

How Many are there, Really?

Counting the Mitzvos of Chanukah and Purim

In the *koseres*, or header, to *Hilchos Megillah VaChanukah* in the *Yad HaChazakah*, the Rambam posits:

יש בכללן שתי מצוות עשה מדברי סופרים
ואינן מן המנין.

The laws of Megillah and Chanukah include two positive mitzvos established by the Rabbis, which are not included among the 613 mitzvos of the Torah.

This seemingly innocuous line becomes troubling when the rest of *Hilchos Megillah VaChanukah* is taken into account.¹ A simple tally shows that six mitzvos are mentioned by the Rambam in *Hilchos Megillah VaChanukah*: *krias hamegillah*, *mishteh*, *mishloach manos*, *matanos l'evyonim*, *hadlakas neiros Chanukah*, and Hallel. The *koseres* states that only two mitzvos will be discussed, while the Rambam in fact presents six — including the mitzvah of Hallel, a mitzvah that applies to holidays throughout the year — in the halachos that follow.

The answer lies within the foundational basis of the six aforementioned obligations. By identifying the two underlying objectives — and the rationale behind them — it is possible to group the array of commandments into two baskets, with each of the components driving at the same goal. In order to do this, we must take an individual look at each of the mitzvos.

In answering why those who do not understand *Lashon HaKodesh* (Hebrew) can still fulfill *krias hamegillah* in Hebrew, the Gemara in *Megillah* presents an incomplete resolution:



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מצוות קריאה ופרסומי ניסא הכא נמי מצוות קריאה ופרסומי ניסא.

[With regards to] *krias hamegillah* and *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle), in [the case where a listener did not understand what was being read,] he still fulfills the mitzvah of *krias hamegillah* and *pirsumei nisa*.

Megillah 18a

Rashi is bothered by the fact that the Gemara rules that they have fulfilled the obligation of *pirsumei nisa*, since publicizing at the very least connotes an understanding of the miracle on the part of the listener, which is absent if the listener does not understand Hebrew. Rashi explains that listeners who don't understand the words of the megillah as it is being read will at least ask others for an explanation of what they are hearing, and in this way will become familiarized with the story of the miracle of Purim. Through this knowledge, they are naturally involved with, and therefore fulfill *pirsumei nisa* and consequently, *krias hamegillah*.

In regard to *neiros Chanukah*, the Rambam describes a situation in which the person who lit the candles would not fulfill the mitzvah:

וְיָרַח חֲנֻכָּה שֶׁהֵנִיחוּ לְמַעַלָּה מִעֶשְׂרִים אַמָּה לֹא עָשָׂה כְּלוּם לְפִי שְׂאִינוֹ נִכְרָה.

A person who lit Chanukah candles at a height of least twenty amos (30-40

feet) above the ground has not fulfilled his obligation because the candles are not easily observable.

Hilchos Chanukah 4:7

Rashi states explicitly in *Shabbos* 22b, that if the candles are lit at such a height that passersby fail to notice or identify the candles, the candles fail to serve their purpose, namely publicizing the miracle of Chanukah. Once they lose this capacity, they can no longer be used to fulfill *pirsumei nisa* and, accordingly, the mitzvah of lighting *neiros Chanukah*.

In both cases, it is evident that one who fails to properly achieve the necessary level of *pirsumei nisa* also fails to fulfill *krias hamegillah* and *neiros Chanukah*. In other words, *pirsumei nisa* — which at the very least entails the performer's recognition of the miracle — is essential to the fulfillment of the mitzvah. The obligations of *krias hamegillah* and *neiros Chanukah* are merely vehicles used to properly express and execute the mitzvah of *pirsumei nisa*. They serve as halachic formulations and formalizations of the underlying obligation, namely *pirsumei nisa*. *Pirsumei nisa* is basket number one, *krias hamegillah* and *neiros Chanukah* its two constituents.²

In order to form basket number two, the root cause of the remaining four

mitzvos — *mishteh, mishloach manos, matanos l'evyonim* and *Hallel* — must be identified.

After explaining the halachos of megillah, the Rambam goes on to describe the obligation of feasting:

ביצד חובת סעודה זו. שיאכל בשר ויתקן סעודה נאה כפי אשר תמצא ידו. ושותה יין עד שישתכר ויגרום בשכרותו. וכן חייב אדם לשלח שתי מנות בשר או שני מיני תבשיל או שני מיני אכלין לחברו שנאמר (אסתר ט-יט) "ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו", שתי מנות לאיש אחד. וכל המרבה לשלח לרעים משבח. ואם אין לו מחליף עם חברו זה שולח לזה סעדתו וזה שולח לזה סעדתו כדי למים ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו:

What is the obligation of feasting? One must eat wine and prepare a nice meal in accordance to what he can afford, and should drink wine until he falls asleep from his drunkenness. And similarly, there is an obligation to send two portions of meat or cooked food or any ready to eat food, as it says in Megillas Esther, "and the sending of portions between friends" portions implies two per person. Whoever sends a lot of portions to friends is praiseworthy. If he does not have enough [money to do so] he can swap meals (needed for the obligation of mishteh) with a friend in order to fulfill his obligation of mishloach manos.

Hilchos Megillah 2:15

The halachos of *mishloach manos* are put in the same paragraph as the halachos of *mishteh*. To connect the two, the Rambam uses the word "*v'chen*" — and similarly — which connotes a continuation of the halachos of *mishteh*. Furthermore, *mishloach manos* must be food that is ready to eat, because if it is not, the person who received it cannot use it for his *seudah*. Two people can exchange their *seudos* and thereby fulfill their obligation of *mishloach manos*.

