

# Chanukat HaBayit

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## The Question

One of the most famous questions about Chanukah is: What motivated Chazal to create this holiday? The Gemara on Shabbat 21b asks precisely this question and responds by relating the story of the nes pach shemen, the miracle of the cruse that contained enough oil to burn for just one night yet miraculously remained lit for eight. That this miracle lies at the heart of Chanukah is corroborated by the fact that the one mitzvah unique to this holiday is to reenact the nes pach shemen by lighting a menorah every night of Chanukah.

However, it has been pointed out numerous times throughout the ages that the nes pach shemen does not seem to have been sufficient to justify the creation of a holiday. First, many other miracles occurred for the Jewish people throughout history that did not lead to the establishment of an annual holiday. For example, during the battle to defend Givon, Yehoshua beseeched God to make the sun stand still so as to give Bnei Yisrael more time to defeat their enemies,<sup>8</sup> and God acceded to this extraordinary request. It would seem that the sun standing still must have been a more spectacular miracle than a little oil remaining lit for longer than it should have. Yet, the former has become barely a blip in Jewish history while the latter is the centerpiece of an eight day gala festival each year.

Furthermore, the fact that the nes pach shemen took place in the Beit HaMikdash renders it even less remarkable, since miracles related to the functioning of the Temple were commonplace. According to Pirkei Avot 5:5, there were ten miracles that regularly occurred in the Beit HaMikdash, such as the space in the Temple expanding so that there was sufficient room for everyone to prostrate themselves even though the area was crowded while they were standing. Why would the miracle of the oil have been at all noteworthy?

Finally, Jewish holidays generally commemorate seminal moments in Jewish history. It is understandable why we annually mark the anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt on Pesach and the giving of the Torah on Shavuot; Judaism is inconceivable without either of these two events.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, if the miracle of the oil had not transpired, the path of Jewish history would not have been altered in any way. The Jews would simply have had to wait an additional week before continuing to light the Menorah. In fact, it seems they would not have even had to wait the

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I would like to thank my husband, Rabbi Nir Knoll, for his invaluable help editing and researching this article.

<sup>8</sup> His words were "שמש בגבעון דום וירח בעמק עילון" – let the sun stand still in Givon and the moon in the Valley of Ayalon (Yehoshua 10:12).

<sup>9</sup> For an explanation of why we annually remember the booths in the desert on Sukkot, which do not seem particularly noteworthy at first glance, see my article in Sukkot To-Go 5770.

week, since based on the principle of *טומאה הותרה בצבור* (impurity is permissible for the sake of the community<sup>10</sup>), they could have resumed lighting the Menorah immediately, using oil that was *tamei*.<sup>11</sup>

Not only does the *nes pach shemen* seem to have been relatively insignificant, but even if it had been momentous, Chazal would not have created a yearly holiday simply to remember that a certain miracle once transpired. There must be some eternal message embedded in the *nes pach shemen* that Chazal wished to inculcate in us by mandating its annual reenactment. What could that message be?

## The Central Theme of Chanukah

The key to appreciating the significance of the *nes pach shemen* lies in grasping the greater significance of Chanukah in general. The end of Kislev has been an auspicious time in Jewish history since long before the Chanukah miracle ever occurred.<sup>12</sup> According to the *Yalkut Shimoni*,<sup>13</sup> the very first “House of God,” the *Mishkan*, was completed on exactly the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. In addition, *Chagai* 2:18 reveals that the foundation of the second *Beit HaMikdash* was laid at this time of year as well – on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Kislev.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the *Chashmonaim*’s famous rededication of *Bayit Sheni* on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev can no longer be viewed as an isolated historical event; it was the third dedication of a “House of God” to take place at precisely this time of year.

