

Where to Place the Menorah

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 21b) tells us that the proper place to put the Chanukah lights is in front of one's home, so that all the passers-by will notice the lights, and thereby the greatest possible *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle) will be achieved. However, if it is a *sha'as hasakanah* (a time of persecution), it is sufficient to leave the menorah inside one's home. At one point in the discourse, the Gemara (*ibid* 22b, see also *Chidushei Sefas Emes*) clearly assumes that if the menorah is placed inside the home, the mitzvah is not fulfilled at all because an essential factor in the mitzvah of *ner Chanukah* is *pirsumei nisa*, and a private *pirsum*, serving only the *bnai habayis* (the members of the household), is not sufficient. At that point in the discourse, the Gemara clearly feels that the idea of placing the menorah on one's table *b'sha'as hasakanah* is merely to have a *zecher l'mitzvas ner Chanukah*, a remembrance of the mitzvah, without even partially fulfilling the mitzvah.

The *Sefas Emes* points out that once the Gemara reaches its conclusion, this assumption is no longer necessary, and may be rejected. One may assume that lighting in one's home *b'sha'as hasakanah* is not merely for the purpose of having a *zecher l'mitzvas ner Chanukah*, but actually represents an incomplete *kiyum hamitzvah* (fulfillment) of *ner Chanukah*; the *pirsumei nisa* for the *bnai habayis* constitutes a partial *kiyum hamitzvah*. This is obviously the position of *bnai chutz la'aretz*, those living in the Diaspora, for



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

YUHSB Class of 1958
Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

the past several centuries, who recite all the *berachos* upon our lighting inside the home. If it were only a fulfillment of *zecher l'ner Chanukah*, it would probably not warrant all the *berachos*.

In his collection of *drashos* on the Torah, the *Sefas Emes* has an interesting comment regarding this change in practice with respect to the *makom hadlokas haneiros* (proper place to light the lights). The Chanukah lights, explains the *Sefas Emes*, represent the *ohr haTorah* (light of Torah). Years ago, the inside of the Jewish homes were saturated with Jewish values, and the placing of the menorah outside the home, just near the doorpost, represented an attempt to keep the foreign influence of the street from penetrating within. Nowadays, however, as the Gemara (*Avoda Zara* 8a) comments, the Jews who live in *chutz la'aretz* “worship *avoda zara b'tahara*,” and even the insides of their homes fall prey to many foreign influences and elements. Today, it is necessary to light the *ohr haTorah* inside to chase out the foreign notions.

One verse in Mishlei (6:23) contrasts the effectiveness of learning Torah with that of fulfilling mitzvos, declaring, “*ki ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr*” — the illumination gained

from doing a mitzvah is compared to the light of a small candle, while that gained from learning Torah is likened to the brilliance of a torch” (see *Sotah* 21a). A verse in Tehillim (119:45), however, compares even the illumination gained from Torah learning to the light of a candle — “*ner leragli devarecha, ve'or le'nesivasi*,” Your words are a candle for my feet and a light for my path. The medrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* to Tehillim 119, *siman* 478), commenting on that verse, explains that when one has just started to learn Torah, he should not feel that he is already competent enough to develop an entire life philosophy — his own *hashkofas olam*. Only after much learning does the power of illumination of Torah change from a *ner* to an *ohr*, from a candle to a light.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88b, see also Rashi ad loc.) draws a distinction between two groups of people who learn Torah, which it refers to as the *meiyaminim* (those on the right) and the *masmeilim* (those on the left). For those who learn Torah with *amal* and *yegiah* (toil and effort), learning becomes a life-preserving elixir. For those who learn, but without such a great commitment, and without *yegiah* and *amal*, learning will become a source of confusion, and a toxic drug.



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Every person is enveloped in the *choshech* (darkness) of our *alma d'shikra* (world of falsities). The verse in *Borchi Nafshi* (Tehillim 104:20) states, “*toshes choshech veyehi layla*,” You make darkness and it becomes night. The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 83b) comments on this verse, “*zeh ha'olam hazeh shedomen lelaylah*,” this refers to this world which is comparable to night. Our *chachomim* have taught us that “a small amount of light cancels **much** darkness,” but not **all** of the darkness. If one learns **much** Torah with great *yegiah*, he can dispel **all** of the *choshech*. If one has only **begun** to learn Torah, and only reached the level of *ner leragli devarecha*, then he will be in a state of *ohr vechoshech mishtamshim b'irbuvyah* — light and darkness mixed together [See *Sichos Mussar*, by

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt”l, *Parshas Vayetzei* 5733]. We sometimes hear of Orthodox rabbis espousing anti-Torah views even though these rabbis learned in yeshivas. The mere earning of *semicha* from a recognized yeshiva does not mean that a person is qualified to *pasken a shayla* (respond to a halachic question). If one has *ohr vechoshech mishtamshim b'irbuvyah* in his own mind, he can never tell whether his opinion on any halachic matter is rooted in the *ohr* of Torah or in the *choshech* of foreign influences. The *Shulchan Aruch* (Rema, *Yoreh Deah* 242:3) quotes the statement of the Rambam, that those students of the Torah who *pasken shaylas* even though they are “*lo higyvu l'hora'ah*” (not qualified to issue rulings) are “extinguishing the illumination of the Torah.”

This statement of the Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch* was made when the *shaylas* were usually standard, straight-forward ones rooted in Gemara and *poskim*. It is even truer today, when Klal Yisroel is faced with new types of *shaylas*, many of which have no clear precedent in halachic literature. These new *shaylas* require *poskim* of great stature, who have such a broad understanding of halacha that they have even refined their intuitions and instincts to think in terms of Torah. Let us continue to light the Chanukah menorah inside our homes to chase out the foreign influences that have already crept in. May we all merit an abundance of *ohr* to succeed in dispelling **all** of the *choshech*.

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