

Where Are the Candles?!

Rav David Dudkevich – Rav of Yitzhar

Ask any child, "What do we do on Pesach?" and he will reply, "We eat matzah." Ask him, "And what do we do on Chanukah?" and his immediate response will be, "We light the Chanukah candles." However, let us see if the sources support this answer.

The Gemara (BT Shabbat 21b) discusses two Chanukah miracles - the Hasmonean victory over the Greeks as well as finding the flask of oil which burned for eight days in the Beit HaMikdash – and then concludes:

"לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה."

"The following year, they set them and established them as festival days with praise and thanksgiving."

Because of the miracle, they decreed that all future generations would celebrate these days of festival and *hallel* (praise). Note, however, that the Gemara does not say that they ruled that the generations would light Chanukah candles! Why not?! Why did Chazal not mention lighting the Chanukah candles, which many consider to be Chanukah's primary *mitzvah*?!

In fact, the same question also applies to the *Al HaNissim* prayer, which we recite on Chanukah during the *Amidah* and *Birkat HaMazon*. *Al HaNissim* includes the words:

"וקבעו שמונת ימי חנוכה אלו להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול."

"And they established these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and to praise Your great Name."

Here too, there is no mention of the *mitzvah* of lighting the Chanukah candles!

Yet, it would be a mistake to think that Chazal "forgot" about the Chanukah candles, and thus, let us try to explain this matter one step at a time.

Both the Gemara and *Al HaNissim* indicate that Chazal incorporated two elements into our Chanukah observance: *hallel* (praise) and *hoda'ah* (thanksgiving). What is the difference between the two? Conventional wisdom holds that *hallel* refers to the recitation of the *Hallel* prayer and *hoda'ah* refers to the recitation of *Al HaNissim*. However, the answer is far more complex.

There are two ways to praise and thank Hashem for His miracles and wonders:

1. With our mouths. (As we say in the *Nishmat* prayer, "כי כל פה לך יודה" – "For every mouth shall give thanks to You.")
2. With our actions.

On Chanukah, we use our mouths to recite *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim*, and we take action by lighting the Chanukah candles.

These two methods of thanksgiving complement each other. While the spoken *hallel* and *hoda'ah* describe and spell out the magnitude of Hashem's miracles and *chassadim* (kindnesses), the Chanukah candles serve as a concrete representation of those same miracles. In other words, our



hallel and *hoda'ah* connect our thoughts and speech to our actions.

A comparison of *Al HaNissim* and *Hallel* also serves to distinguish between *hallel* and *hoda'ah*. *Hallel* focuses primarily on the eternal nature of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* benevolence and miracles:

”חסדי ה' כי תמנו כי לא כלו רחמינו.”

“The kindnesses of Hashem never cease; His mercies never end.” (Eichah 3:22)

The core of *Hallel* is:

”הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו.”

“Give thanks to Hashem for He is good; for His kindness is eternal.” (Tehillim 118:1)

Hence, we do not refer to specific miracles – including the Chanukah miracle – during our recitation of *Hallel*. (The sole exception is the Exodus from Egypt, because that is the source for reciting *Hallel*.)

In contrast, *Al HaNissim* describes the specific miraculous event for which we now give thanks. Therefore, on both Chanukah and Purim, *Al HaNissim* includes a detailed description of the great miracle that occurred on that festival.

The two elements of Chanukah - *hallel* and *hoda'ah* – work together. *Hallel* reminds us that the private miracle comes to teach us a larger lesson – namely, that Hashem is always with us. And *hoda'ah* – as represented by *Al HaNissim* – reminds us that Hashem is even willing to reverse the very course of nature and to perform miracles for His beloved children.

Thus, these prayers do not only express gratitude for the past but also convey our faith and hopes for the present and the future. Just as Hashem's *chassadim* manifested themselves in glorious wonder during the time of Matityahu and his holy sons, so too, we have faith and anticipate salvation and redemption in our own time. Hence, some prayer books include the following line in *Al HaNissim*:

”וכשם שעשית עמהם נס, כך עשה עמנו ה' אלוקינו נסים ונפלאות בעת הזאת ונודה לשמך הגדול. סלה.”

“And just as You performed a miracle for them, so too, Hashem, our God, perform miracles and wonders for us at this time, and we will thank Your great Name. *Sela*.”

In conclusion, we express our gratitude with both our speech and our actions – in order to demonstrate that we want all our deeds to reflect our recognition of the Creator and His Divine Providence. Furthermore, we hope to serve Hashem soon in the *Beit HaMikdash* in the same way: with our mouths and with our deeds. This is the message of Chanukah, which is when we commemorate the renewal of the *Avodah* in the *Beit HaMikdash* – the place where *avodat halev* (literally, the service of the heart) and *avodat hakorbanot* (literally, the service of the sacrifices) are joined together; the place where the heavens and the earth meet.

May Hashem perform miracles for us – as He did for our forefathers – speedily and in our days.

Educational Musings

Rav Dudkevich's article contains several important spiritual lessons, including:

1. Our commemoration of the Chanukah miracle is not only meant to remind us of this supernatural miracle. Rather, it serves to help us understand, identify, and appreciate the miracles contained within nature. We often overlook these miracles – in spite of the fact that they are right in front of us and are an intrinsic part of our lives:

”שבכל יום עמנו... ערב ובקר וצהריים.”

“Which are with us every day... evening and morning and afternoon.” (From the *Amidah* prayer)

2. Completeness can only be achieved by a combination of speech and action.
3. Our goal must be to ensure that our faith in Hashem is not only manifested in our speech but also in our actions and our entire way of life.

”חשוף זרוע קדשך וקרב קץ הישועה.”

“Reveal the force of Your holiness, and hasten the end of the salvation.”

(From *Ma'oz Tzur*)