In fact, Chanukah seems to commemorate much more than just the one rededication of *Bayit Sheni* that took place during the time of the *Chashmonaim*. Throughout all eight days of Chanukah, we recite *Tehillim Mizmor 30*, *מזמור שיר הנוכת הבית לדוד*, at the end of *Shacharit*,<sup>15</sup> which recalls the inauguration of the first *Beit HaMikdash*.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the completion of the *Mishkan* is prominently memorialized on Chanukah in a number of ways. The Torah portion that we read all eight days describes the *korbanot* that each of the *nesi'im* offered upon the *Mishkan*’s completion.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the eight days of Chanukah are reminiscent of the eight-day consecration ceremony to inaugurate the *Mishkan* that is described in *VaYikra* 8-9. Furthermore, though Chazal did not require extra *seudot* on Chanukah to commemorate the

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<sup>10</sup> *Pesachim* 77a.

<sup>11</sup> This is a famous point raised by many different *meforshim*, including Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi and the *Pnei Yehoshua* (*Shabbat* 21b). See also the first two pages of Rabbi Ezra Bick’s article, “Why Celebrate a Miracle?” at [www/vbm-torah.org/chanuka/chan60eb.htm](http://www/vbm-torah.org/chanuka/chan60eb.htm).

<sup>12</sup> See Rabbi Menachem Leibtag’s article, “Chanukah’s Biblical Roots” ([www.tanach.org/special/chanuka.doc](http://www.tanach.org/special/chanuka.doc))

<sup>13</sup> *ילקוט שמעוני מלכים א פרק ו סימן קפד*. This *Midrash* is cited by the *Mishnah Berurah* 670:7. A similar *midrash* is also found in *Midrash Rabbah BaMidbar* 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Chagai* 2:18 says, *שימו נא לבבכם מן היום הזה ומעלה מיום עשרים וארבעה לתשיעי למן היום אשר יסד היכל ה' שימו* “*שימו נא לבבכם* – Now consider from this day onwards, from the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month (Kislev), from the day that the foundation of HaShem’s Temple was laid, consider it.

<sup>15</sup> *Masechet Sofrim* 18:3 is the source for this practice.

<sup>16</sup> It is actually a *machloket* whether this *mizmor* refers to *Bayit Rishon* (Radak) or a future *Beit HaMikdash* - *Bayit Sheni* or *Shlishi* (Ibn Ezra). The *Malbim* interprets the *mizmor* as an allegory to David’s health (the *bayit* is really his body).

<sup>17</sup> *BaMidbar* perek 7.

Chashmonaim's rededication, the Rama notes in Orach Chayim 670:2 that some opinions<sup>18</sup> hold there is a mitzvah to increase meals during Chanukah in honor of the Chanukat HaMizbeach that took place when the Mishkan was completed.

What emerges is that Chanukah memorializes much more than the nes pach shemen and the rededication of Bayit Sheni by the Chashmonaim. Rather, what Chanukah celebrates is the entire concept of chanukat habayit laHaShem altogether – the idea of dedicating a “house” for God, a physical structure to be filled with His presence. The name Chanukah itself encapsulates this theme. The Hebrew word “chanukah” means dedication or inauguration. Thus the very name of the holiday highlights the concept of dedicating a physical place for the service of God.<sup>19</sup>

However, if the central theme of Chanukah is the dedication of “Houses of God,” why does the Gemara say that Chazal established this holiday to commemorate the nes pach shemen, and why is the primary mitzvah of the holiday lighting the menorah?

To answer these questions, we must further explore the significance of the nes pach shemen.

## The Significance of the Nes Pach Shemen<sup>20</sup>

The essence of a Mikdash is the presence of God. At the conclusion of every construction of a house for God in Tanach, the final climactic moment is when the Shechinah descends, transforming what would otherwise have remained simply stones and bricks into a Mikdash. For example, upon the completion of the Mishkan, the Torah relates:

*The glory of God appeared to the whole nation. A fire came out from before God and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat. The whole nation saw, and they raised their voices in praise and fell on their faces.*

**VaYikra 9:23-24**

וירא כבוד ה' אל כל העם. ותצא אש  
מלפני ה' ותאכל על המזבח את העולה  
ואת החלבים וירא כל העם וירננו ויפלו  
על פניהם  
**ויקרא ט:כג-כד**

Similarly, at the culmination of the construction of the first Temple, it is written:

<sup>18</sup> Such as the Maharal MiPrague, cited in parentheses there.

