



Chicago Rabbinical Council

מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו

# Divrei Torah

## CHANUKAH 5785



**RAV  
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## **CHANUKAH**

3 | Light and Darkness

*Rav Yona Reiss*

7 | Should the Branches of the Menorah Be Round or Straight?

*Rabbi Yochanan Posner*

11 | Hashem Loves the Righteous

*Rabbi Yehuda Tzvi Garsek*

13 | Shalom Bayit: Chanukah's Rival or Chanukah's Goal?

*Rabbi Noach Goldstein*

# Light and Darkness

Rav Yona Reiss  
Av Beth Din



A central theme of the Chanukah story is that the *Chashmonaim* were able to overcome the darkness represented by the *Yevanim* (the Syrian Greeks) and their Hellenistic ideology through the light of Torah and Mitzvot. The *Midrash Rabbah* comments on the verse, וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם, (Bereishis 1:2) – “and darkness was upon the abyss,” that the word “darkness” refers to the kingdom of Yavan. On the other hand, the *Chashmonaim*, by refusing to submit to the assimilationist forces of Hellenism, were able to prevail over their enemies through the actualization of אור ומצוה וּתוֹרָה אִוֵּר (Mishlei 6:23) – “a mitzvah is a candle and the Torah is illumination,” as explained by the *Maharal* in his volume נר מצוה. In this sense, the crescendo of our triumph over the Syrian Greeks was not so much the military victory over their armed forces, but the miraculous rekindling of the holy Menorah for eight days with the flask of pure oil, representing our fidelity to Torah and Mitzvot, that was preserved even after the *Yevanim* had otherwise desecrated the *Beis Hamikdash* (see *Shabbos* 21b).

The need to utilize the light of Torah to dispel the darkness of assimilation is not merely an ancient theme. As the *Ramban* notes in his commentary to the Torah (*Bamidbar* 8:2), the lighting of the Chanukah candles throughout the generations is a continuation of the initial mitzvah given by Hashem to Aharon *HaKohen* to kindle the lights of the Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Even today when we have no *Beis Hamikdash*, we still preserve

the sanctity of the original Menorah by lighting our Chanukah candles as a continuing celebration of the vanquishing of the darkness of assimilation through the light of Torah observance.

However, we must remember as well that part of the message of Chanukah is that darkness can sometimes seep into the light. The efforts of the *Yevanim* to weaken Torah observance unfortunately influenced much of the Jewish population, who were known as the *Misyavanim* – those who became like the *Yevanim* in their demeanor and mores (see, e.g., *Sukkah* 56b). According to the *Ba'al Hamaor* (*Avoda Zara* 24a-24b, *Dapei HaRif*), these assimilated Jews were in fact the individuals who were responsible for desecrating the Temple vessels in the first place. When there are forces of darkness surrounding us, sometimes that darkness can even seep into the holiest of our places and in our sacred services, creating a sense of religious confusion.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz notes (*Sichos Mussar, Ma'amar* 12) that this type of religious confusion is encapsulated in the concept of אור וחשך משתמשין בערבובייה (see *Rashi, Bereishis* 1:4) – darkness and light existing together in a jumble, an untenable state of being that existed at the time of creation before the separation of light from the darkness. Similarly, whenever there is only a limited exposure to Jewish values combined with a strong exposure to the darkness of the outside world, a person can end up with a religiously schizophrenic personality. Thus, we are taught by the *Midrash* (see *Rashi, Bereishis* 29:11) that



fulfill the *mitzvah* of hospitality that he had learned from Avrohom, it was perfectly acceptable for him to offer his two young daughters to be violated by the wicked townfolk of Sodom (*Bereishis* 19:8). Had Lot remained with Avrohom and accepted a holistic system of Torah values, he would have had a clearer moral compass in which he would have avoided living in a corrupt culture altogether that would encourage this contradictory state of light and darkness existing in a jumble.

I once heard from Rabbi Moshe Dovid Tendler *zt"l* that this connection between a Torah lifestyle and a clear moral compass enables us to understand the *Gemora* (*Shabbos* 31a) regarding the prospective convert who came in front of Hillel and asked to be converted while standing on one foot. Hillel responded, “don’t do unto others what you wouldn’t want done to yourself” and then added, “the rest is commentary – go learn it.” According to Rabbi Tendler, the aspiring proselyte wanted to convert to Judaism to observe the interpersonal laws of Judaism, such as visiting the sick and giving charity, but was not interested in the “other foot” of observing ritual laws between man and G-d, such as keeping Shabbos and kosher. Hillel responded that it is indeed wonderful to take on the interpersonal laws of being kind to others, but if you don’t learn and integrate the rest of the Torah, then you will not have any real morality either, because without an eternal Divine compass, any moral system of interpersonal relationships will be subject to shifting societal values and will end up fostering cruelty and violence, rather than true moral conduct.

