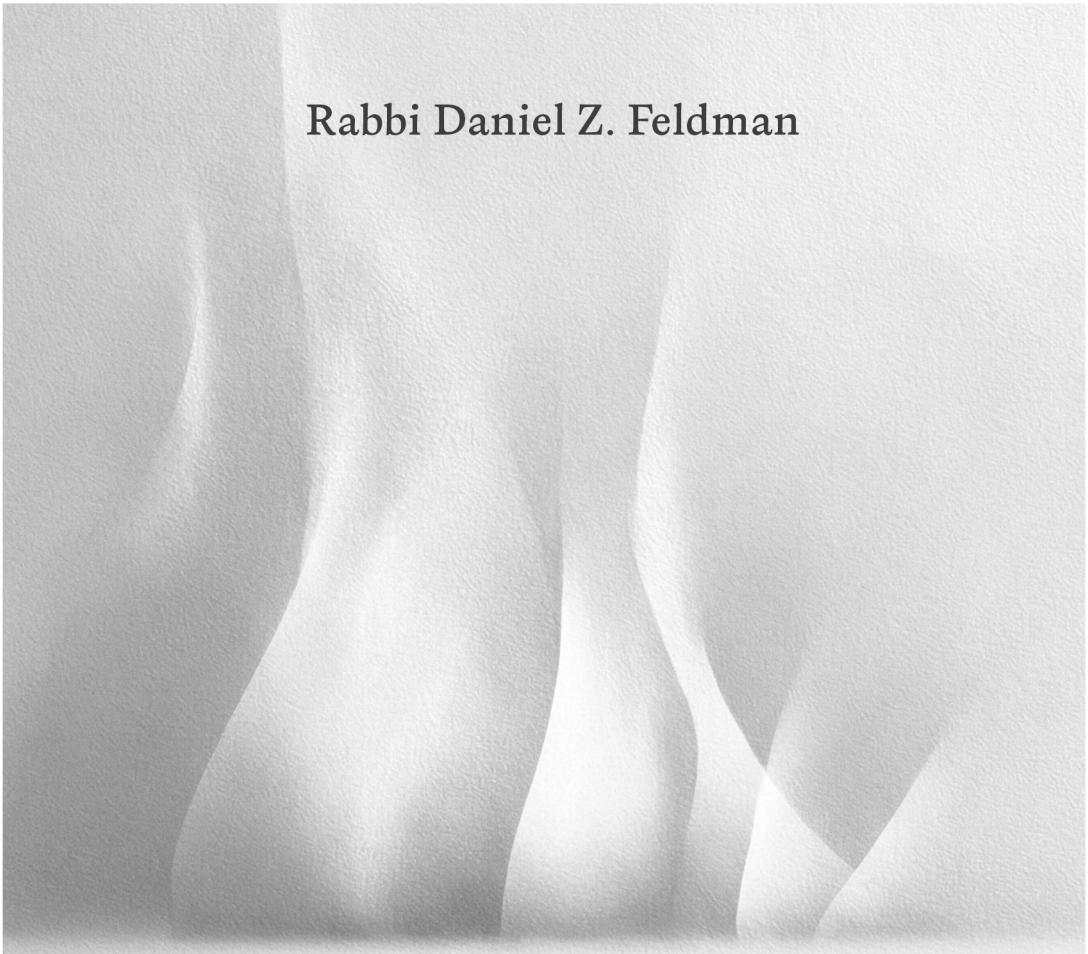
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman



Generations of Light

בינה בספרים בני בינה

The Concepts and Precepts of Chanukah Through Rabbinic Literature

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Introduction

There is a linguistic relationship between Chanukah and artificial intelligence, which is increasingly reshaping our world. The modern Hebrew phrase used to identify AI is *Binah Melakhutit*. That first word, which is generally translated as "understanding," appears prominently in the song that follows the lighting of the Chanukah candles, *Maoz Tzur*, which, in an apparent reference to the Jewish people, identifies them as "*B'nei Binah*," literally "children of understanding," who "established eight" days of Chanukah "for song and praise."

Why, however, they are described in that fashion, and in that context specifically, is unclear. One innovative suggestion is that it is a reference to the miracle of the oil, in which a small quantity of oil expected to last only one day lasted for eight. A miracle, indeed; still, asks Rabbi Yosef Karo in his *Beit Yosef*, why celebrate for eight days, when the first day was natural and non-spectacular?

Rabbi David HaLevi, in his commentary *Turei Zahav*, notes that miracles build upon the natural; they require a foundation. If there was any flame at all on the second night, it is because not all of the oil was consumed on the first night; hence, a miracle happened on the first night as well.

However, notes Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, this is a far more subtle miracle, requiring great sensitivity even to notice. Those who

would perceive such a miracle as having taken place, and thus establish a celebration of eight days, not seven, reveal themselves to be *b'nei binah*—those who "understand," who can infer one fact from another.

It is evocative, he observes, of the powerful words of the Ramban in his Biblical commentary (Exodus 13:16), in which he discusses the distinction between "open miracles" that overtly defy nature and "hidden miracles" that operate within natural rhythms. All of reality, he explains, is God's miracle; we come to recognize this through the more obvious miracles. Accordingly, this recognition could be called the ultimate act of *binah*—through one level of understanding, we come to a deeper recognition.

This is what Chanukah provides for us, especially at a time of great darkness for the world and the Jewish people: an opportunity to contemplate the overtly miraculous, so that we can find wonder and hope even in the mundane and the disheartening.

It is noteworthy that, among all the Hebrew words that exist for intelligence, *binah* was chosen for AI. The ongoing debate about whether AI can recreate the human mind is, and always has been, itself an inquiry into what that mind is and how it truly operates. In the Talmud, the essence of intelligent thought—which the Rambam identified with humanity's creation in the image of God—is the ability to understand one thing from another.

The emergence of generative AI, which transforms pre-trained data into new conclusions, brings the question of whether the human mind is being truly imitated to a new level. This has excited many while terrifying others—are human beings about to be cast aside? For the *b'nei binah*, those who learn everyday wonder from spectacular miracles, AI need not pose a threat. The ability for human beings to create machines that can astound and amaze as recent versions have does not diminish humanity; it opens a window into its greatness and its potential to grow. Just as ChatGPT strives to interpret one thing from another, it pushes us to new heights in doing so ourselves; and that, for humans created in the Divine image, is certainly a miracle.

The content of this volume was not generated by AI. However, much of its translation, at least in its initial stages, was—through experimentation with many models, including ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude. It then went through a process of editing by humans. It is an experimental endeavor, hopefully the first of many, and there will unquestionably be many mistakes. We welcome all input from attentive readers and look forward to refining the process for future editions and for additional projects. This specific volume is adapted from the original Hebrew, appropriately enough entitled *Bnei Binah*, part of a larger series by the name of *Binah BaSefarim*.

It is my hope that the theme of *binah* informs not only this project, but all of my work: the effort to understand one thing from another, and to build upon a foundation of knowledge and insight drawn from the contributions of those who have written on these subjects and otherwise contributed to the conversation that stretches back to Sinai, and from all of those from whom I have personally and directly gained so much.

Chanukah is the festival of *hoda'ah*, and I express my *hoda'ah* to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for His infinite kindnesses. I thank, as well, all of His emissaries who have taught me Torah over the decades, including my revered rebbe, Rabbi Hershel Schachter, whose world-famous shiurim I have been privileged to hear and grow from for many years, for all of his influence and counsel, and for his warm encouragement. I express my profound gratitude to my rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Blachman of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, for all of his support—now spanning multiple generations—as I also acknowledge the continuing influence of the founding Rosh Yeshiva of Kerem B'Yavneh, Rabbi Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, z"l.

Rabbi Mordechai Willig, whom I have been fortunate to hear shiurim from and to draw influence from for many years in many contexts, also serves as the Rosh Kollel of the Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon. In recent years I have gained even more from his mentorship through my role as *sgan* in that program, in which I was

privileged to study in its inaugural years. We continue to be grateful to Ms. Susan Wexner for her wise and farsighted sponsorship of the Kollel, together with her mother, Mrs. Bella Wexner, a"h, and for her ongoing involvement in the program.

I am profoundly grateful to Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman for his wise leadership as president of Yeshiva University, and especially for his personal support, including actively involving me in exploring the potential and challenges of AI. RIETS has greatly benefited in recent years from the leadership of Rabbi Menachem Penner, and currently that of Rabbi Dr. Yosef Kalinsky and Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz. I am grateful to the entire team at RIETS Press for all of their incredible work in bringing our projects to the reading public, including Rabbi Yona Reiss, Rabbi Ari Rockoff, Rabbi Josh Flug, and Rabbi Jordan Auerbach.

I wish to express my appreciation to the administrations of the schools that currently give me the opportunity to teach Torah under their auspices, including the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and the Sy Syms School of Business, as well as to all of the synagogues, schools, and other institutions that have hosted my lectures and classes. And to my students and participants at these institutions, I offer my thanks for listening, for challenging me, and for helping me to gain a clearer understanding of all that I would hope to teach.

To the wonderful people of Ohr Saadya of Teaneck, and all who have joined with us in various stages throughout the years, I convey my gratitude, and my pride and appreciation in our shared experiences and endeavors; and I pray that the future brings only success and happiness in the fulfillment of our goals and aspirations.

The "generations" of this book's title has many levels of meaning. The original Hebrew version of this book was dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, Rabbi Dr. David Feldman, z"l, who brought much light to the world through his teaching, his love of humanity and the Jewish people, and his smile, and this version, which coincides

with his eleventh yahrzeit, is dedicated to him as well. May it serve as a continuing comfort to his partner in all things, my beloved mother, Rebbetzin Aviva Feldman, and may she continue in good health to carry on their joint mission of kindness and service.

The Hebrew version came soon after the passing of my cherished aunt, Rebbetzin Goldie Fendel, a"h, and this version comes at the time of the first yahrzeit of my esteemed uncle, Rabbi Meyer Fendel, z"l. The influence that the two of them had on my life was immense, and their memory serves as an inspiration.

My brother, Rabbi Jonathan, and his wife, Rachel, and their family are constant and invaluable sources of love and support. My sister Rebecca, together with her husband Dr. Tal Becker and their family, extends her wise counsel and warm compassion with consistency and devotion, and I am a most fortunate beneficiary.

Our family suffered a tremendous loss this past year with the passing of my revered father-in-law, Rabbi Mordechai Feuerstein, z"l, who, together with my extraordinary mother-in-law, Rebbetzin Shayndel Feuerstein, a"h, left a magnificent legacy of leadership, education, outreach, kindness, and love for family.

It is an immense blessing that our children are guided by the life and legacy of two sets of grandparents who, following their own parents, placed the vision of *chesed* and societal responsibility at the forefront of all that they ever did, and crowned their many accomplishments with kindness, compassion, and boundless communal service.

The generations continue with our oldest daughter Adina, who devoted many long hours to providing editorial skill and literary flourish to this volume. Her poetic sensitivity impacted the structure of each chapter, and I am deeply grateful for her thoughtful involvement in this project. Our son Yaakov also found time in his yeshiva schedule to contribute to the process of editing, and I am thankful for all that he did to enhance the final product.

The lights of Chanukah illuminate the journey of our family, as my wife and I were married on the second day of Chanukah, 5764, and our

youngest child was born on *Zot Chanukah*, 5780. Nothing I do would begin to be possible without my wife Leah; and still, nothing can begin to be expressed, as her modesty combines with the limitations of language in preventing me from saying even a fraction of what should be said. I will only express my continued gratitude that our children, Adina, Yaakov, Miriam, Shaindel, Tehilla, Bracha Golda, and Meira, have the role model they have in all the ways of life, and that a beacon of *chesed* lights their path.

Daniel Z. Feldman
Teaneck, NJ
Kislev, 5786

Chapter 1

The Miracle of Chanukah

Introduction

"*Mai Chanukah*: What is *Chanukah*?"

The question, posed in such simple language by the Talmud (*Shabbat* 21b), is at once familiar and jarring. Is the answer not self-evident? By the time the Talmud was redacted, *Chanukah* had been observed for centuries. Jews had kindled lights in their doorways, recited *hallel* in their synagogues, and added *Al Ha-Nisim* to their prayers for generations. The historical record was clear; the customs were entrenched. What, then, does the Talmud mean to ask?

Rashi pauses over the question to explain that it is asking "upon which miracle was the festival established?". *Chanukah* commemorates many things: a military victory against impossible odds, the rededication of the Temple, the restoration of Jewish sovereignty, the defiance of a culture that sought to extinguish Jewish practice. Yet when the Talmud asks what *Chanukah is*, this is the tale it offers in response:

> On the twenty-fifth of *Kislev* begin the days of *Chanukah*, which are eight, during which lamentation and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the oils therein. When the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only one flask of oil,

> sealed with the seal of the High Priest. It contained only enough to light for one day. A miracle occurred with it, and they lit from it for eight days. The following year, they established these days and made them holidays of *hallel* and thanksgiving.

The passage is spare, almost austere. No description of the war, no record of the rebellion, no trace of triumph or pageantry. Only a sealed flask, a brief act of faith, and a light that endured beyond its measure. From this an entire festival is born.

Rashi senses, perhaps, the dissonance that lingers between story and law. Why this miracle, this detail of oil, when the war itself had been nothing short of impossible? The Talmud could have told of armies, of decrees overturned, of a people reclaiming its sovereignty. Instead, it speaks of purity preserved, of one day that became eight.