<sup>19</sup> The Tur in Orach Chayim 670 and the Ran on Shabbat 9b bedapei haRif mention the famous explanation of the name Chanukah as a reference to “חנו בכ”ה” – that the Jews rested from battle on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. However, many if not most, other mefarshim focus on the literal meaning of the word, which translates as “dedication.”

Interestingly, the commentators choose different dedications to highlight as the source of the name. The Maharsha on Shabbat 21b and the Ohr Zarua 2:321 explain the name as referring to the Chashmonaim's chanukat hamizbe'ach (dedication of the Altar) following their purification of Bayit Sheni. Rav Yaakov Emden posits that it refers to the original dedication of Bayit Sheni discussed by the prophet Chaggai. The Shibbolei HaLeket thinks it is a reference to the dedication of the Mishkan, whose work was completed at this time. Since so many commentators agree that the name refers to a dedication of a house for God, yet disagree as to which specific dedication, I would suggest that the name is meant to transcend any one specific dedication, and instead to capture the broad concept of dedicating a house for God in general. (I would like to acknowledge Rabbi Nosson Scherman's article, “Origin of the Name Chanukah,” which presents a clear summary of the different opinions as to the source of the name Chanukah. It can be found at [www.torah.org/features/holydays/originchanukah.html](http://www.torah.org/features/holydays/originchanukah.html).)

<sup>20</sup> I want to thank and give credit to my husband, Rabbi Nir Knoll; many of the ideas in this section are his.

*And when Shlomo finished praying, the fire descended from the Heavens and consumed the burnt offerings and the sacrifices, and the glory of God filled the house. The Kohanim could not enter the House of God because the glory of God filled the House of God. All of Israel saw the fire's descent and the glory of God upon the House, and they prostrated themselves upon the floor, and bowed, and thanked God for He is good, for His mercy is forever.*

**Divrei HaYamim II 7:1-3**

(א) וככלות שלמה להתפלל והאש ירדה מהשמים ותאכל העלה והזבחים וכבוד ה' מלא את הבית: (ב) ולא יכלו הכהנים לבוא אל בית ה' כי מלא כבוד ה' את בית ה': (ג) וכל בני ישראל ראים ברדת האש וכבוד ה' על הבית ויכרעו אפים ארצה על הרצפה וישתחוו והודות לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו:  
**דברי הימים ב ז:א-ג**

However, a description of the glory of God visibly descending is glaringly missing from the account of the construction of the second Beit HaMikdash.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Yoma 21b claims that the second Temple never lived up to the majesty or holiness of the first.<sup>22</sup> It lists five specific items that were present in the first but absent in the second and the Shechinah is one of them.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Shechinah was clearly not a strong presence in the second Temple, it does seem to have been there to some degree, at least initially.<sup>24</sup> The Gemara explains that there was a daily sign of the Shechinah's presence in the Batei Mikdash – the western lamp of the Menorah:

*It [the Temple Menorah] is a testimony for all Mankind that the Divine Presence dwells with Israel. Rav said: This (the testimony) is the western lamp, to which the Kohen gave the same amount of oil as the other lamps, and yet from the western lamp he would kindle the other lamps, and with it he would conclude.*

**Shabbat 22b**

עדות היא לבאי עולם שהשכינה שורה בישראל. מאי עדות? אמר רב: זו נר מערבי, שנותן בה שמן כמדת חברותיה, וממנה היה מדליק ובה היה מסיים.  
**מסכת שבת דף כב:**

This miracle involving the ner ma'aravi miraculously remaining lit for longer than the other lamps occurred in the second Beit HaMikdash as well as in the first. Thus, though there was no initial descent of the Shechinah into Bayit Sheni, the Shechinah does seem to have been present there, at least to a minimal degree.

