we relate to our sacred tradition and to our community will determine how we can meet these threats.

May the lights of Chanukah guide us to a better future.

On the Essence of Chanukah

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The queen of the British Empire, Queen Victoria, and her husband were visiting family in Hanover, Germany, when the unexpected happened: Queen Victoria went into labor two months before her due date. Moses Montefiore, a financial advisor to the British government, arrived at the Court of Hanover during this time, and found the members of the Court in an uproar. The premature birth seemed inevitable, but it would pose a major problem. If the baby was born on German land, he would be considered a German citizen and his right to succeed the throne would be endangered. The doctors and members of the Court were at a loss as to what to do. Upon the advice of the rabbi in Hanover, Rabbi Nathan Adler, Montefiore counseled that the queen give birth on a British warship in international waters, thus rendering the newborn a British citizen. Later that night, the queen gave birth to the future King Edward VII on the Arc Royal, a British ship. The difficult situation was forestalled by the clever rabbi of Hanover.

We Jews have always been experts on knowing how to maintain our

identity even while living on foreign soil - to be hosted by a foreign nation and yet still remain apart, as if we reside in an embassy of our own, on a ship that belongs to G-d, His Torah and His people. As Bilaam stated prophetically (*Bemidbar* 23:9): הן עם לבדד ישכון – ובגוים לא יתחשב, “*Jews are a people who dwell alone and do not consider themselves among the nations.*”

The differences are not merely in the set of laws we follow and rituals that govern our lives. What singles us out is something far deeper than the how: it's in the why we observe our holy Torah and *mitzvos*.

No holiday emphasizes this aspect more than Chanukah. As we all know, the miracle of Chanukah revolves around the oil. But why the oil? What bothered the Greeks so much? Why did they focus so intensively on the oil, when there was so much else to focus on? Furthermore, why didn't the Jews simply use the oil that they had? After all, it's known that according to *halacha*, *b'shaas hadechak* (in a time of great need), it would've been sufficient to use the oil even with a broken seal.

The core of what the Greeks wanted to do was להעבירם ולהעבירם, ולהעבירם, ולהעבירם (AlHanissim Prayer). The essence of what disturbed them was the observance of Torah and *mitzvos* in order to do YOUR will, the will of Hashem. It was the *neshama* of it all. As we know, the Greeks didn't mind if we were Jews, as long as we were cultural Jews. They accepted our keeping the parts of Torah which they felt were rational, but rejected our observance as a holy matter. What bothered them was our pride in being Jewish and our observance of the *mitzvos* simply for the sake of our *neshamos*.

The very goal of the Greeks was to defile the seal of the oil; they maintained that oil was oil and that the seal of the *Kohen Gadol* was irrelevant. After all, the oil looked the same and worked the same! Therefore, when the Jews returned to the *Beis Hamikdosh*, it was paramount that the jug of oil had the חותמו של כהן גדול (Shabbos 21b). The sole reason for the seal was that this is what Hashem wanted. And for that we were מדייק. That was why it was most important to preserve and observe every detail of the *mitzvah* of the oil, in the holiest and purest format.

What's the biggest challenge we are facing today? It's doing *Yiddishkeit* by rote. What we need is to be in touch with our essence, with the *neshama*

of *Yiddishkeit*, the essence of what it is. That is the greatest miracle of Chanukah and that's the message of Chanukah. It's no coincidence that we light the *Menorah* after dark: we have to be light-makers. Oil has two qualities: it's constantly spreading, and yet it will always float to the top. We too need to spread the light of *Yiddishkeit* to the world, while maintaining our distinct identity, to remain above the world while being in the world.

How often do we get lost in our concerns of what will the world say? Instead of spending so much of our energy invested into what people think of us, we can set the tone with our *Ga'on Yaakov*, our pride in being who we are as Jews, in being proud of our real identity. This is the challenge we try to tackle in our work on campus—helping students find and grow their *Ga'on Yaakov*, their pride in being Jewish and keeping Torah and *mitzvos* to the best of their ability. It's easy to get swept up into campus culture. Our goal is for every student to feel their *Yiddishkeit*, their *neshama* and their connection to Hashem—and that will be a *Ga'on Nitzchi*.

May the light, joy and clarity of this message of Chanukah illuminate our entire year and the entire world, leading to the time of ultimate light, when darkness will be banished from the world: the era of *Moshiach*.

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