The Rambam (*Hilkhot Chanukah* 3:1-2) provides a fuller historical account, quoted almost verbatim by the *Mishnah Berurah* (§670:1):

> In the days of the Second Temple, the Greek kings issued decrees against Israel, abolishing their religion and forbidding Torah and mitzvot. They seized their property and their daughters, entered the Sanctuary and breached it, and defiled what was pure. Israel suffered greatly under their hand until the God of their fathers had mercy upon them. The sons of the Hasmonean High Priests rose, defeated their oppressors, and redeemed Israel. They appointed a king from among the priests, and sovereignty returned to Israel for more than two hundred years, until the Second Destruction. When Israel prevailed over their enemies and destroyed them—on the twenty-fifth of *Kislev*—they entered the Sanctuary and found no pure oil except one flask, sealed with the seal of the High Priest, containing enough to burn for only one day. They kindled from it the lamps of the Menorah for eight days, until olives could be pressed and new oil extracted.

The Rambam's account makes clear that this was no ordinary revolution. The Greek decrees were not political but theological, striking at the very core of Jewish faith. They sought not merely to conquer the land but to extinguish the covenant—to erase Torah, desecrate holiness, and dissolve the distinctiveness of the Jewish soul into the currents of Hellenism. The Hasmonean uprising was therefore not a political rebellion but a battle for spiritual survival. It was faith, not freedom, that was at stake.

In such a case, when the dust of battle settled, it was not yet time to revel in a miraculous military salvation provided by the Divine hand. The fighting may have ceased, but the struggle for the soul of the nation was far from over. The Temple, the place where Heaven meets Earth still stood in eerie stillness, its defiled state echoing the spiritual desolation The Seleucid-Greeks had left in their wake.

From this perspective, the military victory alone was not the true miracle but its prelude. The lighting of the *Menorah* was not a consequence of the military victory but the reason for it. The oil that should have burned for one night and endured for eight was not only a human triumph of faith, but a Divine gesture of reconciliation. The persistence of the flame of Israel became the answer to the Hellenistic challenge, the proof that sanctity could outlast empire, that Divine presence would not reject a nation who refused to let it go.

Thus the question about the curious absence of the war miracle in the early sources begins to answer itself. It was not strength that restored Israel, but light.

A question arises regarding the true scope of the Greek decrees. The *Midrash Ma'aseh Chanukah* (Second Edition)[1] teaches that the Seleucid-Greeks directed their campaign against the specific commandments of Shabbat, the sanctification of the new month (*Rosh Chodesh)*, and circumcision. Each of these, in its own way, binds heaven

1 Referenced by *Shulchan Mesudar* (p. 45).

and earth. Shabbat sanctifies time, *Rosh Chodesh* orders creation, and circumcision imprints the covenant upon the body. To abolish them was to sever every axis along which holiness enters human life.

Rambam's account, however, casts a wider shadow. His words suggest not a targeted campaign against a few commandments, but an effort to uproot Torah itself—to dissolve the covenant at its source. The *Teshuvah Me-Ahavah* (II, §285) traces this understanding to the words of the additional prayer added on *Chanukah,* that of *al ha-nisim*: "to cause them to forget Your Torah and to transgress the statutes of Your will." This was not merely a war against observance but against memory, an attempt to erase the consciousness of the sacred. The *Ma'aseh Rokeach* adds that Rambam may have drawn from the Book of Josephus, where the history of Greece and Judea is rendered not as a clash of powers, but as a collision between two worldviews.[2]

And yet a question presses itself upon the reader. The military triumph was, by any measure, the greater deliverance. The liturgy of *al ha-nisim* speaks of nothing but this victory—"You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few"—and makes no mention of oil at all. Why, then, does the Talmud locate the festival's meaning in a miracle that seems, by comparison, almost incidental?

The Relationship Between the Two Miracles

The *Darkei Moshe* (§670:1) raises this very tension, citing R. Avraham of Prague. The *Mordechai HaAruch* records that according to *Megillat Ta'anit*, *Chanukah* was first instituted to celebrate the rededication of the altar—a view supported by the *Or Zarua* and suggested in *Midrash Rabbah* on *Beha'alotecha*. Yet the Talmud explicitly roots the holiday in the miracle of the oil. R. Avraham refuses to collapse one miracle into the other. He resolves the dissonance by

2 See also *Chikrei Zev* of R. Zev Charlop, §61.

distinguishing between two forms of celebration: the rededication of the altar inspired days of feasting and rejoicing, while *hallel* and thanksgiving were established specifically in response to the miracle of the oil. It is this duality that lies behind Rashi's formulation—the coexistence of physical deliverance and spiritual revelation within a single festival.

The *Kuntres Chanukah U-Megillah* (15) cites Rabbenu Yonah (*Berachot* 21a in Rif's pagination), who offers a profound interpretation of the verse, "Truly, You are a God who conceals Himself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (Isaiah 45:15). Though the Holy One, Blessed be He, remains invisible to the eye, He becomes manifest through His mighty deeds and wonders. Even as He conceals Himself, He reveals Himself as the God of Israel who has performed countless miracles for His people, the Savior at every time and hour. Through His acts of salvation, people perceive His presence and come to recognize Him. The miracle of the oil thus becomes a moment of divine self-disclosure, a radiance through which Israel could once again perceive God's nearness.

R. Yonatan HaKohen of Luneil, in his commentary to the Talmud (Shabbat 21b), adds another dimension. The eight-day span of *Chanukah*, he explains, was established to mark an unprecedented kind of persecution. Never before had a foreign power sought not merely to subjugate Israel but to erase the observance of *mitzvot* entirely. Pharaoh, for all his cruelty, never forbade the study of Torah. The Greeks did exactly this. And so the Sages instituted an eight-day commemoration matching the duration of the longest festival—*Sukkot* together with *Shemini Atzeret*. The miracle of the oil did not itself necessitate establishing a new holiday; rather, when it occurred alongside the military victory, it inspired the addition of candle-lighting as a commemorative practice. The festival would have existed without the oil; the oil gave it its distinctive ritual form.[3]

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3 See also *Resp. V'Darashta V'Chakarta* (III, OC 76:1-2)

Birchat Mo'adekha (9) develops this further. *Chanukah*, he writes, was founded primarily to commemorate the salvation of war. The eight days would have been observed in any case, in thanksgiving for national deliverance. What the oil introduced was not the holiday itself but the menorah as its symbol—the distinctive practice of candle-lighting to mark this additional manifestation of divine favor.

He notes that this connection between *Chanukah* and *Sukkot* is already recorded in the Second Book of Maccabees (ch. 1, verses 9 and 18), where the festival is called "the *Sukkot* of the month of *Kislev*." The text recounts how, the previous *Sukkot*, the people had been driven to hide in caves and mountains, exiles in their own land. Now liberated, they celebrated with the branches of leafy trees, palms, and fronds they had been denied just two months earlier, offering thanksgiving to God for enabling them to purify His sanctuary.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (§670:5) draws a similar picture. The Hasmoneans' eight-day festival had already been born of devotion. The Greeks had forbidden the offerings of *Sukkot* and *Shemini Atzeret*, silencing the Temple at the very moment it was meant to resound with joy. When the altars were reclaimed, the people celebrated for eight days, renewing the worship they had been denied. Only afterward, when the oil burned beyond its measure, did Heaven answer their act of faith with one of its own. The flame that endured was not the cause of the festival but its confirmation—a divine echo affirming that their service was once again received.

The Oil as Authentication

That same interplay between human courage and divine affirmation stands at the heart of comments of the Taz (§670:3). He contrasts *Chanukah* with *Purim*, two salvations that seem cut of different cloth. *Purim* commemorates an openly miraculous salvation of lives, warranting physical celebration and festive joy. *Chanukah*, by contrast, celebrates a military victory that, while divinely orchestrated, could appear to skeptics as a natural occurrence—the product of

strategy, courage, or fortune. Only through the unmistakable miracle of the oil was the supernatural character of the deliverance made manifest. Therefore, the Sages established *Chanukah* primarily as a festival of *hallel* and thanksgiving rather than feasting, focusing on the clearly miraculous aspect—the oil—which demanded spiritual acknowledgment through liturgical praise.

The *Mateh Moshe* (§977) makes this point explicit. Military victories, he writes, always leave room for denial. They belong to the realm of probability, however small. But a flask of oil sufficient for one night that burns for eight lies beyond any natural calculus. It cannot be rationalized; it can only be witnessed. In that flickering light, skepticism has no foothold. It is the world's quietest refutation—the moment when Israel could say, without hesitation or apology, "This is from God; it is wondrous in our eyes."

From this perspective, the military victory alone was not the true miracle but its prelude. The lighting of the *Menorah* was not merely a consequence of the victory but, in a sense, its vindication. The oil that should have burned for one night and endured for eight was not only a human triumph of faith but a divine gesture of reconciliation—proof that sanctity could outlast empire, that the divine presence would not abandon a nation that refused to let it go.

Thus the question about the curious absence of the war in the Talmud's account begins to answer itself. The two miracles are not separate; they are one. The victory delivered the Temple into Jewish hands; the oil confirmed that Heaven had delivered it too. It was not strength alone that restored Israel, but light.

The Necessity of the Miracle

The light of *Chanukah* did not necessarily fade when the lamps were extinguished. Throughout the generations, the halakhic imagination has turned back to it, asking not only what happened, but why it had to happen at all.

The *Pnei Yehoshua* and *Chacham Tzvi* (§87) both ask, as the Hasmoneans had found plenty of impure oil, what need was there for a miracle at all? There is a normative halakhic principle that communal offerings, and by extension the Temple service, may be brought even in a state of ritual impurity when no pure alternative exists. If so, the *menorah* could have been kindled with defiled oil; the service could have resumed without delay. Why, then, did Heaven intervene?

A second, more well-known question is posed by the *Beit Yosef* (O.C §670 s.v. *ika*). If the flask contained enough oil to burn naturally for one night, then the miracle extended only across seven additional nights. Why, then, is an eight-day celebration called for?

The *Kuntres Chanukah U-Megillah* addresses these questions by identifying the supreme purpose of the *Chanukah* miracles: the restoration of Israel's ability to perform God's will with perfection. True, the *mitzvah* could have been fulfilled with impure oil, but the miracle enabled them to fulfill the *mitzvah* with *hiddur*, aesthetic and spiritual beautification.

The *Pnei Yehoshua* and the *Beit Ha-Levi* add that even within natural means, the Hasmoneans could have rationed the oil or used thinner wicks to make it last. Yet after years of desecration, it was not enough merely to serve God again, the nation wished to serve Him perfectly and completely. The oil's endurance was Heaven's way of granting them that possibility.

This understanding hearkens to the language of the liturgical *Chanukah* addition of *al ha-nisim*: "the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the insolent into the hands of those engaged in Your Torah." The essence of the miracles was not merely physical survival but the restoration of sovereignty to a righteous, pure people devoted to Torah, enabling them to serve God with complete purity and perfection.[4]

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4 The *Kuntres Chanukah U'Megillah* uses this approach to explain the *Beit Yosef*'s

The *Maharatz Chayot* (Shabbat 21b) offers a strikingly different resolution, one rooted in a creative reading of *Megillat Ta'anit* (ch. 9) an early rabbinic calendar-text that lists specific dates on which the community was not allowed to fast, because they commemorated happy or victorious events in Jewish history. He points out that the question is already raised there as to why *Chanukah* extends for eight days, when even Moshe's dedication of the Tabernacle lasted only seven. The text answers that when the Hasmoneans reentered the Temple grounds, they found the altar in ruins and the sacred vessels defiled. It took them eight full days to rebuild the altar, fashion new utensils, and restore the Temple's service to its former sanctity.

The *Maharatz Chayot* then turns to an additional detail preserved in that same source. *Megillat Ta'anit* reports that when the Hasmoneans entered the Temple, they possessed seven iron spits, which they affixed and used for lighting. Yet, he notes, the text should properly read *eight*, a correction supported explicitly by *Pesikta Rabbati* (ch. 2), which describes how "eight iron spits" were set in place and kindled, serving as makeshift *menorah*s in those first days of rededication.

According to this reading, the eight days of *Chanukah* correspond not to the oil's endurance but to these eight implements themselves—the tangible expression of a people's determination to return light to a desecrated world. What the *Maharatz Chayot* reveals is that before there was a miracle of oil, there was a miracle of resolve. In lieu of vessels of gold and silver, the band of priests instead beat the iron of war into instruments of Divine service. The duration of *Chanukah* thus mirrors the eight spits of metal that rekindled the Temple's light.

R. Ya'akov Emden in *Mor U-Ketziah* reverses the hierarchy of common understanding of *Chanukah*'s essence. The miracle that warranted a festival was first and foremost the deliverance itself: a battered,

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question regarding why we celebrate eight days of *Chanukah*. Regarding the matter of impurity being permitted for the community, see further *Responsa Divrei Shlomo* (Schneider, II §191).

spiritually targeted nation rescued from decrees meant to sever it from Torah, and a handful of faithful fighters prevailing against the many in a way that cannot be reduced to strategy or luck. *Chanukah*, for him, is the celebration of that providential salvation—military in form, but covenantal in purpose—a renewal of Jewish life under God rather than merely a surprising turn on a battlefield.

That is why the name of the day matters. It is *Chanukah*, dedication, because the victory's point was the restoration of the Temple and the possibility of *avodah* (divine service). The war was not an end; it was a path back to sanctity. R. Emden frames the story teleologically: the redemption is measured not only by survival but by the re-opening of a life of *mitzvot*, purity, and public holiness. In that light, the Hasmoneans' entry into the Temple and their labor to cleanse it are not a postscript; they are the very sign of what was retrieved.

The oil miracle, then, is neither dismissed nor central in isolation. R. Emden treats it as Heaven's confirming signature on the larger drama. Wars can always be misread as politics, insurgency, or improbable human heroism. The *Menorah*'s light, burning beyond nature at the moment of renewed consecration, forces the eye to see the whole sequence differently. It is the visible witness that the victory was not merely for Israel's body but for Israel's soul; that the return to the Temple was welcomed Above; that the light of Torah and *Shekhinah* could re-enter history precisely where defilement had tried to erase it.