<sup>21</sup> See Ezra 6:15-18, which describes the completion of the construction, the dedication (which is referred to as בית אלהא חנוכת), and the sacrifices that were offered. It concludes without any reference to a sign of the Divine presence descending.

<sup>22</sup> Most Rishonim and Achronim who address what led to the inferiority of the second Beit HaMikdash relate it to the fact that the vast majority of Jews chose to remain in galut rather than return to Eretz Yisrael. See for example the Kuzari 2:24. Rabbeinu Bachya, in his commentary to Bereishit 46:27 suggests a similar reason but adds a technical point – that only 42,360 Jews returned in the time of Ezra to build the second Beit HaMikdash (Ezra 2:64), but the Shechinah cannot reside permanently among less than 600,000 Jews.

<sup>23</sup> The other four are the aron, kaporet, and keruvim, which together count as one, the Heavenly fire, ruach hakodesh, and the urim v'tumim.

<sup>24</sup> Rabbeinu Bachya to Bereishit 46:27 (cited also in footnote #16) says this explicitly. In addition, the Gemara in Zevachim 118b quotes a Beraita which expounds the pasuk, "He (God) hovers over him (Binyamin) all the day" (Devarim 33:12) as referring to God's Shechinah hovering specifically over the second Beit HaMikdash.

The situation, however, worsened still further in the years leading up to the Chanukah story. The Gemara in Yoma 39a relates that from the time when Shimon HaTzaddik served as Kohen Gadol, Bnei Yisrael were no longer worthy of the miracle of the ner ma'aravi on a consistent basis; some mornings it remained lit but other mornings it went out at the same time as the other flames. This indicates that from Shimon HaTzaddik's time on, the Shechinah was not simply less present than it had been during Bayit Rishon; it was often absent altogether. Shimon HaTzaddik was the Kohen Gadol during the reign of Alexander the Great,<sup>25</sup> the famous conqueror who first brought Greek culture and Hellenist influence to Israel. In other words, about 150 years before the Chanukah miracle occurred, exactly when Greek assimilation first began to make inroads within the Jewish people, God indicated that He was so displeased with His nation that He was removing Himself still further from them and would sometimes be entirely absent from the Beit HaMikdash.

With this backdrop, we can now appreciate the dramatic import of the nes pach shemen. The Chashmonaim fought valiantly to militarily defeat the Greeks and chase them out of the Beit HaMikdash. They then devoted themselves to thoroughly purifying the desecrated Temple. However, their painstaking efforts would have all been for naught if upon completing the purification and inauguration, the Shechinah had still refused to come to Bayit Sheni. If God had still been displeased with His people and still refused to live amongst them in a consistent, permanent way, then their enormous efforts to expunge Greek paganism and idolatry from the Beit HaMikdash would ultimately have been worthless. Thus, the value of everything they worked so hard for – their military victory and purification of the Beit HaMikdash, all hinged on waiting for some sign from God that He had accepted their efforts. And that sign came in the form of the nes pach shemen.

The essence of the miracle was that a little bit of oil lasted for a supernaturally long time. The parallel to the miracle of the ner ma'aravi is striking.<sup>26</sup> There too, a limited amount of oil miraculously lasted for longer than it naturally should have, and that, says the Gemara, was the sign *שהשכינה שורה בישראל* – that the Shechinah resided in Israel. Thus, the awesome significance behind the seemingly minor miracle of the nes pach shemen is that it was HaShem's sign that He was returning His Shechinah to the Beit HaMikdash. Given the history of Bayit Sheni, the significance of this cannot be overstated.