We do not need to look too far to see this type of moral confusion and contusion in our own times. Individuals can be champions of the poor and defenseless in society, and in the same breath proclaim

as a core value the right of a woman to be permitted to indiscriminately take the life of the fetus inside of her womb (for the Torah perspective, see *Sanhedrin* 57b). Similarly, some individuals may insist upon the right to life for a fetus but at the same time adopt as one of their core values the prerogative of each person to easily obtain firearms including assault weapons, with unfortunately predictable results (for the Torah perspective, see *Avoda Zara* 15b-16a). Light and darkness reign together even amongst well-meaning people, when there is no framework of Torah but simply political platforms and contradictory societal values.

We unfortunately have witnessed nations that watched silently as terrorists brazenly raped and massacred innocent Jews in Israel one year ago, and then absurdly accused the Jewish nation of committing genocide when Israel rightfully defended itself against our ruthless enemies. *Chazal’s* teaching that *כל המרחם על האכזרי סופו להמרחם על הרחמנים* (see *Koheles Rabbah* 7:16) – that those who have compassion for those who are cruel will end up being cruel towards the compassionate – is a prescient call for all of us to adhere to the timeless values of Torah and not be corrupted by the evil of moral relativism.

The victory of the *Chashmonaim* was to maintain Jewish identity and values even while being part of a Greek empire that tried to force assimilation upon them. The Apter Rav (*Oheiv Yisroel*, beginning of *Parshas VaYetzei*) noted that when Yaakov arose from his sleep in which he dreamt of the angels ascending and descending a ladder reaching up to Heaven, and he declared *אכן יש ה' במקום הזה ואנכי לא ידעתי* (*Bereishis* 28:16), he was marveling at his discovery that even in the deep despair of exile that cast him into a somnolent state, he could perceive the radiance of the

Divine presence. So too the *Chashmonaim* understood that they need not be intimidated by the surrounding culture of hedonism and perfidy, particularly in their own homeland.

Once Yaakov beheld that the radiance of the Divine can be found even in mundane circumstances, he was equipped with his survival kit to be able to endure twenty years of living with Lavan, the quintessential scoundrel. Thus, Yaakov could declare at the end of his challenging journey עם לבן הרשע גרתי – ותרי"ג מצוות שמרתי ולא למדתי (Rashi, *Bereishis* 32:5) – that he was able to live in the morally obtuse world of a crooked Lavan, and yet emerge unscathed through the light of Torah. It is no surprise that *Chazal* teach us (*Berachos* 26b) that Yaakov established the *Ma'ariv* prayer, which according to R. Shmuel bar Nachman (*Bereishis Rabbah* 68:9) stands for our supplication that יה"ר מלפניך ה' אלהי לאורה – שתוציאני מאפילה לאורה – “may it be Thy will, Hashem, that You extricate me from darkness unto light.”

According to the *Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, ibid)*, the *Yevanim* tried to impose their darkness upon the Jews of their time by adjuring them - כתבו על קרן השור שאין – “write on the horn of the bull that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel.” The *B'nei Yissaschar (Kislev-Teves, Ma'amar 13)* explained that the *Yevanim* were referring to Yosef, who was likened to a bull (see *Devorim* 33:17). Yosef, who possessed the ability to perceive the דמות דיוקנו של אביו (*Tanchuma, Vayeshev* 9) – the likeness and example of Yaakov his father, was able to persevere and maintain his Jewish identity even while in the dark dungeons of Mitzrayim. Accordingly, the

*Yevanim* proclaimed that now times had changed, and therefore the Jews should write on the bullhorn of Yosef that it is no longer practical to keep the Torah in modern day society. The response from the *Chashmonaim* was a resounding “no” – rather, we can still learn from Yosef's example, following in the ways of ישראל טובא, to illuminate the light of Torah even while living in the darkness of the surrounding Hellenistic culture.

Thus, when we light the Chanukah candles each year, we are rekindling our flame representing both our passion for the pristine clarity of our Torah traditions and the banishment of outside influences that could, G-d forbid, jumble our light and cloud our judgment.

The prescribed method of underscoring our message of unadulterated light is through נר איש וביתו – the lighting of candles in each Jewish home (*Shabbos* 21b). The *Rambam* wrote in a responsum (*Ma'amar Kiddush HaShem*) that the *Yevanim* required that the doors to the Jewish homes be kept open so that they could penetrate the inner sanctum of the Jewish home with their own values and influences and shut out the observance of the *mitzvot*. Accordingly, we demonstrate, through our defeat of the *Yevanim* and the forces of Hellenistic culture, that the doorways to our homes and lives remain sacrosanct, illuminated only by the clear and eternal light of Torah and *mitzvot*, with a *Mezuzah* on one side, the Chanukah candles on the other side (see *Maseches Sofrim* 20:3), and our beautiful and spiritually untainted Jewish families on the inside.