And in an ethical register, R. Emden notices the human component that invited this divine completion. Technically, the community could have relied on the halakhic allowance of communal impurity in crisis; they did not. They searched for sealed, undefiled oil, refusing to settle for the minimum when holiness was at stake. The miracle responds measure-for-measure: when Israel reaches for purity beyond the easiest path, God sustains that pursuit beyond what nature would permit. So the candles we light each year do not celebrate chemistry; they rehearse a theology of redemption—gratitude for salvation, joy in restored sanctity, and confidence that a small light guarded

with integrity can be made, by God, to illuminate far more than its measure.

The Question of the *Beit Yosef*

The question of the *Beit Yosef* has occupied commentators for centuries: if the oil in the discovered flask was sufficient to burn for one night, then the miracle extended only seven additional days. Why then, do we celebrate eight? The manifold attempts to answer this question endeavor not merely to resolve a textual curiosity, but to uncover the spiritual center of the festival itself.

The *Beit Yosef* suggests three possibilities:

In his first answer, he proposes that the Hasmoneans divided the single flask of oil into eight equal portions, lighting one part each night. Though naturally insufficient, each fraction miraculously endured until dawn. Here, the miracle unfolds night by night, the very act of lighting in faith becoming a conduit for Divine response. Human initiative precedes Divine amplification, and the miracle is one of God sustaining the courage of those who act despite knowing their means will fall short.

In the second explanation, after filling the *Menorah* with the proper measure of oil on the first night, the Hasmoneans found the flask miraculously remained full. In this understanding, the miracle is the continuous renewal of a vessel that should have emptied yet remained ever full. Importantly, this understanding means the miracle is evident already from the first night.

In a third suggestion, the *Beit Yosef* explains that they may have poured all the oil into the lamps on the first night, which burned throughout, yet by morning the lamps were found full again, a pattern that repeated each subsequent night.

The *Meiri* had already anticipated the *Beit Yosef's* first answer, envisioning the division of oil as a deliberate act of faith; the choice to stretch what little they had, trusting Heaven to complete what

their hands could not[5]. Later authorities, however, including the *Pri Chadash*, object to this understanding. Judaism does not permit ab initio reliance on miracles. Would *halakhah* ever sanction an act predicated on Divine intervention?

The *Kuntres Sha'arei Torah* (*Olat Shabbat b'-shabbato u-Mo'ed b-Mo'ado*) raises a related question, probing the details of how the miracle must have functioned. Assuming the oil was indeed divided into eight portions, how precisely did the miracle operate? Did the oil immediately receive supernatural potency to sustain combustion far beyond its natural capacity, or did it retain its ordinary properties while receiving continuous miraculous supplementation at each moment to extend beyond natural limitations? This tension between suspension of nature and its transcendence reflects two ways of seeing the Divine presence, both the spectacular and the concealed.

R. Asher Weiss (*Minchat Asher* on *Emunah u'Bitachon*, §27), reframes the discussion entirely in order to answer the question of the *Meiri* and *Pri Chadash* regarding reliance on miracles. For him, the miracle begins not with the flame, but with the finding. The Greeks had ravaged the sanctuary, breached its walls, defiled every vessel, and polluted every flask. To discover a single vial, sealed with the mark of the High Priest, was already to encounter the supernatural. That survival itself was accordingly a Divine signal. Once Heaven had revealed its hand so unmistakably, relying upon that sign was not presumption but devotion. God had left them a token of presence, and by lighting it, they answered the call.

The Taz (O.C §670:1), however, remains unsatisfied. He dismisses all three of the *Beit Yosef's* suggestions, insisting that none appear in the Talmudic account. Had any of these mechanisms been operative, the Sages would have explicitly mentioned them to clarify the nature

5 For additional perspectives on this resolution, see *Responsa Amudei Or* (§40, §1), and see also *Responsa HaGrimat* of R. Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky (I, 47).

of the first night's miracle. The Taz instead proposes that the miracle of the first night becomes evident only in retrospect. He invokes a principle from the *Zohar's* commentary on "What do you have in the house?" (II Kings 4:2), the verse where the prophet Elisha asks the impoverished widow what remains in her possession before miraculously multiplying her single jar of oil. The *Zohar* teaches that divine blessing multiplies only what already exists, however minimal. God does not create ex nihilo through His blessing; rather, He amplifies existing substance. Applying this principle to *Chanukah*, had the Hasmoneans consumed the entire flask's contents on the first night, no substance would have remained for miraculous multiplication. Therefore, even on the first night, they must have reserved a portion of the oil. It was upon this remainder that Divine blessing rested, enabling the miraculous multiplication that sustained the *Menorah* for eight days. Thus, the first night too witnessed a miracle—not of complete consumption and renewal, but of partial use and supernatural preservation for future amplification. Consequently, we celebrate for eight full nights.

The *Megillat Sefer* (§2) strengthens this approach, finding support in the liturgical poem *Ma'oz Tzur* which describes the miracle as originating "from the remnant of the flasks", suggesting that some oil remained even after the first night's use.[6] He further cites the *She'iltot* of Rav Achai (*She'ilta* 26), which records that the flask "did not contain enough to burn even for one day," yet miraculously lasted eight. Though this version departs from both Rambam (*Hilkhot Chanukah* 3:2) and the Talmud, each which maintain the flask did hold a day's supply, the *Megillat Sefer* reconciles the contradiction by suggesting

6 He adds: Do not say that they instituted eight days because of the uncertainty of the day (*sfeika d'yoma,* like the question of the Abudraham), since they were then "people of understanding (*bnei binah*)" and knew how to intercalate the years.

that the miracle lay chiefly in finding the oil at all, preserved in a hidden recess where no one thought to look.

Other commentators resolve the seven-eight question by suggesting that perhaps the very premise is mistaken, and the miracle was never primarily about the oil's endurance at all. The *Birchat Mo'adecha* reiterates, based on the Book of the Hasmoneans cited earlier, that the eight-day duration was instituted to parallel *Sukkot*, as previously discussed. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (O.C §670:5) concurs with this interpretation.

In a similar vein, the *Meiri* (*Shabbat* 21b, s.v. *nes zeh*) explains that the full *hallel* is recited on each of the eight days of *Chanukah* because the miracle itself was renewed each night, beginning on the first. Unlike the Exodus, where the redemption occurred in a single moment and full *hallel* is recited only on the first day, *Chanukah* was a miracle that unfolded gradually. On the first night, when the oil's endurance was not yet known, the blessings were said in thanksgiving for the victory and for finding the pure flask. On each subsequent night, they were recited again as the miracle continued, day after day, night after night.

The *Shelah Ha-Kadosh* offers a related interpretation, suggesting that in fact on each night only one-eighth of the oil was consumed. The light thus lasted because Heaven measured its endurance precisely, allowing it to burn steadily without ever being exhausted.

The *Responsa Binyan Shlomo* (§53) offers another resolution based on the Rambam's ruling (*Hilkhot Temidin U'Musafin* 3:10) that the *Menorah* lamps required lighting even in the morning. If so, the single flask's contents—sufficient for one night—would not have covered the morning lighting as well. Thus, a miracle occurred enabling them to light in the morning too. Even according to those who dispute the Rambam, the two eastern lamps certainly required lighting if found extinguished (*Tamid* 3:9).

Other explanations expand this picture further. Some authorities suggest that the flask itself was empty, and that the very act of lighting called the miracle into being. The *Ner Ish U-Beito* adds that the flask

was so small it could not have contained even one day's supply, which means that the miracle began from the very first moment of lighting.

These interpretations heighten the emotional register of the original moment. The tipping of an empty vessel into a lamp meant to illuminate the House of God—knowing with certainty that it is not enough, that dawn will only expose the insufficiency of the offering, must have felt as punishing as the battle itself, as the flame was asked to rise from what could not possibly sustain it.

Suddenly, unmistakably, a spark caught where nothing should have burned. A wick became swollen with light despite the meager trace beneath it. It does not require great imagination to understand how such a moment could reverberate across generations. That light born of the impossible's bow towards the fragile sacrifice that summoned it could become the symbol of an eight-day commemoration for the rest of time. An annual remembrance not only of survival, but of the extraordinary tenderness with which Heaven can answer the smallest offerings of human hands.

Other authorities suggest a pragmatic reason for the eight-day institution. The Sages had feared that a seven-day festival might encourage people to fashion *menorot* with seven branches, an act explicitly prohibited by Jewish law (*Avodah Zarah* 43a; Y.D. §141:8).[7]

The *Magen Avraham*, in his *Zayit Ra'anan* (*Beha'alotecha*), posits that the Temple *Menorah*'s flames could not be extinguished, thus resolving the *Beit Yosef's* question from another angle. The flask found by the Hasmoneans contained a half-*log* of oil per lamp, sufficient for a single night's lighting. Yet since extinguishing the flames was forbidden, the lamps continued to burn into the following days. In this way, the same oil illuminated the menorah for eight consecutive

7 See in *Responsa Sho'el UMeishiv* (First Edition, III, §71) and *Responsa Hit'orerut Teshuvah* (III, §455). In *Chashukei Chemed* (p. 171), it states that Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv said that this resolution is the most acceptable to him.

days and nights, rendering the miracle one of uninterrupted continuity rather than daily renewal.

An intricate line of reasoning appears in the *Responsa Bo Tashiv* (§26:6), which cites *Ha-Toledot*'s report of the question: Why did the Sages not establish nine days of *Chanukah* to account for calendrical uncertainty, as they do with other festivals? While the question alone deserves attention, it also serves as a resolution for the *Beit Yosef's* problem—the miracle itself spanned seven days, while the eighth was added to address possible calendar variation. Bo *Tashiv*, however, challenges this assumption, pointing out that if the first day required no miracle, why begin on the twenty-fifth of *Kislev* rather than the twenty-sixth?

The *Arvei Nachal*, quoting R. Avraham Stein, responds that upon pouring the oil on the first day, the flask immediately refilled. Yet this solution seems to invert the problem: if the replenishment occurred on the first day, the eighth day would then lack any miracle. The *Arvei Nachal* therefore refines the argument, suggesting that the miraculous replenishment persisted throughout the seven days beginning with the first, while the eighth day was retained for calendrical reasons.

Even so, *Bo Tashiv* finds this explanation unsatisfactory. If the additional day exists solely to address uncertainty, why should it apply equally in the Land of Israel, where the calendar is fixed? Furthermore, the direction of the doubt itself fluctuates from year to year; when the month of *Cheshvan* has thirty days, the concern is that the twenty-fifth may in fact be the twenty-sixth; when it has twenty-nine, the reverse is true. This would demand a yearly distinction as to whether the first or last day lacked a miracle, an implausible conclusion. Perhaps, the *Bo Tashiv* concedes, the Sages instituted a uniform eight-day observance to preclude such inconsistencies, even if the miracle proper endured only seven.[8]

8 See also on this in the sermons of the *Chatam Sofer* (Sermons for *Chanukah*, p. 87 et seq.).

Finally, the *Avnei Pinah* (§22) advances a functional and integrative understanding of his own. The eight-day duration of the miracle was not incidental but essential, as that was precisely the amount of time required to produce new, ritually pure oil. Had the miracle lasted for fewer days it would have proved futile, as the Hasmoneans would ultimately have been forced to resort to defiled oil once the miracle ceased. Only an eight-day span ensured uninterrupted service in purity.

From this perspective, the *Avnei Pinah* concludes, the *Beit Yosef's* difficulty dissolves entirely. The eight days are not discrete units but components of a single, continuous miracle—the discovery of the flask, its initial lighting, and its sustained burning together constitute one unbroken act of Divine providence. Viewed in this light, even the first day partakes in the miracle's totality, for it marks the beginning of a process whose purpose was only fulfilled through its completion on the eighth.[9]

The Distinction of Days in Chanukah

The Talmud in *Arachin* (10a–10b) teaches:

> R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon ben Yehotzadak that there are eighteen days in the year on which full *hallel* is recited—eight days of *Sukkot*, eight of *Chanukah*, the first day of *Pesach*, and *Shavuot*. In the Diaspora, the count rises to twenty-one. Why does *Sukkot* warrant full *hallel* each day while *Pesach* does not? Because *Sukkot's* offerings differ daily, whereas *Pesach*'s remain uniform.

Building upon this principle of differentiation, the *Shibbolei*

9 See also another approach in *Responsa Lehorot Natan* (VII, §54), and see also *Responsa Mishneh Sachir* (O.C., II, §286).

Ha-Leket (Laws of *Rosh Chodesh* §174) explores why *Chanukah*, too, merits full *hallel* each day. Rashi explains that the progressive increase in candles distinguishes one day from the next, paralleling the varied offerings of *Sukkot*. His brother, R. Binyamin, proposes instead that the miracle itself renewed daily, echoing the second answers of the *Beit Yosef*, as well as the *Meiri*, and the *Shelah*. Since the Hasmoneans possessed oil sufficient for only one day yet kindled the *menorah* for eight, each day introduced a new act of Divine renewal deserving of its own *hallel*.

The *Ner Ish U-Beito* (§36) interprets these views as reflecting a deeper disagreement about the miracle's nature. Was the flask endowed at once with eight days' worth of miraculous endurance, or did it refill each day with precisely that day's portion? He connects this question to the discussion of the Talmud (*Shabbat* 23a) regarding the nightly recitation of blessings. There it inquires as to why the blessing over miracles (*she-asah nisim*) is recited every night of *Chanukah,* while the "time" blessing (*shehecheyanu*) is recited only once, on the first night. Its answer is plainly, "Because the miracle exists each day." Rashi there comments, "For all eight days they lit from the flask," implying a single, continuous miracle extending over eight days. Yet, as the *Ner Ish U-Beito* observes, one could also read the phrase literally, that each day bore its own miracle as the flask refilled anew.