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<sup>25</sup> Yoma 69a tells an intriguing story about a dramatic meeting between the two. When Alexander the Great was on his way to wreak havoc upon Jerusalem, Shimon HaTzaddik went out to greet him dressed in the Bigdei Lavan normally reserved only for Yom Kippur. Upon seeing Shimon HaTzaddik, Alexander dismounted and bowed down to him, explaining that every night before a victory, a figure that looked exactly like Shimon HaTzaddik would appear to him in a dream and instruct him on which strategies to use in the battle. At the end of the encounter, as an alternative to putting a statue of Alexander in the Beit HaMikdash as the Emperor wanted, Shimon HaTzaddik offered to have all Jewish males born that year named Alexander.

<sup>26</sup> See the Pnei Yehoshua's commentary to Shabbat 21b, where he explicitly spells out this parallel. I want to give credit to Rabbi Yair Kahn, whose article, "The Miracle of the Lights," ([www.vbm-torah.org/chanuka/a-chan-2.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/chanuka/a-chan-2.htm)) brought this parallel to my attention.

Especially striking is the fact that God did not indicate His return by simply causing the miracle of the ner ma'aravi to once again occur consistently; rather He chose the more dramatic eight-day-long, all-seven-branch *nes pach shemen*<sup>27</sup> to express the message of His return. Perhaps this indicated that the Chashmonaim's passion, devotion, and commitment were so successful in bringing the Shechinah back, that it was not returning on the diminished intensity level that had previously characterized Bayit Sheni, but on an intensity level previously unknown in the second Beit HaMikdash.<sup>28 29</sup>

With this understanding of the *nes pach shemen*, it makes perfect sense that Chazal established a new holiday with this miracle as its centerpiece. Not only was it the climax and culmination of everything the Chashmonaim had fought and cleansed for, but it initiated a new era in Bayit Sheni and a newly close relationship between HaShem and His people that had not existed for a few hundred years.

The significance of the *nes pach shemen* goes still deeper. As we developed at the outset, the holiday of Chanukah transcends the events that took place during the time of the Chashmonaim; it encapsulates the broad concept of *chanukat habayit laHaShem* – dedicating a house for God. The essence of a Mikdash, of a “House for God,” is the presence of the Shechinah; that is what transforms the stones and bricks into a place imbued with kedushah. There could be no more perfect mitzvah for the holiday which embodies the concept of dedicating mikdashot than recreating the *nes pach shemen*, the miracle that conveyed the purpose of a mikdash - the coming of the Shechinah.<sup>30</sup>

## The Relevance for Us

Now that we no longer have a Beit HaMikdash or the palpable presence of the Shechinah in our midst, what significance does Chanukah possess? What message does this holiday convey to us, as we light small chanukiyot in the windows of our homes instead of the glorious Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash?

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<sup>27</sup> The ner ma'aravi was just one candle and it only remained lit for one extra day

<sup>28</sup> Rashi seems to indicate this in his commentary to Chagai 2:6.

<sup>29</sup> The Haftarah that we read on Shabbat Chanukah, Zecharia perek 2, expresses the overwhelming joy and relief that must have accompanied the *nes pach shemen* precisely because of the message that it expressed. Pasuk 14 states, "רני ושמחי בת ציון כי הגני בא ושכנתי בתוכך נאם ה'" – Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for I am coming and will dwell in your midst, says HaShem.

<sup>30</sup> Rav Michael Rosensweig, in his article, “Chanukah as a Holiday of Idealism and Maximalism,” ([www.torahweb.org/torah/2006/moadim/rros\\_chanukah.html](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2006/moadim/rros_chanukah.html)) addresses one of the questions that was raised at the outset of this article: why didn't the Chashmonaim light the Menorah with impure oil, based on the principle of *tumah hutra be'tzibbur*? He answers that perhaps the significance of the *nes pach shemen* lay specifically in the fact that it wasn't technically necessary; it became necessary only because of the people's desire to perform the mitzvah in its most *lechatchila* way, with pure oil. Perhaps this can also explain why the *nes pach shemen* was the chosen vehicle through which the message of the Shechinah's return was expressed: The Beit HaMikdash has always been viewed as the centerpiece of an ideal Jewish national and religious existence. Thus, a perfect medium for expressing its revival was a miracle that occurred only because of the nation's insistence upon performing a mitzvah in the most ideal way.