Best wishes for a happy and *lichtige* Chanukah.

# Should the Branches of the Menorah Be Round or Straight?

Rabbi Yochanan Posner  
Rabbi, Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie



As Chanukah approaches, people in the Chicago area, like millions of others around the globe, will start seeing the many large Menorahs installed by Lubavitch Chabad in their communities. In Skokie alone, Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie puts up dozens of large outdoor Menorahs.

Most of the Menorahs sponsored by Lubavitch Chabad follow a similar design, with eight diagonal branches extending from an upright trunk. This is in contrast with the more commonly known design, which features curved or rounded branches.

This distinction is of no halachic significance. The Chanukah Menorah need not have branches at all, and a common traditional Menorah design features oil cups lined up on a flat surface with an upright plate behind it. However, the question of the origin of these different designs is fascinating.

## FROM THE MENORAH TO YOUR MENORAH

Over the generations it has not been uncommon for Jews to loosely model their Chanukah lamps after the Menorah of the Beit Hamikdash. This is despite the fact that the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash had just seven lamps in total, whereas the Chanukah Menorah has a total of nine, eight for the eight nights of Chanukah plus one *Shamash*.

And where does our understanding

of the design of the Menorah of the Beit Hamikdash come from? Clearly, it comes directly from the *pesukim* in *Parshat Terumah*,<sup>1</sup> in which Hashem gives Moshe Rabbeinu the *mitzvah* of making the Menorah. But, as rich with details as that description is, there are some basic pieces of information that are not stated clearly in the *pesukim*.

For example, just about everyone takes it for granted that the six branches of the Menorah were arranged in a row, as the *Chazal* understood as well.<sup>2</sup> Fascinatingly, *Ibn Ezra* cites an ancient tradition that they were actually arranged in a circle around the central stem, resembling points on a crown. *Ibn Ezra's* tradition is not commonly accepted in light of the very clear evidence that the sages of the Talmud understood the flames to be arranged in a row. However it is interesting to note, and it highlights the fact that not every detail is clearly evident just from reading the *pesukim*.

The *pesukim* also don't say whether the branches were curved, as depicted on the official emblem of the State of Israel, or diagonal as in the Chanukah Menorahs often sponsored by Lubavitch Chabad.

Chazal are silent on this issue, and there are no direct testimonies regarding this matter in the Gemara from people who had seen the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. However, there are various carvings, mosaics, and coins with Menorahs on them,

1. *Shemot* 25:32.

2. *Masechet Menachot* 28b,

some of them dating back to the Second Temple era.<sup>3</sup> Many of these do, indeed, have Menorahs with round branches, indicating that many people envisioned the Menorah with round branches even during the *Zman Habayit*.

### RASHI'S SLANT

The first Torah source to weigh in is *Rashi*. In his commentary,<sup>4</sup> he writes that the branches extended upwards *be'alachson*, a fairly common term in Talmud, which the Jastrow dictionary defines as being related to the Greek word for "slanting," λοξός.

So if *Rashi*, the foremost of all commentators, understood the branches to have extended on a slant (not a curve), from where did the idea of round branches become popular?

It is unlikely to have come from carvings made during the Second Temple era. These were not available to be seen for most of the two thousand years since that time, as they have been mainly discovered more recently since the advent of archeology.

Rather, it appears to come from the following two sources:

#### 1. The Arch of Shame

The famous Arch of Titus, which still stands in Rome, was erected to honor the deification of Titus, the cruel Roman general who had quashed the Jewish rebellion, destroyed Jerusalem, and brought to an end the second Beit Hamikdash. It became a symbol of the Jewish

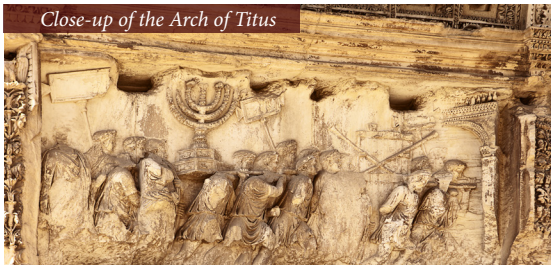
diaspora, and was a source of deep shame and mourning for every Jew who saw it. It was a jarring reminder of Rome's power, and the Jews' powerlessness amid the deep darkness of exile. After the establishment of the Roman Ghetto, Jewish elders were forced to kiss the feet of the pope as part of an oath of submission, which took place annually at the arch.

