

# TORAH, CULTURE AND THE COMMUNAL HAVDALAH

Shabbos Chanukah lives in the familial religious experience as an emotional, inspirational, and highly stressful weekend. Often, as families prepare for Shabbos, they leave themselves very little time on Friday to light the candles, sing *Maoz Tzur*, distribute the presents, and then make their way to shul for Mincha. Yet once the harried onset of Shabbos passes, the combination of Chanukah—which profoundly celebrates our communal identity—and the sacred atmosphere of the Shabbos home, creates a spiritually saturated day of rich family tradition. At the conclusion of Shabbos, the competing priorities of Chanukah candles and Havdalah are often addressed differently in the home and in the shul. The *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 681:2, writes that in shul, the Chanukah candles are lit before Havdalah. At home, the *Mishnah Berurah* 681:3 writes that many have the practice to recite Havdalah first.

R Moshe Soloveitchik (cited in *Nefesh Harav* pp. 222-223) accounts for this discrepancy by explaining the nature of *pirsumei nissah* (publicizing the miracle) in the synagogue. In our homes, the kindling takes place within the confines of our private space, and the *pirsumei nissah* is reflected on those outside the home who view the candles. In shul, the congregation itself forms a community worthy of its own experience of *pirsumei*

*nissah*. For this reason, we have a custom to light the menorah in shul between Mincha and Maariv, when the congregation is in the middle of its “gathering” for services. On Motzaei Shabbos, we obviously must wait until the conclusion of Maariv to light the candles, because we cannot light on Shabbos. But after Havdalah, no further prayers are recited by the congregation. Once Havdalah is recited, on a halachic level, the congregation disbands into a collection of individuals, no longer comprising a larger entity. Yet while anticipating Havdalah, the congregation retains the status of community. Therefore, explains Rav Moshe, we light the candles before the formal Havdalah in order to do so while the congregation has the status of a halachic community.

This interpretation conveys a fundamental principle regarding the idea of community in Jewish life. The community is not simply a common space for individuals to gather in their own service to G-d. The community is a living entity that is defined by its shared values and shared pursuits. Only while we are bound by our shared obligation in Havdalah are we classified as a singular unit regarding the lighting of the menorah. Our common goals, ambitions, and immediate engagement ultimately defines us as a community. As individuals, we each have a sense of

our personal religious goals, and the approach to societal engagement that is right for us. But these decisions are not only personal. Engaging with contemporary culture and its values impacts the community around us. It isn't exclusively a personal or familial decision, and it influences the tone and identity of our larger community. Parents are familiar with what happens when the first member of the class procures some new technological device — it affects the way many others will now address these challenges.

Part of what defines our community is Havdalah — the degree to which we preserve and nurture our uniqueness from the world around us. This issue of *Torah To Go* explores the relationship between our community and our surrounding culture. While each individual and family must consider their personal approach, we must also recognize that our collective identity is impacted greatly by those personal decisions. The discussions in this volume are intended to address these issues substantively and honestly. May we each find the strength to navigate these complex issues with courage and conviction, and may our individual choices help shape a community of nuance and depth.