The answer, I believe, lies in a very unique aspect of the mitzvah of ner Chanukah, namely that it is inextricably linked to our homes. Most mitzvot can be performed wherever an individual happens to find himself. For example, one can eat matzah or shake a lulav anywhere he happens to be and still fulfill the mitzvah. However, lighting ner Chanukah must specifically be done in one's home; one may not even be able to fulfill the mitzvah with a lighting done elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

The very formulation of the mitzvah indicates the unusual connection between ner Chanukah and the home. The phrase used by the Gemara to convey the basic obligation is מצות הנוכה נר איש וביתו. Though the meaning of the phrase is that the mitzvah is one candle for a man and his entire household, the phrase literally translates as: a candle for each man and his house.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the basic obligation expressed by this phrase confirms the fundamental link between ner Chanukah and the home. The phrase נר איש וביתו teaches that the minimum obligation of lighting Chanukah candles is fulfilled by one member per household lighting for his entire family. This is startling because based on the regular rules that govern when one can fulfill a mitzvah on behalf of someone else, this should not work. For a mitzvah of speech, such as kiddush, one person can fulfill the obligation of another through the principle of *shome'a ke'oneh* – if one hears it, it is as if he said it himself. However, for mitzvot that involve performing an action, each person must fulfill the mitzvah himself. For example, one cannot ask someone else to eat matzah, sit in a sukkah, or shake the lulav for him. So how can the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles be fulfilled through only one member of the household lighting on behalf of the rest of his family members?

The fact that the mitzvah can be fulfilled in this way indicates that the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles may be fundamentally different than most other mitzvot. Perhaps there is no obligation upon any specific individual to light Chanukah candles.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the mitzvah might be for every Jewish home to have a menorah lit in it.<sup>34</sup> In other words, perhaps the mitzvah of

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<sup>31</sup> The Rivash quoted by the Beit Yosef in Orach Chayim siman 671 says that one cannot rely on the menorah lighting performed in shul; rather he must relight at home in order to fulfill the mitzvah. Tosafot on Sukkah 46a s.v. "ha'roeh ner," seems to indicate the same thing. Tosafot there raises the question of why ner Chanukah is the only mitzvah for which Chazal established a birchat ha'roeh – a blessing that one should make upon seeing someone else's mitzvah (their lit candles). Tosafot suggests at one point that it might be because someone who doesn't have a house is otherwise unable to fulfill his mitzvah of ner Chanukah (משום שיש כמה בני אדם שאין להם בתים ואין בידם) (לקיים המצוה). According to this explanation, it is only possible to fulfill one's obligation by lighting in one's home. (See footnote #29, where this Tosafot is discussed again.)

<sup>32</sup> Another indication of the connection between the menorah and the home is that the Gemara on Shabbat 21b informs us that the Chanukah candles should be lit by the entrance to one's house, outside, and the Gemara further clarifies on 22a that they should ideally be placed specifically within a tefach of the entrance. Tosafot there comments that if one has a private chatzer (courtyard) in front of his house, he should light his menorah at the end of his chatzer where it opens to the public thoroughfare, so as to maximize pirsumei nisa. Rashi however, indicates that one should always light within a tefach of his home, even if he has a chatzer that distances it from public view. This implies that according to Rashi, proximity to the home is even more important than maximizing pirsumei nisa.

<sup>33</sup> In other words, it may not be a *chovat gavra*, an obligation upon the person.