The arch contains panels depicting the Roman's triumphal procession after their victory over the Jews. It includes scenes of sacred items from the *Beit Hamikdash* such as the Menorah being carried off to Rome as booty. Many have understood it to be a contemporaneous depiction of the Menorah. The Menorah depicted in the arch has rounded branches.

#### 2. The Missing Rambam

The primary Torah source of the round-branched Menorah is from the writings of Yosef Shalit ben Eliezer Riqueti in *Chochmat Hamishkan* and the Kabbalist, Rabbi Emanuel Hai Ricci, best known for his work *Mishnat Chassidim*. They assert that the branches were curved. Their source is the *Rambam* who does not describe the branches as ascending *be'alachson*. While

Close-up of the Arch of Titus



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3. The Magdala Stone, discovered in 2009, has depictions of the second Beit Hamikdash and a Menorah featuring branches that are not quite round or diagonal, but polygonal. The Israel Antiquities Authority says that this is the first time that a Menorah decoration has been discovered that dates to the Second Temple period and that it is possible that the engraving was done by an artist who saw the Menorah with his own eyes in the Temple in Jerusalem.

4. *Shemot* 25:32





*Maimonides' drawing courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford*

Rashi states his view clearly by including the word *be'alachson*, the *Rambam* omits this word, and appears to not be saying anything at all regarding the trajectory of the Menorah's branches. Interestingly, these rabbis took it for granted that the *Rambam's* seeming silence on the shape of the Menorah's branches means he believed that they were rounded.

However, the fact is, that the *Rambam* actually did record his opinion on the matter very clearly. It can be found in his original handwritten manuscripts of his *Mishneh Torah* and his Arabic-language commentary to the Mishnah.<sup>5</sup> Amazingly in addition to his written text, he actually included his own hand-drawn depiction of the Menorah, with diagonal branches, in agreement with Rashi.

During the lifetime of the *Rambam* the printing press had not yet been invented, and his original drawings were not copied over by the scribes who handwrote books, so his drawings were not available to the public. This drawing has been in the possession of Oxford University since 1693 and can still be seen today. However, it was not available to the public during the

lifetimes of Rabbi Ricci and Rabbi Riqueti, and it is highly unlikely that they even knew these drawings existed, as openly practicing Jews were not allowed entry into Oxford until later on.

Some scholars have argued that this drawing alone cannot definitively prove the *Rambam's* stance on the matter as it may be that he drew straight lines because it was easier than drawing curved lines.

However, this argument has two counter arguments:

1. This very same drawing includes perfectly formed curved lines on the base of the Menorah, proving that the *Rambam* was clearly capable of drawing curved lines if he wanted to, so the straight branches must be presumed to have been drawn that way deliberately.

2. The *Rambam's* son and successor, Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam, asserts<sup>6</sup> "The six branches... extended upward from the center shaft of the Menorah in a straight line, as depicted by my father, and not in a semi-circle as depicted by others." He ruled that the branches extend upward *beyosher* ("straight"), based on this very drawing.

### THE REBBE'S APPROACH

Of course there is no empirical way to know with certainty what the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash actually looked like. But the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, argued that if Rabbi Ricci and Rabbi Riqueti would have been aware of the *Rambam's* drawing, they surely would have described the Menorah with diagonal branches as well.

Having clarified that the *Rambam* is not the source for the popular belief that the Menorah's branches were curved, the Rebbe notes that the Arch of Titus remains

5. *Perush HaMishnah La'Rambam - Menachot*, chapter 3.

the only primary source, and it is probably the way that rounded branches entered the popular consciousness.

This arch, carved by gentile artists on behalf of our most bitter enemies in celebration of our defeat, is hardly a reliable source to glean authentic insight into Jewish tradition. This is especially so when we consider that the carving contains some very obvious errors,<sup>7</sup> and the artists probably never laid eyes on the items they were instructed to reproduce, as it was completed around a decade after the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash.

Furthermore, even if the artists were shown a Menorah pillaged from the Beit Hamikdash, it may very well not have been the Menorah but one of the ten other Menorahs commissioned by Shlomo Hamelech<sup>8</sup> to illuminate the *Heichal* during the first Beit Hamikdash. While these Menorahs were likely to be similar in design to the Menorah, it doesn't say anywhere that they were identical. It is possible that these other Menorahs were rounded, and it is possible that the Arch of Titus would be depicting one of these other Menorahs that was also plundered by the Romans. It is also possible that other mosaics and coins were designed based on them as well, as they were probably more visible to the public than the Menorah.

As the carving on the Arch of Titus comes directly from our enemies who sought to stamp out any remaining trace of Jews or Judaism, the Rebbe taught that it behooves us to avoid imitating it in our Chanukah Menorahs intended to celebrate the victory of Judea over Greece (the

progenitors of Rome).<sup>9</sup> And it certainly doesn't overrule Rashi and Rambam.

