

My Chanuka while the Beit Hamikdash Stood

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We generally link Chanuka with the mitzvah of *hadlakat neiros*, lighting candles. In fact, lighting the candles has become so deeply associated with Chanuka that it is virtually impossible to imagine Chanuka without candles. People go to great lengths to ensure that they do not miss a single night of *hadlakat neiros*, since in common perception, *hadlakat neiros* is the essential act of Chanuka.

However when we look at the Gemara, we note that in fact, the original Chanuka may have been devoid of *hadlakat neiros*:

What is [the reason for] Chanuka? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Chanuka, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient oil for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle happened and they lit [the lamp] for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.

Shabbat 21b (adapted from Soncino Translation)

The proper text is these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving—Not that there is a prohibition against creative labor because these days were only appointed to read Hallel and recite Al haNisim in the blessing for thanksgiving.

Rashi, ad loc.

מאי חנוכה? דתנו רבנן: בכ"ה
בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון,
דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות
בהון. שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל
טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל,
וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי
ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך
אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו
של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא
להדליק יום אחד, נעשה בו נס
והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים. לשנה
אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים
בהלל והודאה.

שבת כא:

הכי גריסינן: ועשאום ימים טובים
בהלל והודאה - לא שאסורין
במלאכה, שלא נקבעו אלא לקרות
הלל ולומר על הנסים בהודאה.
רש"י, שם

The Yom Tov of Chanuka was established for *hallel* and *hoda'a* (thanksgiving). Rashi understands that *hallel* and *hoda'a* refer to two different aspects of tefilla, reciting the Hallel and inserting Al haNisim in the *bracha* of Modim. Rashi makes no reference to lighting candles.

According to Rashi's understanding of the Gemara, the kindling of Chanuka lights, which looms so large for us, was not originally part of the Yom Tov.

The *Bach* notes the puzzling absence of lighting of the candles from the Gemara:¹

It is difficult to understand why lighting the candles is not mentioned. It is central [to Chanuka]. | קשיא ממה שלא הוזכר גם הדלקה שהוא העיקר.
ב"ח אורח חיים סימן תרע

Bach, Orach Chaim no. 670

Some answer that the Gemara is simply quoting a *beraita* from *Megillat Taanit*. The goal of *Megillat Taanit* is to report on days when it is forbidden to fast, and does not endeavor to relate all the details of each holiday. Hence, there is no mention of candle lighting in *Megillat Taanit*.²

However, it is possible to offer an alternative explanation. Perhaps *hadlakat neirot* was not part of the original Chanuka. The original Chanuka took place at a time when the Beit haMikdash was still standing. There was no need to institute a new mitzvah of lighting Chanuka candles while the original Menorah in the Beit haMikdash was being kindled. Only after the destruction of the Beit haMikdash was the mitzvah to kindle Chanuka candles established to replace the Menorah that was lit in the Beit haMikdash.³ Although Josephus writes that Chanuka was called *Chag haUrim*, the festival of lights, at its inception⁴ this does not contradict our thesis. It is possible that Josephus meant the festival to celebrate the miracle of lights, rather than the festival when we kindle lights. The kindling of Chanuka lights may have been a later enactment, after *Churban haBayit*.⁵

If this perspective is correct, we may understand a number of halachot. Some Rishonim are bothered by the text of the *bracha* we recite when we light the Chanuka candles. We recite the text "*lehadlik ner,*" (to light the candle). According to the most accepted position among Rishonim, the formulation of this *bracha* would indicate that this mitzvah cannot be performed through a *shaliach* (agent). If the mitzvah could be performed through a *shaliach*, the text of the *bracha* should be *al hadlakat ner Chanuka*. Yet Chanuka candles may be lit by a *shaliach*. Why then do we recite the text *lehadlik ner shel*⁶ Chanuka and not *al hadlakat ner Chanuka*?⁷ Raavad (*Hilchot Brachot* 11: 15) in one of his explanations notes that we recite *lehadlik* because the

¹ The same point is made by R' Eliahu Mizrahi in his notes appended to the *Smag*, end of *Hilchot Chanuka*.

² See R' Hirsh Melech Dinover, *Chidushei Mahartza* page 166.

³ This approach was developed by R Betzalel Zolty, *Mishnat Yaavetz, Orach Chaim* number 73. R Shlomo Fisher in R. Betzalel Naor's *Emunat Itecha* page 62, asks a number of intriguing questions on this approach.