<sup>34</sup> The Pnei Yehoshua on Shabbat 21b presents the mitzvah in exactly this way. He calls it a *chovat habayit* – an obligation upon the home, not upon any specific individual. This could also more generally be termed a *chovat cheftza* – an obligation upon an object.

ner Chanukah is more similar to the mitzvah of mezuzah, which every Jewish home must have, rather than to a mitzvah such as lulav, which every individual has an obligation to perform. This would explain both the formulation of נר איש וּביתו as well as its halachic ramification that only one candle has to be lit per household. The implication of this is remarkable: Not only is there a connection between the mitzvah of ner Chanukah and the home; the home itself may be what generates the obligation to light a Chanukah candle!<sup>35</sup>

The fact that ner Chanukah is inextricably linked to our homes indicates that there is something about its message that can only be expressed in our homes. The theme of Chanukah in general and of the nes pach shemen in particular is the importance of performing chanukat habayit laHaShem, of transforming physical structures into places worthy of housing the Shechinah. One might have thought that the synagogue would be the most appropriate venue for expressing this message. Yet halachah insists that it be expressed specifically in our homes. The overwhelmingly powerful message that we are supposed to imbibe from our experience of Chanukah is to perform a chanukat habayit laHaShem in our own homes. We are supposed to transform our homes into places that are worthy of carrying the message of the nes pach shemen. Just as the nes pach shemen proclaimed the presence of the Shechinah in Bayit Sheni, the flames that burn in our windows each night should be broadcasting the message that this is a makom Shechinah; this is a place dedicated to avodat HaShem, a place imbued with a sense of God's presence.

It is encouraging that of the three Mikdashot throughout history that were dedicated at exactly this time of year, Chanukah focuses primarily on the Chashmonaim's rededication of Bayit Sheni. The Chashmonaim were faced with what must have seemed like a hopeless situation: the Shechinah had never returned with the intensity of the Bayit Rishon era and was growing increasingly distant as Hellenism continued to spread throughout the Jewish community. There were idols in the Temple, and the enemy vastly outnumbered them. Yet, they rose to the challenge with courage, passion, and commitment, and were ultimately successful in reversing the reality; they defeated the Greeks, purified the Beit HaMikdash, and most importantly, brought the Shechinah back to Am Yisrael. The message that emerges from this inspiring story and our reenactment of it each year is that no matter how far removed the Shechinah may seem, if we demonstrate genuine courage, passion, and commitment, we can bring the nes pach shemen into our homes and make the Shechinah a palpable presence in our lives.

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<sup>35</sup> Tosafot in Sukkah 46a s.v. "ha'roeh ner" seems to indicate exactly this. As mentioned in footnote #25, Tosafot wonders why ner Chanukah is the only mitzvah for which Chazal established a birchat ha'roeh – a blessing that one should make upon seeing someone else's mitzvah (their lit candles). Tosafot first suggests that it is because of "chavivut hanes" – the degree to which the mitzvah is beloved. He then proposes that it might be because someone who doesn't have a house is otherwise unable to fulfill his mitzvah of ner Chanukah. He concludes that the first reason is preferable "דלא תיקשי ליה מזוזה" – so that one shouldn't raise an attack from the mitzvah of mezuzah. Presumably, Tosafot means that one might say that there can never be a problem of someone being unable to fulfill his ner Chanukah obligation due to his homelessness since someone who doesn't have a house has no obligation of ner Chanukah at all, just as he has no obligation of mezuzah.

## Conclusion

Throughout Jewish history, a number of mikdashot were constructed or dedicated at exactly this time of year. Thus, Chanukah celebrates much more than the one victory and dedication that occurred during the period of the Chashmonaim, but rather the far-reaching concept of chanukat habayit laHaShem – the idea of consecrating a physical structure to God. The perfect symbol for this concept is the nes pach shemen, which signified the momentous return of the Shechinah to Bayit Sheni. During Chanukah, we recreate this miracle specifically in our homes, hopefully inspiring us to transform our own homes into places filled with a sense of God's presence.

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