All of this points to the conclusion that *mishloach manos* is an outgrowth of *mishteh*. Each is a mitzvah in its own right, yet the two share the same fundamental purpose. In other words, *mishloach manos* is an extension of *mishteh*, and therefore should share its thematic underpinnings, whatever they may be.

The famous Rambam in *Hilchos Shvisas Yom Tov* explains the requirement for enjoying a feast through meat and wine:

אין שמחה אלא בבשר ואין שמחה אלא בייין. *There is no simcha (happiness) where there is no meat and wine.*

Hilchos Shvisas Yom Tov 6:18

The halachic requirement of enjoying meat and wine is the very definition of *mishteh*, and clearly stems from the halachic requirement of *simcha*. *Simcha* is not merely one of the pleasant effects of *mishteh*, but rather its purpose and motive. It follows, then, that *mishloach manos*, a corollary of *mishteh*, is grounded in *simcha* as well.

The connection between *simcha* and *matanos l'evyonim* is highlighted beautifully by the Rambam, as he explains that *matanos l'evyonim* takes monetary priority over the *mishteh* and *mishloach manos*:

אין שם שמחה גדולה ומפארה אלא לשמח לב עניים ויתומים ואלמנות וגרים.

There is no greater, more splendid joy than gladdening the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the converts.

Hilchos Megillah 2:17

Matanos l'evyonim is not merely a new name for the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. The goal of giving on Purim is to enhance the *simcha* of both the supporter and the supported; the benefactor is also the beneficiary. He attains an even greater level of *simchas yom tov* by helping a fellow Jew.

Hallel is recited as an expression of *simcha* as well. When listing the days in which *Hallel* is recited, the Rambam explains why *Hallel* is omitted on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur:

אבל ראש השנה ויום הכפורים אין בהן הלל לפי שהן ימי תשובה ויראה ופחד לא ימי שמחה יתרה.

On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, Hallel is not recited because they are days of repentance, awe and fear, not days of excessive happiness.

Hilchos Chanukah 3:6

Hallel is a means to verbalize and possibly expand the scope of our *simcha*. By acknowledging our indebtedness and dependency while also celebrating our relationship with God, we become filled with joy, pride, and a sense of fulfillment.

Basket number two has now been woven. *Mishteh, mishloach manos, matanos l'evyonim* and *Hallel* are all motivated by the core obligation of *simcha* on Chanukah and Purim, some as expressions of and others as catalysts for joy. *Simcha* is the intention and objective of these mitzvos, while the obligations themselves are formal means used for reaching the goal of *simcha*.

This fits beautifully with the words of the Rambam when he first introduces the mitzvos of Purim:

מצות יום י"ד לבני כפרים ועירות ויום ט"ו לבני כפרים להיות יום שמחה ומשתה ומשלוח מנות לרעים ומתנות לאביונים.

It is a mitzvah, on the fourteenth (of Adar) for those living in villages and unwalled cities, and on the fifteenth (of Adar) for those living in walled cities, to make the set day a time of happiness and feasting in which food portions are sent among friends and gifts are given to the poor.

Hilchos Megillah 2:14

The Rambam mentions the mitzvos of Purim that are a part of the “simcha basket,” namely *mishteh*, *mishloach manos* and *matanos l’evyonim*, immediately after the obligation to be happy on Purim.³ Furthermore, in addressing these three obligations, the Rambam uses the word “mitzvas,” which means “the one mitzvah,” effectively regarding all three obligations as one. This unquestionably drives at a synthesis and unification of the mitzvos on a fundamental level.

The Rambam, therefore, is quite consistent throughout *Hilchos Megillah VaChanukah*. The *koseres* outlines the two underlying mitzvos from which the specific mitzvos *hayom* stem, while the halachos explain how they express themselves through the six obligations. The six mitzvos are rabbinic mediums that we use to bring

pirumei nisa and *simcha* into our Purim and Chanukah celebrations.

Endnotes

1 Citings of the six mitzvos mentioned by the Rambam:

קריאת המגילה בזמנה מצות עשה מדברי סופרים.
Reading the megillah in its proper time is a positive mitzvah established by the Rabbis.
Hilchos Megillah 1:1

מצות יום י"ד לבני כפרים ועירות ויום ט"ו לבני כפרים להיות יום שמחה ומשתה ומשלוה מנות לרעים ומתנות לאביונים.

It is a mitzvah, on the fourteenth (of Adar) for those living in villages and unwalled cities, and on the fifteenth (of Adar) for those living in walled cities, to make the set day a time of happiness and feasting in which food portions are sent among friends and gifts are given to the poor.

Hilchos Megillah 2:14

והדלקת הנרות בהן מצוה מדברי סופרים בקריאת המגילה.

Lighting candles on the days of Chanukah is a rabbinic mitzvah, like megillah reading.

Hilchos Chanukah 3:3

אף על פי שקריאת ההלל מצוה מדברי סופרים מברך עליו אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו כדרך שמברך על המגילה.

Even though the reading of Hallel is a rabbinic mitzvah, the blessing of “who sanctifies us with His commandments and commanded us” is recited, similarly to the way the blessing for megillah reading is formulated.

Hilchos Chanukah 3:5

2 This idea can also help explain the bracha of *SheAsah Nissim*, and why the only time it is said is before the mitzvos of *krias hamegillah* and *neiros Chanukah*. Since the underlying mitzvah is *pirumei nisa*, it is imperative to acknowledge the miracle that will be publicized through the fulfillment of the mitzvah. This blessing, therefore, which is a form of praise, is ensuring that the performer of the mitzvah has *pirumei nisa* in mind.

3 There is no Hallel on Purim because the reading of the megillah is Hallel in the sense that it praises and causes the listeners to praise and thank Hashem for the miracles which He performed.



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