This distinction, he continues, may also underlie the dispute between the Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai regarding the candle sequence, whether to begin with eight and decrease or to begin with one and increase. Beit Shammai maintains that the full miracle was manifest from the outset, thus diminishing candles with each passing day; Beit Hillel sees each day as a fresh miracle, justifying an ascending progression.

The same conceptual divergence, the *Ner Ish U-Beito* suggests, emerges in the later disagreement between the Vilna Gaon and the *Shulchan Aruch* regarding the order of lighting. The *Shulchan Aruch* (citing the Maharik) begins with the newly added candle, emphasizing

each day's additional miracle. The Vilna Gaon and Maharshal, by contrast, light the original candle first, reflecting the view that the full miracle occurred initially.

He further cites R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik who offers a complementary perspective, suggesting that the Hillel-Shammai dispute centers not merely the miracle's form but the essence of thanksgiving itself. For the Beit Hillel, gratitude grows in proportion to revealed goodness; as each day's light magnified the miracle, so too did the obligation of praise. For Beit Shammai, thanksgiving corresponds to deliverance from danger; at the miracle's onset, the peril was greatest, and each subsequent day lessened the distress, warranting a diminishing expression of thanks.

The *Pnei Yehoshua* explains that the oil miracle specifically demonstrated God's love for Israel, reminiscent of how throughout the Temple's history no disqualification afflicted the *omer* offering or the two loaves. Following their redemption from enemies who sought to sever them from God, this miracle with the *Menorah*—symbolizing the Divine Presence dwelling among Israel—occurred during a propitious time to signal their return to God's favor.

The Bach draws a final distinction between *Chanukah* and *Purim*. *Purim* commemorates a decree against Jewish lives, hence its expression through festive rejoicing. *Chanukah*, however, arose from a spiritual assault. Observing Jewish laxity in Temple service, the Greeks sought to abolish the daily offering and, above all, the *Menorah* lighting—identified by Antiochus as the practice most vital to Jewish continuity. When Jews risked their lives to preserve this service, Divine salvation arrived through the priestly descendants. The miracle thus occurred specifically through the candles, mirroring their self-sacrifice for the Temple's light. Accordingly, *Chanukah* was consecrated not for feasting but for *hallel* and thanksgiving— services of the heart.[10]

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10 See also *Levush* (O.C. §670:2).

The Distinctive Nature of Chanukah's Oil Miracle

Later authorities point out that throughout Jewish history, there have been numerous miraculous events involving oil and light[11]. What, then, rendered the *Chanukah* miracle singular—worthy not merely of gratitude but of an enduring festival?

The *Chiddushei HaRim* (*Vayeshev*) explains that its distinction lay in its public revelation. Unlike private miracles granted to individuals or the righteous, this miracle unfolded before the entire nation. Its illumination was not only physical but collective—an open manifestation of Divine favor visible to all.[12]

The *Me'orot Natan* adds that the miracle expressed God's exceptional affection for His people, granting them purity even in circumstances where the law would have permitted impurity for communal service[13]. The *Natan Piryo* (p. 32) deepens this idea, teaching that certain miracles possess enduring spiritual resonance, their light rekindled each year on the anniversary of their occurrence. On this basis, he explains the detail that the Sages delayed the formal institution of the festival until the following year; they waited to confirm that the same sanctity, the same current of Divine grace, reawakened with time's return.

Viewed through the framework established above, the holiday's essence emerges with greater clarity. *Chanukah* commemorates not the miracle in isolation but its function within the broader arc of redemption. The victory and the oil are not parallel wonders but interwoven expressions of a single Divine movement. On one level, the discovery of the sealed flask served as proof that the military triumph was not a product of human valor but of Divine design. On

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11 See *Sefer Sukkat Chaim* §16 for examples.

12 See *Emek Berachah*, who distinguishes between thanksgiving for goodness and song, which is reserved for revealed miracles.

13 See also in the essay by Rabbi Yekutiel Simcha Stern in the collection *Netzach Yisrael* (of Kollel Kehillati of Miami Beach, pp. 180-181).

the other, both miracles share a unified purpose of the restoration of Israel's service to God in purity and light.

Conclusion

What was it about those eight days that altered the rhythm between Heaven and earth? This is the question of "*mai Chanukah*" that the commentaries circle across the centuries, tracing the flicker of meaning hidden within the flame, seeking to grasp what had truly been rekindled on that fateful night.

What they describe is not a chain of theories but a single unfolding that the miracle was never merely in the oil, but in the dialogue it revealed. The hand that lit became the channel through which the Divine reentered the world. The flame did not descend from above but rose from below. In a Jerusalem whose prophets had long since lay silent, revelation was invited by human hands.

The Hasmonean uprising was not a political rebellion but a battle for spiritual survival. It was faith, not freedom, that was at stake.

In such a case, when the dust of battle settled, it was not yet time to revel in a miraculous military salvation provided by the Divine hand. The fighting may have ceased, but the struggle for the soul of the nation was far from over. The Temple, the place where Heaven meets Earth stood in eerie stillness, its defiled state echoing the spiritual desolation Greece had left in its wake.

From this perspective, the military victory alone was not the true miracle but its prelude. The lighting of the menorah was not a consequence of the military victory but the reason for it. The oil that should have burned for one night and endured for eight was not only a human triumph of faith, but a Divine gesture of reconciliation. The persistence of the flame of Israel became the answer to the Hellenistic challenge, the proof that sanctity could outlast empire, that Divine presence would not reject a nation who refused to let it go.

From that moment forward, *Chanukah* ceased to be the story

of conquest and became a story of covenant, of a people who kept burning when they should have gone dark, and of Heaven who kept their light alive.

The *menorah* then is less a commemorative ritual, than it is a reenactment of a covenantal moment—a people reaching upward, and a Divine Presence meeting them in the flame.

This is *Chanukah*.

Chapter 2

The Prohibition of Personal Use of the Chanukah Candles

Introduction

Typically, a flame draws us closer. By its nature it invites; it warms a room, illuminates the faces of those that surround us, and softens the edges of the night. Almost counter-intuitively, the most blustery months of the year introduce an altogether different kind of fire, that of the *Chanukah* lights. They demand attention, and yet hold themselves apart. They permit the warmth of their presence, yet refuse the intimacy of use. Their glow is generous, but their power remains deliberately inaccessible. For eight nights, all over the world, man lights a flame that cannot not serve him.

Such a practice seems to fly in the face of the central instinct of Jewish life. Judaism rarely instructs withdrawal from the material world. Instead, its rhythm is to take the ordinary and lift it upward, to press the mundane into the service of something higher. What greater example of this exists than Shabbat candles, lit expressly to brighten the meal, and to gather the family in its embrace? It is precisely such noble ends that justify their sanctification altogether.

Somehow, *Chanukah* lights reverse this grammar. Here the sacred does not emerge from utilizing the physical for spiritual ends, but

from the refusal to do so. The prohibition against personal use of the *Chanukah* flames is not a technical detail. Rather, it establishes a boundary within the most familiar of spaces, a narrow but unmistakable zone of distance where the usual logic of the home recedes. On these nights, the flame is no longer drawn upward by human purpose but is left untouched, allowed to signify something beyond it.

This inversion demands a reckoning. What does it mean to encounter light meant solely to be witnessed? The laws that follow—concerning which uses are prohibited, who bears the restriction, how leftover oil is treated, and when a candle's sanctity yields—are not merely procedural.

It can be suggested that the home gains something subtle through this encounter. A domestic space accustomed to absorbing every responsibility, and every demand becomes, for a brief span, host to an untouchable light. Suddenly, it holds within its walls a reminder that not everything exists for human shaping. The Jewish home, trained to sanctify the world by engaging with it is asked quite literally to resist that very instinct. Instead, it is offered a lesson in a rare kind of humility and self-restraint; the acknowledgment that some things remain holy precisely because they are allowed to exist beyond reach.

Thus, walls so accustomed to uplifting, nourishing, and embracing whatever crosses its threshold, are annually reminded that to be hospitable to holiness periodically requires a different posture. To learn these laws is to attempt to embody such a lesson.

The Source

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 21b–22a) offers a fundamental question about our orientation towards the *Chanukah* candles, asking if one is permitted to use their light for ordinary use. Rav Huna permits; Rav Chisda forbids; the *halakhah* follows the latter. A parallel passage (22a) describes Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav Assi forbidding the counting of coins by the *Chanukah* light, apparently a statement

of emphasis. When word of this teaching reaches Shmuel he asks rhetorically, "Do the candles possess sanctity?" ostensibly assuming that only inherent holiness could preclude its use. Rav Yosef answers indirectly, by invoking a parallel to *kisui ha-dam*, the imperative to cover the blood of a slaughtered animal, as the Torah commands, "He shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth" (Leviticus 17:13). The Rabbis understand that this may not be done with one's foot as it would demean God's Divine command (*bizui mitzvah)*. While the blood itself is not sacred, the act of fulfilling a *mitzvah* is one that demands dignity. So too even if the *Chanukah menorah* is not consecrated in essence, its light demands a certain amount of reverence. To treat it as a mere utility would seem to somehow disgrace the sanctity of the command, a problem of *bizui mitzvah.*

The early authorities step in to further clarify; if indeed there is no sanctity, how should the restrictions of use placed on the *menorah* be understood? Six formulations emerge—six ways of understanding what it means to honor the *mitzvah* once its flame is lit. Together, they fall conceptually into three pairs:

Rashi and Rosh: The Power of Perception

Both Rashi (*Shabbat* 21b, s.v. *va-asur*) and Rosh (*Shabbat* 2:6) understand the prohibition as an issue of perception. Simply put, using the *Chanukah* candles for personal use misrepresents what the candles are for. Where they diverge is their understanding of what creates the misconception. For Rashi, the candles must be left alone, "*she-yihei nikar shehu ner mitzvah"* (that they should be recognizable as a *mitzvah* flame). The candles must be left untouched, their stillness itself creating the *heker*, the recognizable mark that this is a fire claimed for holy purpose. The responsibility falls on the kindler of the flame to protect that perception by refraining from any personal use. However, it is difficult to see how such recognition could be achieved through non-use alone, as it would seem to require an onlooker's sustained

attention to understand what the flames were not being used for. One may suggest that through this difficulty the *shamash* was born, a companion flame, standing slightly apart, a visual cue distinguishing between ordinary and sacred light; even so, Rashi's formulation remains troubling.

Rosh's understanding (*Shabbat* 2:6), in contrast, evades this difficulty. He focuses instead on what an onlooker would witness if the kindler did indeed transgress the prohibition and behave towards the candles as if they were a mere utility – they would erroneously conclude that the candles were lit for this mundane purpose. For him, the *heker* arises not from abstention but from transgression; it is only *misuse* that betrays the light's purpose. For Rashi, the refraining from use itself establishes the reality, as it is the way the kindler demonstrates the candle's sanctity. The *heker* is created through deliberate stillness. The Rosh does not see *heker* as something one must actively establish rather as something that exists by default, so long as the light's purpose is not contradicted. Only when the candles are used for personal benefit is that perception lost. Thus, where Rashi speaks of an obligation to generate recognition, the Rosh speaks of a duty to preserve it.

Both agree that the meaning of the light depends on how it is perceived, presumably both by the world and by the one who lights the flame. In either view, the integrity of the *Chanukah* light is inseparable from human consciousness; the sanctity of the *mitzvah* is not merely a property of the flame, but also of the meaning one allows it to bear.

Rashba and Bal HaMaor - The *Menorah* Model

To light a contemporary *menorah* is to stand, in miniature, before the golden *Menorah* of the Temple, the vessel through which the original miracle itself unfolded. For early authorities like Rashba (Shabbat 21b), the prohibition of making use of the *Chanukah* candles stems from this very connection. If the original *Menorah* was only for

ritual use, so too must be its reflection in exile. The *Ba'al ha-Ma'or* (to Rif 9a), writing a century earlier, formulates this in what appears to be the most expansive way: because the lamps and oil of the Temple were entirely forbidden for benefit, the commemorative *Chanukah* lights are off-limits as well. (When ruling practically, however, he follows Rav Huna and permits ordinary use while barring actions that demean the mitzvah, like counting coins.) For him, the candles themselves are literally infused with the same original holiness they seek to evoke and emulate. This suggests that our small lights are not only commemorative but continuous; that in every generation, a glimmer of the Temple's radiance finds its way back onto our windowsills.

Other authorities affirm the *Menorah* connection but interpret it less as embodiment and more as memorial. Ran (*Shabbat* 21b) is explicit that all use of the light is prohibited, even for *mitzvah* purposes. His reasoning, too, flows from the *Menorah*-model that candles established to commemorate the *Menorah* should share in its non-utility. He proves this by observing that oils unfit for Shabbat candles are nonetheless permitted for *Chanukah*. On Shabbat, we fear "*shema yateh*", that one might tilt the candle to improve its flame, which would constitute forbidden labor. However, on *Chanukah*, there is no such concern, for its light is not meant for practical function at all. Were it intended for any kind of use, even *mitzvah*-use, that concern would return. Ran's position, supported by the *Yerushalmi* and mirrored by Rambam (*Hilkhot Chanukah* 3:6), reads the Talmud's "counting coins" story not as narrowing the scope of the prohibition— as if only mundane use should be barred—but as broadening it. The point is precisely that even the most trivial, harmless use is forbidden, because any appropriation of the light, however minor, disrupts its role as a remembrance of the *Menorah*.