⁴ *Anitquities* XII, 7:7.

⁵ See *Emunat Itecha* page 59.

⁶ There is a discussion as to the precise text recited, specifically if *shel* is included, and whether it is one word or two. See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 676:1 and *Magen Avraham* and *Birkei Yosef* there for halachic reasons to omit *shel*. There is a kabbalistic reason as well to maintain thirteen words in the *bracha*. Those who recite *shel* but attach it to the word Chanuka maintain the text as it appears in the Gemara but still keep the thirteen words *mekubalim* prefer. See Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael* volume 5 page 76 and note 5 there. The text of *ner Chanuka* rather than *neirot* in the plural is also worth investigating – See *Peri Megadim, Eishel Avraham* 263:11.

⁷ Yerushalmi in *Sukka* 3:4 does in fact have the text of *al* and there are Rishonim cited in *Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim* number 676, who amend the text of our Gemara to read *al* rather than *lehadlik*. This question was already posed by *Or Zarua* volume 1 number 139. See also *Aruch haShulchan, Orach Chaim* 676:2, for a summary of the positions.

mitzvah is based on the candles that were lit in the Mikdash. Since in the Mikdash, a *shaliach* could not perform the service, we also recite *lehadlik*. Clearly for Raavad, there is a connection between *hadlakat haner* in the Mikdash and *hadlakat haner* on Chanuka.

This comparison is also evident in the explanation of two other halachot related to *hadlakat haner*. Rashi, *Shabbat* 22b, s.v. *Ee Hadlaka*, writes that the reason why we assume *hadlaka oseh mitzvah*, the lighting of the candles is the fulfillment of the mitzvah (as opposed to the placement of the candles), is that the mitzvah is similar to the mitzvah in the Mikdash. Ran, *Shabbat* 9a in Rif pages s.v. *Hilchot*, writes that the reason why it is forbidden to derive benefit from the Chanuka lights is that the mitzvah mirrors the mitzvah in the Mikdash and in the Mikdash it was prohibited to benefit from the light.⁸

Other Rishonim

There are a number of other Rishonim who split between the *hoda'a* and *hallel* aspect of Chanuka and the *hadlakat haner* aspect. According to these Rishonim it is entirely possible that *hadlakat haner* was a later enactment only instituted after *churban haBayit*. The *Tur* is a case in point. In chapter 670 of *Orach Chaim* he cites the establishment of Chanuka for the purposes of *hallel* and *hoda'a*, but later on in chapter 671 he first mentions:

Since the miracle took place through candles, the rabbis instituted to light candles each night in order to mention (publicize) the miracle.

ויען כי אירע הנס בנרות תקנוה
להדליק נרות בכל לילה כדי
להזכיר הנס.

As such, according to the *Tur*, the essential, original Chanuka was *hallel* and *hoda'a* and did not include *hadlakat neiros*.

Interestingly, there are *girsat* (textual variances) in the Gemara, cited by other Rishonim, that add a slightly different texture to Chanuka. Rabbenu Yerucham 9:1 assumes that in addition to *hallel* and *hoda'a* there is an obligation to study the halachot of Chanuka on Chanuka. This replicates the obligation to expound upon the topics of each Yom Tov on the Yom Tov itself.⁹ (*Megilla* 31a)

Hadlakat Haner as Part of the Original Chanuka

However, there is a school of thought that maintains that lighting the Chanuka candles was part of the original Chanuka. This can be inferred from the *Sheiltot* (number 26 page 177-178 in *Haamek She'aila* version) who has a text in the Gemara that reads “*mai ner Chanuka*” (what is the reason for the Chanuka **candle**) rather than *mai Chanuka*. Accordingly, *hallel* and *hoda'a* are both functions of the candles themselves. Essentially we are praising and thanking G-d for the

⁸ It remains troubling however why those who compare *neiros Chanuka* to *neiros haMikdash* do not require olive oil as was required in the Mikdash. This same question may be asked on *neiros Chanuka* that are kindled in shul and seem to clearly replicate *neiros haMikdash*, *Shulchan Aruch* 671:7 —see *Piskei Teshuvot* 671 note 43.