We probably won't know for sure what the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash looked like until Moshiach comes. Meanwhile may the flames of our Chanukah Menorahs stand tall and proud, bringing the world the light it so desperately needs, and safety and security for the Jewish people in the land of Israel and throughout the world, with the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash, and the restoration of the original Menorah to its full glory with the coming of Moshiach!



*Rabbi Yosef Posner of Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie, past president of the cRC, kindles a diagonal-branched giant menorah outside of Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie in 1985.*

6. In his commentary on *Parshat Terumah*, 25:32.

7. On the menorah's shaft there is a little sea dragon.

8. *Melachim Alef* 7:49, and *Divrei Hayomim Alef* 28:15, and *Divrei Hayomim Bet* 4:7

9. *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 21, p. 168.

# HaShem Loves the Righteous

Rabbi Yehuda Tzvi Garsek  
cRc Chaver



As we know, *Dovid HaMelech* authored *Tehillim* (Psalms), containing beautiful and heartrending psalms. In *Tehillim* 146, we find some verses that tell us about *HaShem's* great love, actions and even His emotions regarding people in need.

As it says in *Tehilim* in that *Perek*:  
HE (*HASHEM*) DOES JUSTICE TO THE OPPRESSED:  
HE GIVES BREAD TO THE HUNGRY.  
*HASHEM* FREES THOSE WHO ARE BOUND  
*HASHEM* GIVES SIGHT TO THE BLIND....  
(HE) STRAIGHTENS THE BENT.  
*HASHEM* LOVES THE RIGHTEOUS....  
PROTECTS THE STRANGER, THE ORPHAN,  
AND  
THE WIDOW AND ENCOURAGES THEM.  
BUT THE WAY OF THE WICKED HE  
CONFOUNDS.

(*Tehillim* 146:7-9)

All of the verses are readily and easily understood, except (as will be explained) verse 8, *HaShem* loves the righteous! Of course, *HaShem* loves the righteous! What is *Dovid HaMelech* teaching us? Would we ever question G-d's love of the righteous?

I would like to suggest an answer to the question from our holy texts and from Jewish history itself.

In the *Siddur* on Chanukah (and Purim), each and every *Shemonah Esrai*, towards the end of the *Tefilah*, the paragraph of *Al HaNisim*, which gives us thumbnail history

of the story of Chanukah, is inserted. It tells us that *HaShem* protected us (and continues to protect us) in miraculous ways.

YOU (*HASHEM*) DELIVERED THE STRONG INTO THE HAND OF THE WEAK...  
THE MANY INTO THE HAND OF THE FEW,  
THE IMPURE INTO THE HAND OF THE PURE.  
**THE WICKED INTO THE HAND OF THE RIGHTEOUS.**

Again, we find the word *Tzadikim* – the righteous. The *Chashmonaim* were victorious because of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* guidance and help to deliver us from the terrible Syrian-Greek masses who came to destroy us.

Let us return to our original question. What is *Dovid HaMelech's* point in *Tehillim* 146? What is the *chidush* by telling us an obvious fact? Of course, *HaShem* loves the *Tzadikim*!

An answer, perhaps, is that the truly righteous do not have an easy life. Look at the *Avos*, at *Moshe Rabbeinu*, at *Yehoshua*, *Shmuel HaNavi...* at *Dovid HaMelech* himself, to *Tzadikim* of the past, present and most likely, the future!

The *Tzadikim* have been accused of being callous, unbending and uncompromising, stiff-necked and stubborn, self-serving and selfish, holier than thou, refusing to “going along” with the times, narrow-minded and unchanging – and the list goes on.

These were the *Tzadikim* of Chanukah. These were the *Chashmonaim*, the *Kohanim* and their followers, though few in number.

In those perilous days, thousands and thousands of our own people, *rochmona litzlan*, Jews – turned away from HaShem and His Torah. They chose to throw off what they considered to be the yoke of Torah in favor of the Greek way of life. They preferred to worship foreign gods and throw away the everlasting ties to Sinai, HaShem's path to life for the Jewish people. They were called *Misyavnim*, Hellenized Jews.

The great *Tzadikim*, led by the *Kohen Gadol*, Mattisyahu and his five sons and their followers, directed the revolt against the Syrian army which fought with its weapons and its elephants. And these righteous Jews also led the revolt against the *Misyavnim*.

Physically outnumbered, but spiritually

strong, the Jews were victorious. The Greeks were defeated, and they retreated from Eretz Yisroel. Yes, *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham* (or *Po* as we say here in Israel). HaShem delivered the Greeks into the hands of the righteous just as He continues to guide and to deliver us from the hands of those who want to destroy and annihilate us.