The *Pnei Yehoshua* (Shabbat 21b), however, challenges this assertion that the *Menorah* equivalence could be the basis of the prohibition. If the *Chanukah menorah* truly shared the halakhic identity of the Temple *Menorah*, the Talmud should have required olive oil as it did

in the Temple and yet it does not. The equivalence, then, cannot be exact. It would seem the *Pnei Yehoshua* does not overturn the model but reframes it, asserting that the *Chanukah* candles recall the Temple's *Menorah* without inheriting its identity. They commemorate holiness but they do not necessarily contain it.

R. Yerucham Olshin (*Yareach LaMo'adim*, *Chanukah*) similarly draws a fine line between these *Menorah*-based approaches. The *Ba'al HaMa'or* speaks in the language of *issur hana'ah* (prohibition of benefit), suggesting a quasi-*hekdesh* stance, evocative of the laws governing the use and mis-use of sanctified objects belonging to the Temple. In this understanding, non-use of the *Chanukah* flames is an acknowledgement of the sanctity these candles are themselves endowed with. Rashba and Ran, by contrast, use the language of modeled non-utility: "like the *Menorah*, one may not use its light," without implying inherent holiness. For them, refraining from use is the language of memory, an act of respect that keeps the echo of the Temple's service alive. R. Olshin notes that the familiar text of *ha-neirot halalu* reflects both perspectives. The phrase *"ella li-rotan bilvad"* ("only to look at them") captures Rashba and Ran's modeled non-use, while *"ha-neirot halalu kodesh hem"* ("these lights are holy") seems to favor the *Ba'al HaMa'or's* formulation.

This tension had been sensed in the earlier literature. The *Binyan Shlomo* (*Tikunim ve-Hosafot* §11) relates it directly to Shmuel's question in the Talmud, "does the lamp possess sanctity?[1]". The *Meiri* offers a

1 He further notes: The phrase "we have no permission to use them" warrants examination. Why employ "permission" (*reshut*) rather than stating simply that use is forbidden? This proves particularly difficult according to the *Ba'al HaMa'or*, for whom the prohibition resembles consecrated property's absolute status. The *Ba'al HaMa'or*'s position finds explanation in Rabbi Chaim (Brisker) Soloveichik's principle (Laws of *Me'ilah* 8:1): *me'ilah*'s prohibition fundamentally constitutes theft from consecrated property. Accordingly, *Chanukah* lights' prohibition parallels consecrated property, falling under sacred theft analogous to *me'ilah*. Though not literal *me'ilah*—since we rule that

resolution, suggesting that during the time of the *mitzvah*, one treats the lights *as if* they were sacred to preserve their dignity. The *Sdei Chemed* (*Ma'arechet Chanukah* §69:1) echoes this approach, explaining that though the lights lack true *kedushah* in the way of the *Menorah*, they acquire the status of *tashmishei mitzvah*, accessories to the *mitzvah* that serve its ends but do not inherit its sanctity, during their time and can thus be called "*kodesh*" in a functional sense[2].

Taken together, these interpretations illuminate two distinct ways of standing before the flame. For some, lighting the *menorah* is an act of remembrance, a symbolic recreation of the Temple's light, preserved outside its walls. For others, it is something more immediate, representing a fleeting return of that original sanctity itself, flickering once again within the homes of Israel. To refrain is to remember; to withhold is to witness. For the memorial view, restraint guards the

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sound, sight, and smell fall outside *me'ilah*'s scope—the prohibition operates nonetheless. The formulation "we have no permission to use them" thus means: we lack permission to steal from the sacred. According to other early authorities, however, this analysis requires further consideration.

2 Regarding *Ha-Nerot Halalu*, see the essay of R. Shimshon Y. Ravitz, in *Chanukat Avraham* (pp. 217–218), who analyzes the intent of the word *'kol'* and of the phrase *'all (kol) eight days of* Chanukah *these lights are holy'*. He proposes two explanations for its meaning: (a) based on the Ran's words, as one might have thought to permit use on *Shabbat* (for the Ran wrote that the intent is that it is forbidden to use them for any use, even a *mitzvah* use; if a *mitzvah*-use were permitted, then on *Shabbat*—since the *Shabbat* meal is a *mitzvah*—it would be permitted to use them, and then we would have to be concerned lest one adjust the lamp; therefore, it must be that even *mitzvah*-use is forbidden for *Chanukah* lamps, and for this reason it is permitted to light *Chanukah* candles with those oils even on *Shabbat*); and (b) in response to the *Beit Yosef*'s question (that asks why *Chanukah* is eight days long, if only seven of the days were "extra" and thus miraculous), according to the initial assumption that on the first day there was no miracle in the Menorah—if the prohibition of use stems from the miracle of the Menorah, perhaps one might have thought that on the first day use is permitted; see there.

memory from fading into habit. For the sanctified view, it honors the flame by acknowledging that its light belongs elsewhere. In either case, the prohibition itself completes the *mitzvah*, transforming abstention from use into its own form of worship.

Tosafot and Ramban - *Huktzah* and *Bizui*

Halakhah recognizes that when an object is adopted for a *mitzvah*, it is no longer quite the same as before. A *lulav* waved, a *sukkah* sat in, and a wick kindled, all are marked by their use in divine service. The term for this transformation is *migu d'itkatzei le-mitzvato*, "since it was designated for its mitzvah". For objects within this category, *halakhah* determines that they must at the same time be withdrawn from ordinary use. Once an object stands in the service of Heaven, it cannot at the same moment serve man.

It is within this framework that Ramban (*Shabbat* 21b) and, in one version, Rashba (22a), locate the prohibition against using the *Chanukah* light. Like the original source in the Talmud, they root it in *bizui mitzvah*[3]. Personal use of the light demeans the command itself as it pulls the sacred back into the realm of the ordinary. Once the *menorah* is designated for a *mitzvah*, to use it for one's own needs is to unsettle that designation. For Ramban, *bizui* and *huktzah* are two sides of the same act: the lamp is set apart to preserve its dignity, and its dignity endures only so long as it remains apart.

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3 to the status of *bizui mitzvah* as a prohibition, several sources (e.g., Ran, *Beitzah* 17a; *Maharshal, Beitzah* 4:3) treat it as rabbinic in origin, while others (e.g., *Mabit, Kiryat Sefer, Hilkhot Chanukah* 4:9, reading Rambam) point toward a biblical foundation. One might suggest—in response to the basic question: how could it be that disgracing a *mitzvah* is not a Torah prohibition?—that there is a Torah norm of *kavod ha-mitzvah* (not to demean a *mitzvah*), while specific behaviors were then defined and proscribed by *Chazal* in concrete cases (such as using the light).

R. Yeshayahu Slomowitz, in his *Avnei Shoham*, asks why the familiar rule of *huktzah le-mitzvato* does not resolve the discussion of why use of the candles is prohibited altogether. With *Chanukah* candles, there must be something that *huktzah* does not fully address. He cites *Yeshuot David* (R. Dovid Povarsky, O.C. 16), explaining that generally, *huktzah* forbids direct use but allows incidental benefit, *hana'ah de-memeila*. *Sukkah* walls are *huktzah l'mitzvato* yet still provide the secondary benefits of shielding from the elements and anchoring its decorations. A violation of *huktzah* would not be in benefiting from the walls, rather in repurposing them entirely; for example, taking some of its *schach* and using it as a baseball bat. In this vein, *huktzah* explains why the *menorah* cannot be used as a flashlight, but not why one cannot read by its light. The prohibition of using the *menorah* seems to extend beyond the boundaries of a normal *huktzah* injunction.

This leads to various formulations in the early authorities as to the role *huktzah* plays, if at all, with the *Chanukah menorah*. Some use *huktzah* as a springboard, but require other *halakhic* concepts to fully explain its parameters. Others turn their focus outside of *huktzah* either partially or entirely in order to explain the source of the prohibition.

Tosafot (*Shabbat* 22a, *s.v. sukkah tanya*) would like to understand another example of *huktzah*, that of *noy sukkah* (*sukkah* decorations) as similarly rooted in *bizui mitzvah*. However, R. Yitzchak there raises a difficulty, explaining that elsewhere in the Talmud (Shabbat 45a) it sounds as if the reason is *migu d'itkatzei le-mitzvato*. *Tosafot* offers that both are needed. Something that is *huktzah* is subject to the related Shabbat prohibition of *muktzah* and is limited accordingly. Thus, if only *huktzah* applied to *noy sukkah*, the restriction would lapse on the intermediate festival days, when ordinary *muktzeh* rules do not apply. If only *bizui* applied, the prohibition would not extend to decorations that have fallen, and yet it does. Rosh (Responsa, §24:9) explains that *huktzah* provides the temporal frame— the restriction that endures

through time, while *bizui* supplies the moral frame—the respect owed to what was once sacred.

For *Tosafot* and Rosh the two principles are distinct ideas that work together, approaching the *Chanukah menorah* from different angles. *Bizui mitzvah* forbids active use while the *menorah* stands in place; *huktzah* ensures that prohibition continues even when it has fallen or the festival has passed. Each protects the sanctity of the act from a different direction.[4]

Nevertheless, Ramban (*Shabbat* 45a) collapses the distinction entirely. The prohibition of *huktzah*, he argues, arises precisely from the imperative to avoid *bizui mitzvah*. The legal state of being "set aside" is not an independent rule but a formalization of the *kavod* owed to a *mitzvah*. As *Tosafot Yeshanim* summarize: "Alternatively, it is all one—the *itkatzei* is because of *bizui mitzvah*." The law of *huktzah* is thus the *halakhic* expression of *kavod*, a sensitivity to avoiding disgrace.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (O.C. §673:7–8) reflects this shift from *huktzah* to *bizui* as the primary concern.[5] He entertains the possibility that using the *menorah* for another *mitzvah* might be permitted, reasoning that such use would hardly demean it. Yet he concludes otherwise, determining that any form of use, even one in service of holiness, would still obscure the essential *heker* that these are *Chanukah* candles. Perhaps this is a testament to the unique nature of *Chanukah* candles and the delicacy of their purpose as existing not to perform any physical task, but simply to be beheld. Consequently, even a benefit that neither physically removes them from their place,

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4 R. Shmuel Wosner (*Shevet Ha-Levi, Hilkhot Chanukah* §8) confirms *Tosafot* and the Rosh's treatment of the *bizui* and *huktzah* as two distinct concepts. He suggests use of the *Chanukah* light is proscribed on account of *bizui*, whereas *sukkah* materials are prohibited because of *huktzah* and that the two are not the same.

5 Citing Bach, Taz 3.

nor insults their holy nature, nonetheless disrupts the integrity of their purpose.

The Abudraham (*Seder Chanukah*) captures this interplay at its most delicate. Citing the *Geonim*, he rules that the oil and wicks remain prohibited even after the flames go out, since they were set aside for the *mitzvah*. R. Gershom b. Shlomo asks why this should differ from other *tashmishei mitzvah* such as a *lulav* or *shofar*, who despite being *hukzah* at their times of designated use, may be later discarded. His answer lies in the materials themselves. Those objects continue to exist once the act is complete; their physical persistence returns them to the realm of the ordinary. The *Chanukah* oil and wicks, however, are meant to be consumed in the very act of service. Consequently, their disappearance is their fulfillment. That intention seals their designation: they are *huktzah* until the end, and beyond it. In a second explanation, he adds that the Sages treated them not as *tashmishei mitzva* but as *tashmishei kedushah* (*miztvah* accessories that are inherently sanctified), recalling the Temple's consecrated oil. *Tashmishei kedusha* are never to be discarded even after use, as their *kedusha* is intrinsic and undying. It is here the *Bal HaMeor*'s understanding of a *Menorah-Kedushah* model as one that imposes sanctity onto the candles themselves dovetails with *huktzah*; the memory of the Temple thus merges with the *halakhic* boundary.

All these explanations can also be combined further. One can say that *bizui* itself follows from designation (especially if, as above, the point is not an inherently "disgraceful act," but the lack of respect once the object is set aside), or that designation follows from treating the lights like the Temple oil. More broadly, one may suggest that non-use defines the *Chanukah* lamp as a sign rather than a utility, which becomes the common denominator across the views: since the lamp is a memorial of the miracle, it cannot serve as an ordinary light. From there, the paths converge—either because it stands like the Temple oil (hence benefit is barred), or because a memorial-lamp cannot be used (hence the need for *heker* and the risk that "the observer will

say it was lit for his needs"), so the essence of the mitzvah is non-use, leading to designation and to the concern for *bizui mitzvah*.[6]

What emerges from these views is a portrait of *mitzvah*-objects not as vessels of innate sanctity, but as entities redefined through their exclusion from utility. *Huktzah* transforms matter by withdrawing it from the economy of human use; *bizui* guards the boundary thus created. The *Chanukah* light, therefore, embodies not simply remembrance or perception, but the *halakhic* category of separation itself. It represents a world in which holiness begins at the line we do not cross.

Which Uses Are Prohibited?

Even when a shared principle may underlie the various views, the authorities emphasize different elements of that principle and the distinctions they draw yield many a practical *halakhic* difference.[7] The question of which uses of the *Chanukah* light are prohibited becomes, therefore, not merely technical, but expressive of what the light itself represents.

