

Lighting Chanukah Candles in Shul

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In formulating the *mitzvah* to light candles on Chanukah, the Gemara (Shabbos 21b) uses the term "*ner ish u'beiso*" meaning, in effect, that the basic requirement is to light one candle per home, as explained by Rashi (*ibid. s.v. ner*); the Rambam (*Hilchos Chanukah 4:1*) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim 671:2*) rule accordingly. The Gemara then explains that the candle must be placed outside the doorway of the house which opens to the street; again, the Rambam (4:7) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (671:5) rule accordingly. The Gemara later (23a) discusses the status of an *achsenai*, that is, one who is a guest at the home of another during Chanukah, and the Rambam (4:11) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (677) elaborate on the *halachos* which apply to such a person, noting, as the Gemara itself says, that there is significance to having someone light in one's home even if he himself will not be there. It is clear from these sources, among others, that the primary fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles is when one lights, or has someone else light, in one's own home.

The *Tur*, however (OC 671), indicates that there is a practice to light Chanukah candles in Shul as well. The *Shibolei HaLekket* (185) also cites this practice, but he questions its validity, asking why it should be necessary to light in Shul when the fact is that the people in Shul all light in their homes anyway. He justifies the practice only if there are guests who sleep in the Shul, who would then have to light there because the Shul becomes like their home, or if the person in charge of maintaining the Shul lives there, in which case it is his home, but not if nobody lives or sleeps there. Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann (*Teshuvos Melamed Leho'il* OC 121) asserts that indeed none of the well known earlier *Rishonim*, such as the Rif, the Rosh, and the Rambam, even mention this practice at all. Other *Rishonim*, however, such as the Baal HaIttur (Part II *Hilchos Chanukah 114b*), do cite this practice without challenging it, and some offer suggestions as to its purpose.

The *Kol Bo* (44), for example, writes that the custom is to light Chanukah candles in Shul for the benefit of those who are not able or are not careful to light their own candles at home, as well as to enhance the overall *mitzvah* (the notion of *hiddur mitzvah*), to provide for additional publicizing of the miracle (*pirsumei nisa*), which the *Beis Yosef*, commenting on the *Tur* (*ibid*), says is a sanctification of Hashem's name when so many people can bless Him in public, and it also commemorates what used to happen in the *Beis HaMikdash* (*zecher l'Mikdash*), where lights

were lit each evening. Similarly, the *Sefer HaManhig* (*Hilchos Chanukah* 148) writes that there is a custom to light in Shul because a Shul is a *Mikdash Me'at*, a "miniature version" of the *Beis HaMikdash*, as stated by the Gemara in *Megillah* (29a), based upon a verse in *Yechezkel* (11:16), and it is therefore appropriate to commemorate this miracle which took place in the real *Beis HaMikdash* specifically there, especially since the miracle can be further publicized because so many people assemble in Shul.

The Rivash (111) states that the custom to light in Shul is an old one, and he mentions the idea of further publicizing the miracle, but he adds that since in his days, the Jews were living under the strong control of non-Jews and thus could not fulfill the *mitzvah* at home in the proper fashion, that is, by lighting the candles outside, as described above, the practice became to light the candles at one's home indoors, in which case the miracle could be publicized only to the members of one's household. In order, therefore, to have a more encompassing and demonstrative expression of the publicizing of the miracle, the custom was instituted to light in Shul as well. The Rivash also notes that the *berachos* over the Chanukah candles are recited prior to the lighting of the candles in Shul, even though this lighting is only a *minhag*, a custom, and not a real *mitzvah*. He explains that the usual *halachah* of not reciting a *berachah* before performing an act which is done only as a *minhag* applies specifically to less significant *minhagim*, but this *minhag*, which involves publicizing a miracle of Hashem in the presence of the community in Shul, is observed with the recitation of a *berachah*, similar to the practice of saying a *berachah* before the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, although that recitation of Hallel is, as stated by the Gemara in *Taanis* (28b), only a *minhag*.²²

The *Shulchan Aruch* (671:7) thus rules that Chanukah candles are to be lit in the Shul, and that the appropriate *berachos* should be recited, and the reason given is in order to publicize the miracle; the *Mishnah Berurah*, in his *Biur Halacha* (671 *s.v. ubebeis haknesses*), notes that this is true regardless of how and where people are able to perform the *mitzvah* of lighting the candles in their own homes, apparently rejecting the reasoning cited above from the Rivash. The Ramo (*ibid*) then writes, quoting the Rivash, that one cannot fulfill his personal obligation in this *mitzvah* through the candles lit in Shul, because, as the Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra ibid. s.v. v'ein*) explains, the *mitzvah* is to light in one's home, and one must therefore light again at home; the *Mishnah Berurah* (671:45) adds that this applies even to the *Chazzan* who actually recites the *berachah* and does the lighting in Shul. He then asserts, though, as does the *Shaarei Teshuvah* (671:11), that on the first night, one should not repeat the *berachah* of *Shehecheyanu* at home if he recited it in Shul, unless he is reciting it on behalf of other members of his household; Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe* OC 1:190) however, appears to disagree, and thus rules that in any case, one should repeat all the *berachos*, including *Shehecheyanu*, when lighting candles at home.