Chanukah is a call from HaShem, a call to Torah and to a rededication to a Torah infused Jewish life.

We are here because of G-d and His Torah. HaShem is victorious!

*Lo B'CHAYIL V'Lo B'KOACH*

*KEE EEM B'RUCHI AMAR HASHEM TZIVAKOS.*

NOT THROUGH ARMIES AND NOT THROUGH MIGHT,

SAYS HASHEM, MASTER OF LEGIONS.

**HASHEM OHAVE TZADIKIM**

*A freilichin and lichtige Chanukah!!*

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לע"נ חיים בן סעדיה והב

# Shalom Bayit: Chanukah's Rival or Chanukah's Goal?

Rabbi Noach Goldstein  
Assistant Rabbi, K.I.N.S., Rebbi, Fasman Yeshiva High School



In a celebrated passage towards the end of הלכות חנוכה, the *Rambam* (הלכות חנוכה ד:יב) enthusiastically describes how cherished the מצוה of נרות חנוכה is:

מִצְוֹת גֵּר חֲנֻכָּה מְצֻנָּה חֲבִיבָה הִיא עַד מְאֹד וְצָרִיד אָדָם לְהִזְהֵר בָּהּ כְּדֵי לְהוֹדִיעַ הַנֶּסֶס וּלְהוֹסִיף בְּשִׁבְחָה הָאֵל וְהוֹדִיָּה לוֹ עַל הַנֶּסֶס שֶׁעָשָׂה לָנוּ. אֶפְלוּ אִין לוֹ מֵה יֵאָכֵל אֶלָּא מִן הַצִּדָּקָה שׁוֹאֵל אוֹ מוֹכֵר כְּסוּתוֹ וְלוֹקַח שְׁמֹן וְנֵרוֹת וּמִדְּלִיק:

*“The mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles is exceptionally precious, and a person must be careful with it in order to publicize the miracle and to increase praise and thanks to God for the miracles that He performed. Even if someone doesn't have enough to eat without taking charity, he should borrow money or sell his clothing in order to purchase oil and candles to light.”*

The *Rambam* links to this theme in the following הלכה as well:

הָרִי שֶׁאִין לוֹ אֶלָּא פְּרֻטָּה אַחַת וּלְפָנָיו קְדוּשַׁת הַיּוֹם וְהַדְּלָקוֹת גֵּר חֲנֻכָּה מִקְדִּים לְקִנּוּת שְׁמֹן לְהַדְּלִיק גֵּר חֲנֻכָּה עַל הַיַּיִן לְקְדוּשַׁת הַיּוֹם. הוֹאִיל וְשִׁנְיָהִם מִדְּבָרֵי סוּפְרִים מוּטָב לְהַקְדִּים גֵּר חֲנֻכָּה שֶׁיֵּשׁ בוֹ זְכָרוֹן הַנֶּסֶס:

*“Behold, if he only has one penny, and he has before him the obligations of kiddush on Shabbat and Chanukah candles, he should give precedence to buying oil for the Chanukah candles over wine for kiddush. Since both mitzvot are from the words of the scribes, it is better to give precedence to the Chanukah candle, which contains a commemoration of the miracle.”*

The statement that the Chanukah candles are an “exceptionally precious” mitzvah is thus no amorphous statement; rather it has concrete halachik conse-

quences: 1) This elevated status requires pursuit of the mitzvah even in cases of dire economic hardship; 2) It grants precedence even over the central mitzvah of kiddush.

We can easily understand why the *Rambam* would codify these הלכות at the end of חנוכה. The master of organization, the *Rambam* arranges the laws of Chanukah in a way that they conclude with a crescendo, celebrating Chanukah's greatness and the consequences that result from it.

Yet this makes the *Rambam's* actual conclusion of הלכות חנוכה all the more surprising. For the *Rambam* has one more הלכה to actually conclude his codification of the mitzvah:

הִיא לְפָנָיו גֵּר בֵּיתוֹ וְגֵר חֲנֻכָּה אוֹ גֵּר בֵּיתוֹ וְקְדוּשַׁת הַיּוֹם גֵּר בֵּיתוֹ קוֹדֵם מְשׁוּם שְׁלוֹם בֵּיתוֹ שֶׁהָרִי הַשֶּׁם נִמְחַק לְעִשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ. גְּדוּל הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁכָּל הַתּוֹרָה נִתְּנָה לְעִשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ג יז) “דְּרָכֶיהָ יִרְכָּבֵי נֵעַם וְכָל נִתְיַבְתֶּיהָ שְׁלוֹם.”