The *Meiri* (*Shabbat* 21b–22a) broadens the prohibition to include every kind of use, even those associated with a *mitzvah* such as Torah study or the Shabbat meal. He grounds the issue in *bizui mitzvah* as one who derives benefit from the light treats the *menorah* as ordinary, as something to use rather than to revere. Lighting from one *Chanukah* candle to another is different, since it continues the same *mitzvah* itself. For the *Meiri*, the Talmud's example of counting coins (22a) was chosen precisely because it is so trivial a use that one might have assumed it permissible. By teaching that even this is forbidden, the Talmud highlights how delicate the boundary of honor truly is. In this reading, Shmuel's question of "does the lamp have sanctity?",

6 See further—at length on *bizui mitzvah* and on *hukzah le-mitzvato*—in *Responsa Palgei Mayim*, I, §29 and 30.

7 See *Ner Tamid* (*Ketit La-Ma'or*, §5) for his discussion of this point.

addresses not all forms of use but this seemingly light case. His concern is not metaphysical holiness but honor for the *mitzvah*, wary that an onlooker might mistake the candles for personal illumination. Rav Yosef's response, invoking *kisui ha-dam*, shows that even without formal *kedushah*, restraint is demanded as an expression of reverence. Once such minor benefit is barred, all the more so are greater ones.

However, Ran (to Rif 9a) raises the difficulty that banning even *mitzvah*-use seems to contradict a later discussion (22a) where it is established that using one *Chanukah* candle to light another *Chanukah* candle would be permitted. This is contrasted with using a *kinsa*, a splinter of wood, to light from one candle to the other which is forbidden on account of its undignified nature (*bizui)*. It could be assumed that it would be natural to extend this understanding to other *mitzvot* that could be accomplished with the help of *Chanukah* lights, and perhaps *mitzvah*-use is then permitted after all.

The *Me'orot Asher* (p. 28) resolves this question through Rashi's comment (21b) on the topic of *mehadrin* (the enhanced level of the *mitzvah*) which determines that any extra candles beyond the core obligation of one candle per household constitutes a *hiddur mitzvah*, an act that beautifies the commandment. Lighting from one *Chanukah* candle to another within the same *menorah* therefore yields a *hiddur*, even if there is a trace of *bizui* in the moment of transfer. But lighting with a splinter, or using the candles to read or eat, even if it is to learn Torah or enjoy one's Shabbat meal, adds no *hiddur* to *Chanukah* at all. Such acts, even if they are related to a *mitzvah*, draw benefit without deepening the *mitzvah* itself, and so remain forbidden.

Rif (9a–b) rules like Rav Zeira that one may not use the light, and like Rav Assi that one may not count coins opposite it. The *Ba'al ha-Ma'or*, however, reads Rav Assi as disputing Rav Zeira and splits the positions. For him, the injunction of use prohibits all use, even *mitzvah* and *kedushah* acts, since the *Chanukah* lights commemorate the *Menorah* of the Temple. As with the Temple service, all personal benefit is excluded. Yet the statement "counting coins is forbidden"

addresses only mundane, demeaning acts while sacred uses would remain allowed. For him, Shmuel's rejection of the notion of inherent sanctity in the candles and the comparison to *kisui ha-dam* is only when the *menorah's* physical body is misused. The conclusion, in this view, is that any ordinary use is forbidden out of concern for *bizui*, but as the *menorah* does not possess any sacred status, *mitzvah* use would be permitted.

To summarize, The *Meiri* bans *mitzvah* use because of a risk of contradicting the purpose of the *Chanukah* flames, whereas the *Me'arot Asher* explains that such a ban would bear no contradiction to the Talmud's permission to use one *Chanukah* candle to light another since that is an act of deepening the very *mitzvah* both candles were designated for. For Rif, since he understands the source of the prohibition as *bizui mitzvah,* mundane uses would be prohibited while *mitzvah* use is permitted.

Ramban, in *Milchamot Hashem* to the Rif, pushes back sharply. The plain reading, he argues, is that Rav Assi's interpretation extends the prohibition even to something as slight as coin-counting—and all the more so to other uses, whether holy or mundane. Whereas Rif understands the coin counting paradigm to serve as the distinction between sacred and secular use, Ramban reads differently. For him, even Shmuel agrees that all uses are forbidden; his question concerned only the subtle case of coin-counting, which may seem too remote to matter as can be understood as a *hana'ah be-alma,* a benefit as opposed to a bona-fide use. Hence his phrase "does the lamp possess sanctity?" is understood as asking whether it resembles *tefillin* or a *sefer Torah*, whose demands of dignity extend to their appendages (covers, cases, etc). For Ramban, the *halakhah* follows Rav Yosef who determines that all use, of any kind, is excluded.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 673:1), in line with the *Meiri* and Ramban, codifies that one may not use the Chanukah light at all, not even to count coins, nor for *mitzvah* purposes like learning by its glow. Some, however, permit that kind of sanctified use. The Taz

(§3) rules stringently, forbidding all use, even distant or indirect, since *bizui mitzvah* applies wherever one turns the light into an instrument for self-use. The *Magen Avraham* (§2) quotes the *Beit Yosef* to adopt a middle view, offering that only acts performed up close are prohibited, while casual, passing use is permitted—though he then quotes the Bach to be stringent even there[8].

In this vein, the *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (O.C. 673:3) cites the *Pri Chadash*, who allows one to walk in a room lit by the candles so as not to stumble. One is not obligated to close his eyes, which clarifies that such passive benefit does not count as "use." One may also sit near the *Chanukah* light, apparently even if no other light is present.[9] The *Chayim la-Chag* (p. 95) questions this leniency, since the issue of appearance might still apply, but confirms that *heker* concerns were not decreed where no active "use" of the *menorah* itself occurs.[10]

R. Shmuel Wosner (*Shevet Ha-Levi, Chanukah* §6) further applies this reasoning. Tangible uses like warming oneself are surely forbidden across all opinions. But scented candles, now common, raise a subtler question. Drawing on the Shach (Y.D. 108:27) and *Beit Yosef*, he distinguishes that when something is designed for scent, smelling it is a significant act of use. However, when not produced specifically for its scent, scent is not halakhically significant, and that kind of benefit would seem to be permitted. This parallels *Sukkah* 37b, where smelling a myrtle branch being used for a *mitzvah* could be forbidden outside of the context of its consecrated use (its designation was for scent), but smelling an *etrog* is permitted (its designation was for eating). Thus, if *Chanukah* candles are not made for fragrance, any incidental scent is not considered a "use."

The *Chashukei Chemed (Chanukah*, pp. 23–24) adds a contemporary sensitivity. In a world where people often light candles for

8 See *Responsa Or Yitzḥak*, I, §248, for discussion of this point.

9 See also *Responsa Ktav Sofer*, O.C. §134.

10 See also *Pri Megadim*, O.C. §673, *Mishbetzot Zahav* §3.

ambiance or scent, confusion of purpose becomes possible. Yet when the candles sit in a *menorah* with a *shamash*, the context makes their intent clear. He compares incidental fragrance to the incidental light of which the *Sha'ar Tziyyon* speaks (O.C.673:11); benefit received passively, not as an act of use. Later (p. 50), he extends this reasoning to modern novelty candles that play the *Chanukah* song *"Ma'oz Tzur"* when heated, via a wire and small battery activated by the flame's heat. Drawing on the *Mishnah Berurah* cited earlier, he writes that since the music is triggered passively by the flame, just as walking by the light is permitted, so too this would not count as prohibited use.

Who Bears the Prohibition?

Once the contours of the prohibition are drawn, it must be understood to whom it applies. Is the ban directed toward the one who lights the *menorah*, whose action defines its meaning, or toward anyone who might incidentally benefit from its glow?

The debate will turn, as the *Beit Ha-Levi (Al HaTorah*, s.v. *ba-Gemara*) notes, upon a distinction in the frameworks of Rashi and Ran. According to Rashi's view, the essence of the prohibition is not about any metaphysical properties awarded to the candles, rather about preserving recognition: the *Chanukah* lights must appear as devoted entirely to the *mitzvah*, and not as ordinary domestic illumination. Accordingly, the prohibition primarily binds the household as their conduct is what shapes the message the candles project. Should they use the light for ordinary purposes, they dissolve the distinction the *mitzvah* creates and invite observers to interpret it as mundane lighting. Passersby, however, who happen to receive incidental benefit while walking past, pose no such confusion. Their gain does not retroactively redefine the act of lighting, and their experience imposes no significance onto the candles. For Rashi, the *menorah's* sanctity does not reside in the wax or the wick but in the gesture of renunciation that sets it apart. Consequently, the

boundary is relational, not ritual; it is defined by what one's behavior communicates to others. This allows for a distinction between the household and passerby, who have different relationships with this specific *menorah* and its light.

Ran, by contrast, understands the prohibition as not a matter of perception, but one of substance. The Temple *Menorah* was set apart from all human benefit—no one could warm their hands by its glow or use it to navigate the night, it burned solely before God. So too here, all use by anyone in every scenario, stands outside the candles' sanctified purpose. The boundary is not functional but ontological, the light itself participates in a sanctity that is frustrated by any and all human use, no matter how removed. Thus, where Rashi frames the *mitzvah* as an act of disciplined communication, Ran frames it as an act of reverence before sanctity itself.

The *Yareach La-Mo'adim* again draws a linguistic hint from *ha-nerot halalu* (*Masechet Sofrim* 20:4): "These lights we kindle… these lights are holy, and we have no permission to use them." The first-person phrasing of "we have no permission" implies that the restriction addresses those who kindled the lights. If the intent were universal, one might expect a neutral statement such as "it is forbidden to use them." The prayer thus hints toward the *Beit Ha-Levi's* calibration that the prohibition chiefly concerns the household, the very people whose conduct defines what these lights will mean.

Still, the *Yareach La-Mo'adim* leaves room for both readings. The text's personal tone reflects Rashi's emphasis on household restraint as the act that reveals holiness, yet its declaration of sanctity resonates with Ran's vision of a light that bears intrinsic holiness, independent of perception. Between them stands the tension that animates the *mitzvah* itself as to whether the miracle of *Chanukah* is safeguarded through what we see, or through what we refuse to touch. For Rashi it is consistently human restraint that plays a constructive role in the constitution of sanctification. For Ran, we are excluded from a sphere that is already holy.

Leftover Oil

What becomes of the leftover oil once the aspect that seemingly gives them meaning, the flame, has long since extinguished? Asked differently, how long does sanctity persist outside of what encouraged it? How far does sanctity extend beyond its moment? *Tosafot* (Shabbat 44a, s.v. *she-be-ner*) ask this question, revealing a larger conception of the *Chanukah* light. They draw inspiration from a parallel to both Shabbat candles, whose leftover oil is permitted after Shabbat, as well as *sukkah* decorations which remain *huktzah* and forbidden for personal use only until the festival's end. This is distinct from *Chanukah* candles, where the Talmud suggests that any leftover oil retains its forbidden nature even after the festival ends, and recommends that it should all be burned on the eighth night. R. Yitzchak explains that a Shabbat candle exists for human benefit; one expects it to extinguish and thus never fully relinquishes ownership of its oil. But the *Chanukah* candle burns for something beyond utility as it serves the end of publicizing the miracle, casting a light outward rather than inward. In that act of consecration, the oil is wholly given over to the *mitzvah*, "*m'ktzahu le-gamrei le-mitzvah*". Out of love for the miracle, one does not imagine that it will end prematurely; and the designation is total and unqualified. Hence, if oil remains on the eighth night, it must be burned separately, with no benefit drawn from its flame. A fire belonging to a miracle, even to the memory of one, cannot not return to serve the mundane.

A similar view appears in the *Or Zarua* (II §30), attributed to the *Yerushalmi*. Additionally, the same rule appears explicitly in the *She'iltot* (*Vayishlach* §26)[11]:

> if oil remains on the first night, one should add a little and use it on the second; and so on each night. If oil remains on the eighth

11 *Tosafot ha-Rosh* (*Shabbat* 44a) records this ruling in the name of the *She'iltot*; see also additional early authorities cited below.

night, a bonfire should be made separately, for its burning, "for once it was designated to the mitzvah, it is forbidden to derive benefit from it."[12]

R. Natan Gestetner (*Lehorot Natan* XII §53) emphasizes similarly that leftover oil must be burned separately. He notes that this echoes the case of impure *terumah* oil, which must also be burned, notwithstanding a crucial difference. Impure *terumah* may be used as fuel for cooking. Since it was always for human use, even its destruction may serve a practical end. Leftover *Chanukah* oil, however, demands a more pure parting as its burning is never utilitarian, and even the way in which it is destroyed serves as a final surrender to the holiness it once bore, precluding even indirect benefit.

Ran (to Rif 9a, s.v. *i'nami le-shiura*) nuances the *She'iltot's* view and echoes *Tosafot*. He too distinguishes between *sukkah* decorations and *Chanukah* oil. The former are meant to endure beyond the festival and are designated only for its duration; the latter are meant to be consumed entirely. Once placed in the *menorah*, they become wholly subsumed into the act of the *mitzvah*. Because one never calculates exactly when the flame will die, any oil that remains retains that designation and can be considered as if it had been used in the *mitzvah* itself. This is unlike the *Shabbat* candle, where the light's very purpose is human benefit; the act of use does not contradict its intent. By contrast, the *Chanukah* candle's very nature is non-utilitarian and its meaning is found precisely in being *un-used*. The Abudraham (*Seder Chanukah*) captures this contrast, succinctly expressing that the *Shabbat* candles sanctify through *use*, the *Chanukah* lamp through *non-use*.

Not all agree that sanctity lingers once the *mitzvah's* time has passed. Ramban, in his novellae, notes that Rif (9a) rules otherwise: one need only provide enough oil to burn during the time of obligation. Once

12 See *Ha'amek She'elah* (ad loc., letter 24) at the start of his discussion of these points.

that time has elapsed, the *mitzvah* has been fulfilled, and one may extinguish the *menorah* or even use its light. Ritva elaborates that each night's candle constitutes a discrete commandment, with its own act of lighting, its own measure, and its own moment. The sanctity does not persist beyond its appointed span, and he argues that this must be true since *tashmishei mitzvah* may typically be discarded.[13] Once their service is complete, they return to the world of ordinary use.