⁹ See Rav Aharon Kahn, *Yisamach Avicha*, volume 2, page 363, for a discussion of *dorshim hilchot chag b'chag* (the requirement to study the laws of a festival on the festival) as it relates to Chanuka.

miracles by kindling the Chanuka candles. It is through *hadlakat haner* that we fulfill the obligation of *hallel* and *hoda'a*.¹⁰

Rambam

Rav Betzalel Zolty (*Mishnat Yaavetz* no. 73) infers from the Rambam that *hadlakat neiroi* was part of the original institution of Chanuka and constitutes *hoda'a* mentioned in the Gemara:¹¹

For this reason, the rabbis of that generation instituted that these eight days, which begin on the night of the 25th of Kislev, are days of joy and hallel and the candles are lit each night of the eight days at the entrance of the doorways in order to display and publicize the miracle.
Rambam, Hilchot Chanuka 3:3

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור
שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל
חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל
ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי
הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת
הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס.
רמב"ם, הלכות חנוכה ג:ג

Based on Rambam's comments, Rav Zolty argues that if one lit candles but failed to have in mind that he or she is performing a mitzvah, they do not get credit for the mitzvah. Ordinarily a rabbinic mitzvah does not require *kavana* (intent). However, *ner Chanuka*, which is a mitzvah of *hoda'a*, requires a mindful acknowledgment of the benefit one received. This can only come about through proper *kavana*.

R. Zolty's argument is innovative. However, it seems that a careful reading of Rambam will show that lighting candles was an additional and later enactment, not part of the original Chanuka. In fact, the language of the Rambam implies that *hadlakat neiroi* was a later enactment. Had it been an enactment of the rabbis at the time of the Chanuka story, Rambam would have written the normative expression *vesheyadliku*, "these eight days ... are days of joy and hallel and that one should light candles ..." The expression Rambam uses, *umadlikin*, implies that this is a matter of fact—candles are lit—rather than an enactment set forth by the rabbis at the time of Chanuka.¹²

Moreover, Rambam never states that kindling the candles was a commemoration of what was done in the Beit haMikdash. Were *hadlakat neiroi* a reenactment of what was done in the Mikdash, Rambam would mandate *hadlakat neiroi* during the day and not only at night.¹³ A further difficulty with the thesis put forward by Rav Zolty is the fact that Rambam doesn't include *hoda'a* anywhere in his description of Chanuka. Rather, he speaks of *simcha*, instead of *hoda'a*. [Perhaps Rambam had a variant text in the Gemara.] Moreover, Rambam includes Al haNisim in *Hilchot Tefilla* (2:13), together with other insertions for various special days. Apparently Al haNisim, what we term *hoda'a*, is not a special Chanuka insertion. It is comparable to Yaaleh v'Yavo and other insertions that mark particular days. Hallel however, is mentioned in Rambam's *Hilchot Chanuka* and seems to comprise the core of the Yom Tov. As

¹⁰ R. Zolty notes that the *Shiltei Giborim* on the Rif takes this approach. It is unclear why he does not reference that this is the position of *Shelitot* as well.

¹¹ *Mishnat Yaavetz*, no. 73. He cites a *Piskei Ria*"z that the term *hoda'a* referred to in the Gemara is accomplished through *hadlakat neiroi*.

¹² See Rav Betzalel Naor, *Emunat Itecha* pages 59-63.

¹³ See *Or Sameach* on the Rambam, *Hilchot Chanuka* 3:3, based on Rambam's position, *Hilchot Temidim Umusafim* 3:10, that the Menorah in Beit haMikdash was kindled during the day as well as at night.

such, it seems difficult to assume that lighting candles is a fulfillment of *hoda'a*, a concept that Rambam never refers to in *Hilchot Chanuka*.

It seems that for Rambam, *hadlakat haner* was not part of the original Chanuka celebration. It was a later enactment. However, the purpose of the later enactment for Rambam was not to rekindle Mikdash lights that have extinguished, but to publicize the miracle (*leharot ulegalot haneis*). The original Chanuka was a time of *simcha* and *hallel*. It was a Yom Tov for us to celebrate on our own. Later on the idea of *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle to outsiders was enacted.

Popular culture today stresses the *pirsumei nisa* element of Chanuka. The public display of our values to an otherwise value-starved world, is often viewed as a cornerstone of the Chanuka celebration. According to our analysis however, for both Rashi and the Rambam, the public face of Chanuka, in fact the entire institution of *hadlakat haner*, came about much later. The original Chanuka was not about spreading our values to others, but was about cultivating a proper internal sense of *hallel* and *hoda'a*—gratitude for the miracles bestowed upon us and offering appropriate thanks for these miracles.