

Introduction

Chanukah enjoys a special place in the larger beating heart of the Jewish people. Jewish population surveys have confirmed for decades that the lighting of Chanukah candles remains the most observed religious ritual throughout the Jewish world.

The Gemarah, *Shabbos* 21a, explains that the Chanukah candles must be lit “*ad shetichleh regel min hashuk*,” until the population has left the marketplace. As the *Tur, Orach Chaim* 672 explains:

מצותה מסוף שקיעת החמה עד חצי שעה מן הלילה שאז העם עוברין ושבין ורואין בביתם ואיכא פירסומי ניסא.

The mitzvah is from the end of sundown through a half hour of the night, which is when the people are passing by and will see [the candles lit] in the homes and the miracle is publicized.



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The goal of kindling the Chanukah candles is to publicize the remarkable miracle that took place in the unexpected military victory of the Chashmonaim, and the supernatural endurance of the small flask of oil that served to fuel the flames of the Menorah for a total of eight days.

While the contemporary application of this halacha is complex, as in many locations one may find people awake and benefiting from the candles well beyond the Gemarah’s prescribed time, the Rishonim debate the parameters of this requirement. According to the Rambam, *Hilchos Chanukah UMegillah* 4:5, if the

required time has passed, one may no longer light the candles:

אין מדליקין נרות חנוכה קודם שתשקע החמה אלא עם שקיעתה לא מאחרין ולא מקדימין, שכח או הזיד ולא הדליק עם שקיעת החמה מדליק והולך עד שתכלה רגל מן השוק, וכמה הוא זמן זה כמו חצי שעה או יתר, עבר זמן זה אינו מדליק.

One may not light Chanukah candles before sundown, but rather one should light with sundown, not before and not after. If one forgot or intentionally skipped lighting at sundown, one may light until the population has left the marketplace. How much time is this? About a half hour or a little longer. If this time passed, one may not light.

Before walking to the window to proclaim the eternality of the Jewish people, and G-d’s miraculous hand in our history, we must first soul-search within our own home and our own lives to discover the internal spark that can fuel our own fire of inspiration.



According to the Rashba, *Shabbos* 21b, one is permitted to light the candles for the remainder of the night:

והא נמי דקתני עד שתכלה רגל מן השוק
ופרישנא דאי לא אדליק מדליק. לאו למימרא
דאי לא אדליק בתוך שיעור זה אינו מדליק,
דהא תנן (מגילה כ' ב') כל שמצותו בלילה
כשר כל הלילה, אלא שלא עשה מצוה כתקנה
דליכא פרסומי ניסא כולי האי ומיהו אי לא
אדליק מדליק ולא הפסיד אלא כעושה מצוה
שלא כתקנה לגמרי.

That which it states "until the population has left the marketplace," which I explained that if one has not yet lit, one can light during this time, this is not to say that if one didn't light within this (later) time, one doesn't light at all ... rather one does not fulfill the mitzvah properly because the miracle is not publicized that well. However, if one did not light [while the population is still in the marketplace], one lights and does not lose out. It is like performing a mitzvah in an incomplete manner.

The *Minchas Meir* no. 32, suggests that according to the Rambam, the mitzvah of lighting the menorah is fundamentally one of "*pirsumei nisah*," an act of publicizing the miracle. Therefore, if the kindling takes place devoid of that impact, it is essentially worthless. In contrast, the Rashba is of the opinion that the mitzvah is to light the candles as a personal testament to the miracle of Chanukah, and this obligation was extended by the Chachamim to include a public dimension — *pirsumei nisah*.

Initially, the opinion of the Rambam seems more intuitive. The mitzvah of lighting the menorah is inherently

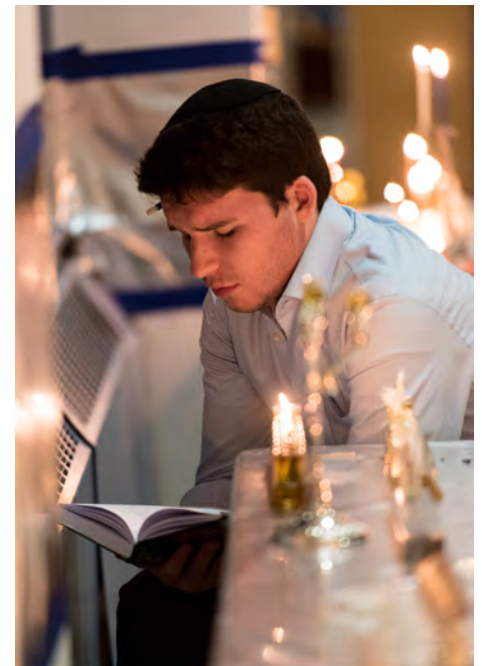
a public expression of our *hallel* and *hodaah* to G-d for his miracles and wonders of sustaining Am Yisrael throughout our tumultuous journey over the course of Jewish history. Why would Rashba interject this two-tiered system, of first imposing the obligation on a personal and formal level, and only subsequently adding the layer of *pirsumei nisah*?

**We live our lives in
the *reshus harabim*,
the public domain,
but before aspiring to
illuminate its streets,
we turn inward to light
our own candle, and
bask in the light and
the warmth of what it
means to be a Jew.**

Perhaps the answer is that before we can successfully represent Judaism to the rest of the world, we need to cultivate a love and devotion to it within ourselves. Before walking to the window to proclaim the eternity of the Jewish people, and G-d's miraculous hand in our history, we must first soul-search within our own home and our own lives to discover the internal spark that can fuel our own fire of inspiration. There is value

in lighting the candle for ourselves and our own families. Chanukah is a mitzvah of "*ner ish ubeiso*" — it's a mitzvah that is rooted in the home. The Gemarah, *Shabbos* 22a, tells us that the menorah is situated on the left side of the doorpost so that we are surrounded by the mezuzah and the menorah on each side. To build a healthy and inspired Jewish home, there needs to be a parchment representing Torah on one side, and fire of passion and inspiration on the other. We live our lives in the *reshus harabim*, the public domain, but before aspiring to illuminate its streets, we turn inward to light our own candle, and bask in the light and the warmth of what it means to be a Jew.

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