*“If someone has before him either purchasing a light for his house or a light for Chanukah, or either a light for his house or kiddush, a light for his house takes precedence because that generates peace inside the home. For behold even the Divine Name is erased in order to generate peace between husband and wife. How great is peace, for the entire Torah was given in order to generate peace in the world, as it states (Mishlei 3:17), ‘Its ways are all pleasant, and all its pathways are peaceful.’”*

Why is the *Rambam's* last note in הלכות חנוכה a case where the performance of

Chanukah candles is overridden?! Doesn't that inevitably lessen the perception of Chanukah's significance, something the *Rambam* was straining to emphasize moments before? And granted the point about the value of peace is well-taken, but why does this have to be at Chanukah's expense?!

Take for example the *Rambam's* organization of שבת הלכות. Here too, the *Rambam* (הלכות שבת ב:ג) thinks that it is of utmost importance to stress the cases of נפש, where the Shabbat can and must be overridden. Here too, the *Rambam* takes the opportunity to emphasize the Torah's superior valuation of שלום:

כְּשֶׁעוֹשִׂים דְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּוּ אֵין עוֹשִׂין אוֹתָן לֹא עַל דְּי דְּבָרִים וְלֹא עַל דְּי קְטִינִים וְלֹא עַל דְּי עֲבָדִים וְלֹא עַל דְּי נְשִׂים כְּדִי שְׁלֵא תְּהֵא שְׁבַת קוֹלָה בְּעֵינֵיהֶם. אֵלָּא עַל דְּי גְדוּלְי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְחֻקְמֵיהֶם. וְאַסּוּר לְהַתְּמַהֲמַה בְּחֻלּוּל שְׁבַת לְחוּלְקָה שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ סִפְנָה שְׁנֶאֱמַר (ויקרא יח ה) "אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָם הָאָדָם וְחִי בָהֶם" וְלֹא שְׁמִימוֹת בָּהֶם. הָא לְמִדַּת שְׂאִין מוֹשְׁפְּטֵי הַתּוֹרָה נִקְמָה בְּעוֹלָם אֵלָּא רַחֲמִים וְחֶסֶד וְשְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם.

*"When we do these things (work to save lives on Shabbat), we don't do them via gentiles, children, slaves or women, so that the Shabbat shouldn't be light in their eyes. Rather we do it via the leaders and sages of Israel. It is also prohibited to delay violating the Shabbat for a sick person in mortal danger, as the Torah states 'one shall do them and live by them' – not that one should die by them. You hereby learn that the laws of the Torah do not bring vengeance to the world, but rather mercy, kindness, and peace to the world."*

However, the *Rambam* places this הלכה in the second chapter of הלכות שבת; not at the conclusion! The concluding *halacha* in שבת, as we would expect, emphasizes the importance of Shabbat, the dire consequences for those who desecrate it,

and the tremendous reward for those who keep it diligently:

הַשְּׁבַת וְעִבּוּדֵת כּוֹכָבִים וּמַזְלוֹת כֹּל אַחַת מִשְׁתֵּיהֶן יִשְׁקוּלָה כְּנֶגֶד שְׂאָר כֹּל מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה. וְהַשְּׁבַת הִיא הָאוֹת שְׁבִין הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וּבִינֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם. לְפִיכָּךְ כֹּל הַעוֹבֵר עַל שְׂאָר הַמִּצְוֹת הָרִי הוּא בְּקָלָל רָשָׁעִי יִשְׂרָאֵל. אֲבָל הַמַּחֲלִיל שְׁבַת בְּפֶרֶהֶסְיָא הָרִי הוּא כְּעוֹבֵד עֲבּוּדֵת כּוֹכָבִים וּמַזְלוֹת וְשִׁנְיָהֶם כְּגוּיִים לְכָל דְּבָרֵיהֶם. לְפִיכָּךְ מְשַׁבַּח הַנְּבִיא וְאוֹמֵר (ישעיה נו ב) "אֲשֶׁרִי אֲנֹשׁ יַעֲשֶׂה זֹאת וְכוּן אָדָם יִחְזִיק בָּהּ שְׁמֵר שְׁבַת מַחֲלֹ" וְכוּן. וְכֹל הַשּׁוֹמֵר אֶת הַשְּׁבַת כְּהַלְכָתָהּ וְיִמְכַבְּדָהּ וְיַעֲנֶנְגָהּ כְּפִי כָּחוֹ כְּבָר מִפְּרֵשׁ בְּשִׁבְלָה שְׂכָרוֹ בְּעוֹלָם הִזָּה יִתֵּר עַל הַשְּׂכָר הַצָּפוּר לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. שְׁנֶאֱמַר (ישעיה נח יד) "אִז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל ה' וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל בְּמַתִּי אֶרֶץ וְהִאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיךָ כִּי פִי ה' דִּבֶּר."