The convergence of these sources reveals a profound difference in how sanctity can operate. The Shabbat flame, *terumah* oil, and *sukkah* decorations all sanctify the home by entering it—they join human life and elevate it from within. The *Chanukah* flame is different as it sanctifies specifically by the contrast it creates. It imposes a boundary in the home, remaining beyond reach, its glow a reminder of what cannot be touched. In this way, the *halakhic* question of leftover oil becomes a window into whether this is a time when holiness integrates into human rhythm or hovers just above it.

This tension is paralleled in the later authorities. *Ner Ish u-Veito* (§34) turns to the technical question of *shiur*, the minimum amount of oil required for the candle to burn during the time of obligation, and explores its ramifications within the lenient opinion. Many authorities (Maharshal §85; *Levush* §677:3; Taz §672, among others) hold that only the oil necessary for the minimal burning time is consecrated, and anything beyond that remains permitted.[14] Hence, Rif, Rosh, and the *Shulchan Aruch* rule that once the time for publicizing the miracle has passed and the streets have emptied, one may make use of the light that continues to burn, and Taz (677) says the same. The *mitzvah*, in other words, applies only to the measured act. This distinguishes *Chanukah* from Shabbat candles, which lack a defined *shiur*. The sanctity of Shabbat candles expands with the home's demands and

13 See *Avnei Nezer*, O.C. §596.

14 On this reading, there is no dispute between the *She'iltot* and the Rif—contrary to the Ramban cited above.

extends only as far as the relative needs of the household to eat its meal in the light. This is dissimilar to *Chanukah* candles which are bound by time. Drawing from this, *Ner Ish u-Veito* again reinforces the distinction from Shabbat candles. Shabbat candles have no fixed *shiur*, and thus in this view resemble a *Chanukah* candle filled with more than the required amount, once the *mitzvah* has been fulfilled, the remaining oil is no longer restricted.

However, *Lehorot Natan* (XII §53, 5–6) challenges this leniency towards the excess oil by invoking Ran in *Megillah* 26a. There he cites Ramban who asks how a synagogue can be sold if it is understood to be imbued with sanctity. Ramban answers that synagogues and other *tashmishei mitzvah* differ from other consecrated property. They possess a "sanctity of honor" during their use, but not an inherent or enduring sanctity afterward. Ramban there relates this principle directly to the prohibition of counting candles by the *Chanukah* flame, as well as eating from *sukkah* decorations which were traditionally made of fruit and nuts, invoking *kisui ha-dam* as the root of the precept. It is understood that leftover *Chanukah* oil, which remains forbidden from use even long after its window of *mitzvah* use has passed, is of a unique nature. This understanding fits Ran's original distinction that a lulav or a synagogue are meant to be used and not *used up* – their sanctity remains only as long as they continue to serve their intended functions. This is unlike *Chanukah* oil, whose purpose is to be consumed in the *mitzvah*. To consume it afterward for oneself would invert its meaning. This suggests that not only does this unique designation preclude personal use of the oil even after the festival has passed, but it similarly demands that even the destruction of the *Chanukah* oil be done by way of a *mitzvah,* otherwise it would have never fulfilled the purpose for which it was *huktzah:* to be consumed specifically by way of a *mitzvah*. In this way the *Chanukah* oil can only be compared to *noy sukkah* that fell *during the festival*; perpetually trapped in a limbo state suspended between worlds, awaiting a final human act that will restore it to its designated sacred end.

Mo'adim u-Zmanim (II §135) explains further by invoking the principle of *ein bilah,* the idea that oil is not recognized as a perfectly mixed substance in the laws of mixtures. This makes it so that it is as though the entire quantity participates in the act of burning. Thus, every drop becomes part of the *mitzvah* since the *mitzvah* does not act on a portion but on the entirety of the substance itself. One cannot specify "I intend only the minimum," for the fire ignores such partitions and the *mitzvah* effectively seizes the whole. By contrast, wax candles would be different since the flame consumes only what it touches, so only the portion that burns during the *shiur* becomes prohibited. The rest of the candle will forever remain untouched by the *mitzvah* flame and should remain permitted. Still, the *Magen Avraham* (§672:2) understands the use of large, beautiful candles as a *hiddur mitzvah*. If the added size serves as adornment, then perhaps the aesthetic of the candle is more valuable than the sum of its parts, roping the rest of the candle back into the sanctified domain. The main dispute would then lie only with respect to oil, where increasing quantity does not itself constitute *hiddur*. He advises weighing this point carefully.[15]

A version of the *She'iltot's* ruling also appears in the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Naso* §29) which then turns abruptly to a theological assertion: "You shall do according to the teaching they instruct you" (Deut. 17:11) and "You will decree a thing and it will be established for you" (Job 22:28). Both of these verses are understood to be affirming that rabbinic decrees themselves bear divine authority. R. Yosef Engel (*Atvan de-Oraita,* §10) reads this as an intentional juxtaposition, and exemplifies what is so fundamental about the discussion over a few drops of oil. One might have thought that rabbinic prohibitions bind only the *person*—that they cannot transform an *object* into something inherently forbidden (*issurei cheftza*[16]). But the *Midrash* teaches

15 See *Avnei Shoham,* §66, for his discussion.

16 As several *Acharonim* understand *Netivot ha-Mishpat* (C.M. §234); see *Eretz Tzvi* I §2; *Lehorot Natan* V §12; *Mo'adim u-Zmanim* II §34; *Mishneh Shlomo* §34;

dramatically otherwise, that God endowed rabbinic enactments with ontological force. Their word can confer object-status sanctity, rendering the leftover oil itself forbidden not simply because of a personal restriction, rather because they have genuinely rendered the oil to be a forbidden object[17]. What was once a human act of

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Migdanot Eliyahu I §23. In particular reference to the *Tanchuma*, see *Ve-Drashta ve-Chakarta al ha-Torah* I (*Parashat Naso*), p. 334.

See *Lehorot Natan* VI §42:8, who rejects a suggested proof from the language, "and does the candle have sanctity?" (*Shabbat* 22a) that even a rabbinic positive command creates object-sanctity, reading the phrase as rhetorical; to the contrary, he takes it to indicate the absence of object-sanctity. He further suggests that the issue turns on whether the *mitzvah* is lighting or placing—i.e., whether the defining act is the kindling, which he sees as emphasizing the actor, or the placement, emphasizing the object. He notes that the view that rabbinic *mitzvot* obligate the person (*gavra*) rather than create a sanctified object (*cheftza*) is grounded in "*lo tasur*," as the phrasing addresses the individual, and still the Talmud (*Shabbat* 23a) explicitly invokes this verse regarding *Chanukah* as a *mitzvah*. One could still argue, however, that even if the Talmud's wording is rhetorical, its initial assumption is itself significant; and from the conclusion "there is no sanctity" one cannot necessarily infer that rabbinic-level *mitzvot* generally lack object-sanctity. One might also question tying the matter to the lighting/placing question, since both are acts of the person.

17 On whether "designated to its *mitzvah*" (*huktzah le-mitzvato*) creates an object-status or a person-obligation, see *Shevet Ha-Levi* (§8, pp. 50–57). In *Kovetz Mevakshei Torah* (*Chanukah* no. 4, issue 56, p. 58), R. Moshe Mendel Brus, §24, asserts that since *Chanukah* lighting can be fulfilled by a *shaliach* (agent), it appears that the fulfillment lies in the state of the being lit rather than in the act of lighting per se. In that view, *Chanukah* differs from other rabbinic *mitzvot*: generally the rabbinic obligation addresses the individual's action; here, however, the rabbinic law would attach to the oil itself, requiring it to be burning, and thus an object-status prohibition would follow—hence leftover oil would be forbidden for benefit.

These claims are difficult on several grounds. First, multiple passages indicate there is a specific obligation of lighting, not merely a result-state. Second, when *Acharonim* say that rabbinic laws create obligations on the person rather than a sanctified object, they presumably do not mean the Sages simply chose not to

designation becomes, through the *halakhic* system itself, an act of sanctification.

Rambam (*Hilkhot Chanukah* 4:5) among others rules leniently, explaining that once people are no longer in the streets one may extinguish or even remove the candle. The *Maggid Mishneh* explains that both Rambam and the *Halakhot Gedolot* are drawing from the model of *sukkah* that after the festival, use is permitted. All the more so here, where the prohibition stems not from inherent sanctity bound up in the object but from *bizui mitzvah*. However, the *Lechem Mishneh* finds difficulty in reconciling this with *sukkah's* stricter rule, namely that *sukkah* materials are subject to *migu de-itkatzei le-bein ha-shemashot, itkatzei le-kulei yoma*—once set aside at twilight, they remain so all day—whereas this ruling of Rambam seems to imply that *Chanukah* lacks that structure.

A third view appears in *Shiltei ha-Gibborim* (Shabbat 9 on the Rif, citing Riaz): the oil remains forbidden only through the eight days, after which it reverts to the mundane as does the *menorah* itself.

Kuntres Chanukah u-Megillah maps the resulting triad of views: for Ran and Ramban, the oil's designation ends with the act; for the Geonim and *She'iltot*, it persists throughout the festival; for Riaz, it lasts until *Chanukah's* end. The dispute, in essence, turns on the nature of designation. For the first view, sanctity attaches to the *act* of kindling; for the second, to the *object* itself; for the third, to the *time* in which the object serves. The *Meiri* notes that none of these flow directly from the core *halakhah* of *tashmishei mitzvah,* all of which may be repurposed. *Chanukah,* nevertheless, stands apart; its very origin is a rededication of the sacred, and so its boundaries were drawn more

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legislate object-status; rather they mean the Sages lack the authority to imbue an inanimate object not itself obligated in *mitzvot*—with intrinsic sanctity. If so, it is not obvious why *Chanukah* should be different from other rabbinic frameworks. For an extended treatment of *Ner Chanukah* and the *cheftza/gavra* axis, see the work *Torah Achat,* and compare the writings of R. Yosef Engel cited there.

tightly. The stringency toward what remains is thus less a fence than a tribute; a way of preserving the awe of that first rekindled light.

The discussion culminates with the codified *halakhah*. As *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. §677:4) records:

> What remains on the eighth day of the oil necessary for the measure for kindling — he makes a bonfire for it and burns it by itself, for it has been set aside for its mitzvah.

Sanctity, once invoked, cannot simply be released into ordinary use.

The Taz (O.C. 672:1) notes that both the *Tur* and Rosh, following the *She'iltot*, adopt this position, requiring the burning of any oil that once served the *mitzvah's* purpose. Yet the *Beit Yosef* asks how this requirement can coexist with the rule established earlier, that once the time of obligation has passed, one may extinguish the candle altogether? If the flame may be put out, why must the remaining oil still be destroyed?

He resolves the tension by refining the category of designation. The key, he explains, lies in distinguishing between oil that formed part of the *shiur* and oil that exceeded it. The portion sufficient for the *mitzvah* was fully consecrated; its use is therefore barred and its end must be separation through burning. The oil that was added beyond the required amount however, was never truly designated. Once the time of obligation has elapsed, that surplus reverts to the mundane.

This principle yields further nuance when intention is considered. The *Beit Yosef*, citing the Mahari'a, adds that explicit intent can redefine the boundaries of designation. If a person specifies before lighting that only the minimal *shiur* should be devoted to the *mitzvah*, any excess that remains afterward may be freely used. Barring such distinction however, the entire contents of the *menorah* become part of the *mitzvah* and must be burned when it ends. (This is unlike the view of *Mo'adim u-Zmanim* (II §135) as explored above, who holds that such a specification would be practically impossible and therefore meaningless).

The Taz deepens the logic with an analogy drawn from *Sanhedrin* 48a, which addresses materials prepared for burial. There, the Talmud distinguishes between what was actually used for the deceased and what was merely prepared in advance. Only the former becomes forbidden for benefit; the latter remains permitted. The same distinction, Taz argues, applies here. Even if one placed more oil than necessary, only what was actually required to fulfill the *mitzvah* assumes that status. The excess, though prepared for potential use, remains outside the boundary of sanctity. The prohibition attaches not to preparation itself, but to realized service.

The *Chokhmat Shlomo* (ad loc., §4) defends the Taz's reasoning while exploring its philosophical undercurrent as to the *halakhic* significance of preparation. Some authorities maintain that "*hazmanah lav milta hi*", mere preparation, has no legal standing. An object set aside for a mitzvah remains ordinary until the act itself transforms it. Nevertheless, the *Chokhmat Shlomo* contends that this is not always the case, and there are moments when designation alone creates a trace of sanctity. He points to the *sukkah* and the *lulav*, where the act of setting materials aside before the festival endows them with a kind of time-bound holiness. *Chanukah*, he suggests, may belong to that same category. Precisely because its candles commemorate the Temple *Menorah*, where preparation and service were inseparable, the very act of setting the oil aside partakes in sanctity.

Shevet Ha-Levi (§8) follows this reading, noting that such an understanding aligns closely with the *Ba'al ha-Ma'or's* view. Since the *Chanukah* lights memorialize the Temple *Menorah* and its oil, they borrow its character. They are not simply functional implements of a rabbinic mitzvah, but vessels of remembrance, bearing within them a reflection of sacred space. Thus, even if the prohibition originates in rabbinic decree, its texture resembles the sanctity of the Temple itself—a sanctity not of only of use, but of separation.