The Chacham Tzvi (88) raises an interesting question on the decision of the *Shulchan Aruch* that Chanukah candles should be lit in Shul with a *berachah*. As mentioned above, the Rivash explains that although lighting in Shul is only a *minhag*, a *berachah* may nevertheless be recited, just as a *berachah* is recited before saying Hallel on Rosh Chodesh which is also only a *minhag*.

²² See *Tosafos ibid s.v. amar, Shulchan Aruch* OC 422:1 with poskim there.

The problem raised by the Chacham Tzvi is that the *Shulchan Aruch* elsewhere (OC 422:2), following the position of the Rambam (*Hilchos Berachos* 11:16 and *Hilchos Chanukah* 3:7), actually rules that a *berachah* is *not* said before the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh; why then may a *berachah* be recited before lighting Chanukah candles in Shul? The Chacham Tzvi suggests that perhaps the *Shulchan Aruch* accepts the aforementioned view of the *Kol Bo* that lighting candles in Shul constitutes a kind of public sanctification of Hashem's name, and therefore a *berachah* is warranted, though he believes this answer is difficult, noting that there is no mention of this idea in the Gemara. He then proposes that perhaps the *Shulchan Aruch* accepts a combination of the reasons suggested by the Rivash and the *Kol Bo*, as presented above, but he leaves the matter in some doubt.

The *Beis Yosef*, in his commentary on the *Tur* cited above, presents an additional reason to light Chanukah candles in Shul, namely, that it is for the sake of the guests who stay in Shul because they have no home, which makes this similar to the practice instituted to recite *kiddush* in Shul on Friday nights for the sake of the guests who are staying there, as discussed by the Gemara in *Pesachim* (101a), and codified by the Rambam (*Hilchos Shabbos* 29:8) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 269:1). The implication is that just as the practice to recite *kiddush* in Shul on Friday night remains (in some communities) even though guests no longer stay in the Shul, so too, perhaps, the custom to light Chanukah candles in Shul remains even without guests staying in the Shul. The Chacham Tzvi, however, notes that this will not really solve our question, because the *Shulchan Aruch* seems to prefer that *kiddush* should *not* be recited in Shul in our days, when no guests stay there; the *Pri Chadash* (OC 671:7), though, draws a distinction between the two practices, and says that one can hold that *kiddush* should not be recited in Shul, but that candles should still be lit in Shul. The *Sdei Chemed* (*Asifas Dinim, Chanukah* 24) discusses other questions raised on this viewpoint; he concludes that the primary reason to light candles in Shul is for the benefit of those less observant Jews who may not fulfill the *mitzvah* at their homes.

It is worth noting that the Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra* OC 671:7) compares lighting candles in Shul to reciting Hallel in Shul on Pesach night for the sake of publicizing the miracle; the *Shulchan Aruch* (487:4) rules that this Hallel is recited with a *berachah*, although the Ramo disagrees with the entire practice, and thus it may be parallel to lighting Chanukah candles in Shul with a *berachah*. The *Kaf HaChaim* (OC 671:70) quotes this as well. Rav Ovadyah Yosef (*Yabia Omer* 7, OC 57:4) suggests another approach, pointing out that although lighting candles in Shul is a *minhag*, the notion of lighting candles on Chanukah (at home) is a *mitzvah*; it may thus be permissible to make a *berachah* before lighting in Shul since this is just an extension of an already existing *mitzvah*, unlike reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, which is not a *mitzvah* anywhere. He also adds (*ibid.* 5) that the practice to light in Shul was a practice originated by the *Chachomim* and the *Rabbonim*, and thus can be accompanied by the saying of a *berachah*, as opposed to the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh which was instituted by the people themselves, and thus can not be accompanied by a *berachah*. He concludes (*ibid.* 6, 7) that it may even be permissible to light candles with a *berachah* not only in Shul, but at other public gatherings during Chanukah as well, because this too publicizes the miracle.

The Ramo (671:7) writes that the practice is to light the candles in Shul between Minchah and

Maariv; the *Mishnah Berurah* (671:45) explains that this is the time when everybody is assembled in Shul, and if we would wait until after Maariv, people would be detained from getting home to light their own candles. The *Kaf HaChaim* (671:77) quotes that this time is literally the very beginning of the next day. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*ibid.*) rules that the *menorah* in the Shul ought to be placed along the southern wall of the Shul because, as the *Mishnah Berurah* (671:40) explains, the *menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* was on the southern wall: the *Baal HaIttur* cited above writes that it should be in the middle of the Shul, while the Ramo, in his *Darkei Moshe* on the *Tur* (671:6), quotes an opinion that it should be placed on the northern side. In the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Ramo adds that the candles should be arranged from east to west, as stated by the *Terumas HaDeshen* (104), quoted by the *Beis Yosef* on the *Tur*, although he writes that there are different practices about all of this,²³ revolving around the dispute cited in the Gemara in *Menachos* (98b) about how exactly the *menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* was positioned and lit, and he actually concludes that one should follow the *minhag* of his community, a decision accepted by the *Magen Avraham* (671:9). Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann, in his *teshuvah* cited above, as well as the *Sdei Chemed* cited above and the *Pri Megadim* (*Eishel Avraham* 670:2), among others, make reference to a custom to light Chanukah candles in Shul during the daytime as well; for this lighting, however, no *berachah* is recited, as stated in the *Sefer She'arim Metzuyanim BeHalachah* (139:19) and elsewhere.

²³ See Teshuvos Maharshal 85, Radbaz 1045 (3:610)