



HAKARAS HATOV IS ONE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Chanukah is the Jewish Thanksgiving. If you are ever looking for the halachos of Hallel in the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, you will not find them in *Hilchos Tefillah* (the laws of prayer), nor will you be able to locate them in *Hilchos Yom Tov* or the halachos of Rosh Chodesh. You will discover all the laws of Hallel only in *Hilchos Chanukah*.

There are three ways in which Chazal instructed us to commemorate the victories of Chanukah: Saying Hallel, lighting candles, and including Al Hanisim in *Hodaah* (the berachos giving thanks in Shemoneh Esrei and Birkas Hamazon). While Hallel has

no specific mention of the victories of Chanukah, the candles represent the miracle of the oil supernaturally lasting for eight days, and Al Hanisim is a statement of thanksgiving, *hakaras hatov*, for the military victory.

Why did Chazal institute two distinct commemorations for the victories of Chanukah? Why not say Al Hanisim when we light our candles?

Many point out that Al Hanisim contains no clear reference to the miracle of the oil. In fact, Al Hanisim is recited as part of our daily thanksgiving prayer for “daily miracles” — *al nisechah shebechol yom imanu*. The implication is that Chazal wanted us to recognize that there

are two distinct components to the victory of Chanukah that should not be blurred. In a sense, the war against Yavan had two battlefronts.

The more difficult battlefront was a philosophical battle. Yavan focused on and glorified the body, and nature in general, to the exclusion of miracle and any higher goal for it. Instead of viewing the body as a vehicle for a covenant with God, they insisted that the body was perfect and Bris Milah was mutilation. How could the Jews ever prove that nature has a master and a purpose? This battle was waged by God Himself and was won with an inexplicable demonstration of *neis*. Namely, the oil lasting far longer than

was naturally possible.

The other battlefield was a physical one. A military war for independence. The Jews won in miraculous fashion, but by physical, explainable means.

There are therefore two distinct commemorations of the two victories of Chanukah, each in its proper place. While the candles have their physical and commemorative location related to the home, Al Hanisim, the commemoration of the military victory, finds its expression alongside all our other daily recognitions of hidden miracles.

An important message we can derive from Al Hanisim is the importance of recognizing and thanking Hashem for even those things that we, so to speak, accomplished ourselves. It is critical to both recognize and thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for things He does for us in hidden ways, and thereby recognize the true source of our victories in life.

This type of *hakaras hatov* is not just a behavior; it is a *middah*, a perspective, and a life outlook that God wants us to develop. We know this, because *hakaras hatov* is one of the Ten Commandments.

The first four of the Ten Commandments are in a clear sequence. 1. Know/believe in God. 2. Do not believe in or worship any other gods. 3. Relate to the name of God with reverence. 4. Keep Shabbos as a testimony that He is the Creator. The fifth one however, is to honor one's parents. Not only does it fail to

maintain the sequence, but it is the first mitzvah that is no longer between man and God — it is *bein adam lechaveiro!*

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 33) explains how the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'eim* actually continues the sequence:

משרשי מצוה זו, שראוי לו לאדם שיכיר ויגמל חסד למי שעשה עמו טובה, ולא יהיה נבל ומתנכר וכפוי טובה שזו מדה רעה ומאוסה בתכלית לפני אלקים ואנשים. ושיתן אל לבו כי האב והאם הם סבת היותו בעולם, ועל כן באמת ראוי לו לעשות להם כל כבוד וכל תועלת שיוכל, כי הם הביאוהו לעולם, גם יגעו בו כמה יגיעות בקטנתו, וכשיקבע זאת המדה בנפשו יעלה ממנה להכיר טובת האל ברוך הוא שהוא סבתו וסבת כל אבותיו עד אדם הראשון, ושהוציאו לאויר העולם וספק צרכו כל ימיו והעמידו על מתכנתו ושלמות אבריו, ונתן בו נפש יודעת ומשכלת, שאלולי הנפש שחננו האל, יהיה כסוס כפרד אין הבין, ויעריך במחשבתו כמה וכמה ראוי להזהר בעבודתו ברוך הוא.

From the roots of this commandment is that it is fitting for a person to acknowledge and return kindness to people who were good to him, and not to be an ungrateful scoundrel, because that is a bad and repulsive attribute before God and people. And he should take to heart that the father and the mother are the cause of his being in the world; and hence it is truly fitting to honor them in every way and give every benefit he can to them, because they brought him to the world, and worked hard for him when he was little. And once he fixes this idea in his soul, he will move up from it to recognize the good of God, Blessed be He, who is his cause and the cause of all his ancestors until the first man (Adam),

and that he took him out into the world's air, and fulfilled his needs every day, and made his body strong and able to stand, and gave him a mind that knows and learns — for without the mind that God granted him, he would be 'like a horse or a mule who does not understand.' And he should think at length about how very fitting it is to be careful in his worship of the Blessed be He.

Kibbud av v'eim is more than mere behaviors, it is supposed to be the actions resulting from the correct perspective of *hakaras hatov*. When we recognize and appreciate our parents as the source of our physical existence, we integrate into our thinking a *middah*, a perspective, of recognition and appreciation for “source.” Such a perspective will then result in the same recognition, appreciation, and behavior toward our ultimate source, Hashem Himself.

Chanukah is the holiday of *hakaras hatov*. Our lives, our independence, and our religion were rescued. An important message to be annually reconsidered and integrated into our thinking is how critical *hakaras hatov* is — not just as the proper behavior of a sensitive, caring human being, but as a function of our religious personality. Every time we recognize and appreciate what another person has done for us, we are further integrating into our consciousness the *middah* of recognition of source. Ultimately this life perspective is to lead to a constant feeling of gratitude to Hakadosh Barch Hu, which transforms our *avodas Hashem* into one of *simchah*.



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