In practical terms, the *Mishnah Berurah* (§677:19) advises a note of caution. Leftover oil should not be stored for use for the following

year, lest error or misuse occur. Yet, after the fact, if one did keep it, it does not retroactively become forbidden. The *Ma'adanei Yom Tov* (§72) raises a further question about the manner of disposal, asking if the oil must be burned specifically or if burial would suffice. He concludes that while burning is the traditional mode of separation, the principle behind it could in theory be achieved through burial as well.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. §677:4) concludes with one final, practical scenario: if leftover oil becomes mixed with other oil and the total quantity does not reach the sixty-to-one ratio required for nullification, one should not deliberately add more oil to annul the prohibition. This reflects a subtle departure from the general rule in *Yoreh De'ah* (§99:6), which allows one to complete nullification after the fact when a prohibitive item became mixed into another substance unintentionally. In the case of *Chanukah* oil, however, the law is treated more stringently. Because the issue concerns not taste or impurity but benefit itself[18], deliberate nullification is again seen as undermining the reverence due to the object.[19]

The *Minchat Shlomo* (II §55) explains the sensitivity by echoing the *Ba'al HaMeor* in very similar terms to the *Shevet Ha-Levi's* analysis. The prohibition here is Rabbinic, yet its tone carries the resonance of the sacred. The oil, though extinguished, seems to retain an echo of the moment when it stood burning in testimony to the miracle. It is this lingering awareness that *halakhah* seeks to preserve.

The sources, despite their nuances, reflect a shared intuition that to

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18 This is the view of *Chavot Daat* (Y.D., ad loc., s.k. 8); *Yeshuot Yaakov* (*Hilkhot Chanukah*); *Beit Ha-Levi* (*Chanukah*, p. 23b, on the *Shulchan Aruch*); and *Sefer Ha-Chaim* by R. Shlomo Kluger (O.C. 677). For an expanded account of the *Chavot Daat*, see *Responsa Shevivei Esh* (O.C. IV §72), which distinguishes between a prohibition of benefit that stems from the object's degraded status and one that stems from the *mitzvah* itself, concluding that there is a distinct prohibition against undoing the status conferred by the *mitzvah*.

19 See *Avnei Shoham* §67; see also *Responsa Divrei Binayahu* I §35.

repurpose what was once devoted is to confuse gift with possession, to reclaim what was meant to be surrendered. The law of leftover oil thus becomes a meditation on boundaries and memory, on how holiness lingers in the physical world. Even what remains—the cooled residue of the miracle—still carries a trace of its fire, a reminder that what was once illuminated for Heaven is not easily reclaimed for man.

Using the Candle After the Half Hour

The questions surrounding prohibited use now turn to their temporal boundaries: what becomes of the *Chanukah* light once its essential moment has passed? The standard window of obligation—the half hour after nightfall—marks the period in which the *mitzvah* of publicizing the miracle lives most vividly, when people still walk the streets and the light performs its public work. But when that time closes, does the candle's sanctity fade with it, or does the light remain bound to its first purpose?

As discussed, *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. §672:2) rules if one places more than the minimum amount of oil, once the half hour has elapsed, he may extinguish the candle or use its light. The same ruling appears in *Beit Yosef* (to 677) and *Magen Avraham* (§672:10). The *mitzvah* has a fixed measure, and the sanctity attaches only to that measure. Anything beyond it was never designated and therefore never restricted.

Yet others hesitated to treat time's boundary as so absolute. The Maharshal (Responsa §85, cited by *Magen Avraham* O.C. 672:4) accepts that once the half hour has passed, one may indeed extinguish the *menorah*. The oil beyond the minimum, he agrees, was not consecrated. Still, he cautions against using the light while it continues to burn not for metaphysical but rather perceptual concerns. An observer who sees one reading or working by the *Chanukah* candle cannot know whether the half hour has elapsed. The act might then seem like using the *mitzvah* light for personal benefit and would be forbidden for a different reason of *mar'it ayin* (appearances that

suggest impropriety). Better, therefore, to extinguish it outright and leave no room for such misunderstanding. The *halakhic* concern becomes a moral one, underlining the risk posed to holiness once it is made to look too familiar.

The Bach (O.C. §672, s.v. *ve-la'inyan halakhah*; and §677, s.v. *ha-notar*) takes a more stringent path. He reads the Talmud to mean that the obligation's time frame is not fixed at all, and that the *mitzvah* remains in progress as long as the light continues to burn. According to this approach, all the oil placed in the *menorah* was designated from the outset for the *mitzvah's* sake. To extinguish it or to draw benefit from it, even after the time when others have gone to sleep, would still contradict its purpose. For the Bach, the flame defines its own sanctity, as long as it shines, and human hands are not permitted to interrupt its testimony.

The *Derech HaChaim* (Laws of *Chanukah, Zeman Hadlakat ha-Nerot*, §4) invokes Maharshal's *ma'arit ayin* concern explaining that even if this permits extinguishing the flame, it would not permit using the burning candle even after the half hour is up. The observer still sees a *Chanukah* flame and cannot distinguish between what is permitted and what is not. The law, once again, bends around perception—the desire to keep holiness visibly distinct, whether or not it truly reflects the precise metaphysical reality of the candles.

As discussed in the previous section, the *Magen Avraham* (§677:10) offers a practical bridge to avoid the Bach's concern. One can, he suggests, make a condition at the time of lighting to designate only the portion needed for the required half hour, and to reserve the rest for ordinary use. Such an explicit condition, declared in advance, clarifies intention and anchors the boundary to specific parameters. The *Mo'adim u-Zmanim* (II §135) does not view such a stipulation to be tenable.

This subtle interplay between time, intention, and appearance acquires a new dimension in the *Responsa Bo Tashiv* (R. Yaakov Zeide, §26), who discusses the Hassidic custom of taking a small portion

of oil from one's Rebbe's *menorah* after the lighting. The question presses him to articulate the status of leftover oil with significant precision. He argues that the entire prohibition of use, whether of leftover oil or extended flame, is rabbinic rather than biblical. His proof lies in the role of conditions. If the restriction were of Torah origin, a condition separating the first half hour from the remainder would be ineffective, because it would rely on *bererah*—retroactive clarification, something not accepted in biblical law (only after the fact could we say, "this portion turned out to be extra."). Only a rabbinic prohibition can hinge on such a condition, and since *halakhah* recognizes the distinction, the prohibition must belong to the rabbinic realm.

He reinforces his point with the words of the *Shach* (Y.D. 99:19), who equates *huktzah* with other rabbinic prohibitions, never with biblical sancta. From this emerges a clear hierarchy of obligation. Between the lenient reading of the *Shulchan Aruch*, who permits benefit once the time has passed, and the stringency of the Bach, who forbids it entirely, the matter stands as a rabbinic uncertainty. And where the question concerns rabbinic law, the principle of *safek de-rabbanan le-kula*—that uncertainty in rabbinic matters follows the path of leniency—applies. Thus, the *Bo Tashiv* concludes, one may rely on the *Shulchan Aruch*: after the half hour, the light is no longer bound to the *mitzvah*, and its benefits may return to the human hand.

Nevertheless, the *halakhah's* hesitation remains instructive, suggesting that one should not be so quick to interrupt traces of sanctity even as they linger past their appointed hour.

The Status of the *Menorah* Itself

If the *Chanukah* flame cannot be used, what then of the vessel that holds it? Much ink is spilled in discussions of the oil, wick, and wax, the measure of time, and the boundaries that sanctify the flame once it is lit. The *menorah* itself stands between them, giving light a home in the world of things. Is the *menorah* drawn, like the flame it holds,

into consecration, or does it remain merely a frame—functional but untouched by prohibition? More fundamentally, is a *menorah* required at all? Whether *halakhah* deems this vessel essential or merely supportive, the discussion turns from the nature of light and its limits to the nature of what contains it.

The *Chesed le-Avraham* writes that a *menorah* that cannot stand on its own is unfit for *Chanukah*, since it lacks the *halakhic* standing of a *kli*, a vessel. The implication is that the *mitzvah* demands not only fire and fuel, but form—a structure capable of bearing the light. The Maharal of Prague, in his *Ner Mitzvah* (p. 24), assumes this as well. For him, the vessel is not incidental but essential. The *menorah* embodies the capacity of creation to contain holiness, just as the Temple *Menorah* gave shape to divine light within a finite world.

The *Avnei Nezer* (O.C. 500) explores this question more precisely, asking if the *menorah* is halakhically part of the *mitzvah*, or merely a support. If it is integral, then lighting without a proper vessel—by affixing wax or tallow directly onto a surface—would fail to fulfill the commandment. Such lighting would lack the medium through which the *mitzvah* takes tangible form. Yet several sources imply that the *mitzvah's* designation attaches chiefly to what is consumed, namely the oil and wick. The stand, by contrast, serves only as a base, assisting but not embodying the act. The *Avnei Nezer* ultimately suspends judgment, leaving open whether the *menorah* is a *halakhic* participant or a silent witness.

This possibility has been invoked to explain a perplexing position cited in the *Ba'er Heitev* (§673:13), who relates that the Maharshal once purchased a new silver menorah and, using it for the first time on the second night of *Chanukah*, recited the *shehechyanu* after the first two blessings and before lighting.

The *Mishnah Berurah* (§671:18), citing the *Pri Megadim*, notes that those who fix wax candles to a wall should leave at least a finger's breadth between them. This detail seems to quietly imply legitimacy to lighting without a separate vessel. The same impression arises from

the *Shevut Yaakov* (I §37) and *Chacham Tzvi* (§45), cited in *Ba'er Heitev* at the beginning of §673, that the *mitzvah* rests in the light itself, not in the object that holds it. Rav Soloveitchik is reported to have strongly disagreed with the suggestion that a *menorah* is vital for *mitzvah*[20]. The *menorah* may dignify the act, but is not its core.

Yet others discern symbolic weight in the vessel's very presence. *Ve-darashta ve-Chakarta* (III, O.C. §76:9) argues that a *menorah* is required precisely because it mirrors the Temple *Menorah*. The holder's structure recalls that sacred prototype, just as the preference for olive oil recalls the Temple's service. To kindle without a vessel, on this view, would be to lose not only a *halakhic* form but a memory—to light a flame without the history it is designed to convey.

The *Shalmei Todah* (§10, pp. 94–102) gathers these strands into a measured overview, citing R. Z. Edelman, who adds a subtle distinction. Even if vessel-status is necessary, perhaps that requirement applies only to oil, whose use presumes a container. Wax candles, by contrast, are self-contained; they carry both substance and structure within themselves. For Shabbat, the *Mishnah Berurah* (§308:34), quoting the *Magen Avraham*, classifies a wax or tallow candle as a *kli she-melachto le-issur* (a utensil whose normal function involves an otherwise prohibited activity). While that discussion concerns the laws of *muktzeh*, it too reveals that *halakhah* regards a candle itself as a vessel. If so, a wax candle can serve as its own *menorah*. The need for a separate receptacle arises only when the act of burning depends on one.

Seen this way, the vessel becomes not a rigid prerequisite but a reflection of the material used—an adaptive frame rather than a structural requirement. Oil demands a container, wax becomes its own. The *menorah*'s necessity, then, depends on the nature of what it holds.

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20 *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 226.

Conclusion

The law introduces the *Chanukah menorah* in a sea of paradox. The candle is a real flame, yet seems to be the only holy fire not for any use. It is kindled in the home, yet faces outward; it evokes the Temple *Menorah* - perhaps more than just metaphorically, yet flickers beside our tables and doorways. Accordingly, the positions traced recognition and dignity, designation and restraint, commemoration and sanctity.

This tension is why the *shamash* was introduced as a companion flame, why leftover oil bears stricter rules than other *mitzvah* objects, and why the vessel may matter less than the act itself. Perhaps the preclusion from use is understood as preserving the dignity of the *mitzvah* or as guarding what was set aside. Maybe it is reflective of the candle's holiness or perhaps it holds the power to create the holiness itself. Regardless, to partake in the discussion is to join generations of Sages in training ourselves to listen for the story these small flames were designed to tell:

On a cold winter night, the Holy Temple lay in ruin. The marble floors were blackened with soot, the golden vessels overturned. Soldiers' footsteps had all but faded, leaving only silence and the stubborn smell of oil and ash. A small band of men walked carefully through the wreckage, faces drawn with exhaustion and disbelief. They did not speak. There was too much to be done—bodies to bury, walls to rebuild, a splintered people to gather from the shards. And yet, before all that, something pulled them forward. Suddenly someone stops. Beneath a shattered beam, he sees it: a single flask, unbroken, sealed with the mark of the High Priest. Enough oil for one night. They knew it would not last.

They lit it anyway.

Not for a moment was this light meant to serve any practical purpose. There is no Shabbat meal to brighten, no family to warm, no study to continue, no darkness to push back. The light serves to bear witness, to testify that the same God who seemed to have left the world

still abides within it. To proclaim that holiness can be desecrated, but can also return. The flame catches. It trembles, small and defiant, and the world holds its breath.

That is the light the law preserves. Every restriction, every prohibition not to touch, not to use, or not to benefit is a reenactment of that decision. To stand before the *menorah* and not draw from it is to stand where warriors once stood, and to let the miracle remain miracle.

The house is quiet; the world outside restless and dark. The candles burn for no purpose we can measure. We are commanded not to use them, rather to let them speak. For eight nights man serves the flame instead of manipulating it to serve him. He is reoriented as the fire's guardian, tasked with protecting its message in faith and in deed.

This is the victory of *Chanukah*, not the triumph of might, but of measure. Not the conquest of the world, but the sanctification of its boundaries. The Greeks sought to make all beauty serve the human will; the Jew answers by kindling a light he cannot use. The flame burns, it beckons yet remains untouched. In the quiet of the night one can almost hear it: the cries of a tortured people, the clash of swords, the groan of the golden Temple doors as they are forced open, the terrible silence that follows, and then—a flame. The same flame. Burning still. Too awesome to approach, too sacred to touch.