*"Shabbat and idolatry are both equivalent to all the other commandments in the Torah. Shabbat is the eternal sign between the Holy One Blessed is He and us. Therefore, anyone who violates the other commandments is included among the wicked of Israel, but one who publicly desecrates Shabbat is like an idolator, and both are considered like gentiles in all matters. Therefore the prophet praises (Isaiah 56:2): 'Praiseworthy is the man who does this and the person who adheres to it – who observes Shabbat without desecrating it, etc.' The tradition explicitly states the earthly reward for anyone who properly observes the Shabbat, and honors and delights in it to the best of his ability, in addition to his reward in the World to Come (Isaiah 58:14): Then you will delight in Hashem; I will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth, and I will feed you the heritage of Jacob your ancestor – thus has Hashem's Mouth spoken."*

Summarizing the problem: Why does the *Rambam* conclude הלכות חנוכה with a הלכה describing a case where Chanukah candles are overridden? Even worse, why does he do this immediately after describing at length how cherished the *mitzvah* of Chanukah candles is, seemingly

undermining his own point?! Contrasting the *Rambam's* codification of הלכות חנוכה with his codification of הלכות שבת seems to confirm the severity of our difficulty!

The answer may be that far from undermining Chanukah's greatness, the celebration of בית שלום is in and of itself the greatest celebration of Chanukah. We can advance three ways in which this is so:

1. My uncle, Rav Yosef Blau, suggests that the *Rambam* concludes הלכות חנוכה with a peroration about peace as a corrective to the opening of הלכות חנוכה, which recounts and celebrates the military triumph of the *Chashmonaim* over the Greeks. More than any other holiday in the Jewish calendar, Chanukah is at risk of devolving into a simplistic celebration of heroics in combat, and forgetting חס ושלוש the *Ribbono Shel Olam* who was behind it all. The reminder about שלום at the end of הלכות חנוכה thus helps ensure that we keep the proper perspective when celebrating the miracle.

2. My *rebbe* Rav Michael Rosensweig notes the dominant role the **home** plays in the Chanukah *mitzvah*: placing the candles in the house, the core requirement of "נר" *Rambam's* opinion that the איש וביתו, the *Rambam's* opinion that the light all the candles even at the המהדרין מן המהדרין level where there are candles for each member of the household, and more. He suggests that this is because ultimately, the clash with the Greeks was a battle for the Jewish home. The Greeks attacked the Jewish home on multiple fronts:

1) physically invading, as the *Rambam* states "פשטו ידם בממונם ובבנותיהם"; 2) spiritually, attacking *mitzvot* grounded in the home, most notably Shabbat; 3) our ultimate Home, the בית המקדש. Ensuring a thriving, peaceful home – שלום בית – is thus a true commemoration of Chanukah's ultimate aspiration.

3. We can add one final point. The purification and rededication of the *Mikdash* was a central element of the Chanukah miracle, the one most closely commemorated by the Chanukah candles. Now, the Torah states unequivocally that the worlds of warfare and *Mikdash* cannot mix: "וְאִם מְזַבַּח אֲבָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה לִּי לֹא תִבְנֶה אֶתְהָר וְזִית" *Rashi* writes that the goal of the מזבח is to bring שלום between Hashem and *Bnei Yisrael*, and thus the presence of any iron, which represents the sword, is unacceptable. The *Ramban* adds that the sword is the embodiment of Esav, and therefore cannot enter the *Mikdash*, the realm of the קול קול יעקב.<sup>1</sup> If שלום is the ultimate goal of the *Mikdash*, then it should not be surprising for it to be the ultimate goal of Chanukah as well, even at the expense of the *mitzvah* of the candles.

בעזרת ה' just like in the time of Chanukah, the *Chashmonaim* were able to emerge victorious and transition from military combat to a peaceful rededication of the *Mikdash*, so too may we soon see *Klal Yisrael* triumph in this current war, and lead to a full peace and the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash* בימינו במהרה!

1. See the *Abarbanel* (מלכים א' ו:ז) who suggests that this הלכה is such a central principle that Shlomo *HaMelech* voluntarily expanded it and refused to allow metal to touch any of the stones for the entire *Mikdash*!

FROM THE  
**Dayan's Desk**

FEATURING  
**RAV YONA REISS**

Av Beth Din of the Chicago Rabbinical Council

## WEEKLY SHIUR FOR MEN

MONDAYS | 8:00 PM | CONGREGATION KINS | 2800 WEST NORTH SHORE AVENUE, CHICAGO

**1: DECEMBER 30**

Location, Location, Location - Where  
 to Light Chanukah Candles

**3: JANUARY 13**

Marrying Without a Civil License

**2: JANUARY 6**

Vacations and Halacha -  
 Where, When and How

**4: JANUARY 20**

Borrowing with Interest from One's  
 Own Pension Account



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