YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Blessings on the Chanuka Candles and the Manner of Lighting**

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**The *Berakha* Recited Before Candle Lighting**

Like most *mitzvot*, the *mitzva* of *hadlakat* *neirot* is preceded by a *birkat ha-mitzva*: “*le-hadlik ner shel Chanuka*” (to kindle the light of *Chanuka*).

The precise text of this *berakha* is subject to some debate.

First, while most *Rishonim* record the text as "*le-hadlik ner SHEL Chanuka*," some omit the word "*SHEL*." The *Shulchan Arukh* (OC 676:1) rules that one should say "*le-hadlik ner Chanuka*," in accordance with Sefardic practice. Ashkenazic authorities differ as to whether one should omit (*Arukh Ha-shulchan* 1) or include (*Mishna Berura* 1) the word "*shel*."

Second, according to the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Sukka* 3:4), the correct text reads, "*al mitzvat hadlakat ner Chanuka*" (upon the commandment of lighting the light of *Chanuka*).

This issue relates to the broader subject of the proper text of *birkot ha-mitzva* generally*.* One of the great Tosafists, R. Yitzchak of Dampierre (the “Ri”), reportedly "didn’t find any reason for the [different formulations of the] *berakhot*" (*Tosafot*,Pesachim 7b, s.v. *ve-hilchata*). Many other *Rishonim*, however, make attempts to explain all of the different cases, often leading to innovative understandings of certain *mitzvot*.

Rabbeinu Tam (*Sefer Ha-Yashar* 340), for example, explains that one recites the text of "*AL mitzvat*…" upon performing a *mitzva* which is fulfilled immediately, such as *mila, shekhita, pidyon ha-ben, tevilat keilim, netilat yadayim, mikra megilla, marror, hafrashat challa*, etc. However, if the mitzva's performance occurs over an extended period, and there is no conclusion to its performance, such as Torah study*, tzitzit, tefillin* and *sukka*, one recites the *berakha* of "*LE*…" (such as “*leishev ba-sukka*”).

Regarding *neirot Chanuka*, Rabbeinu Tam explains that despite the accepted ruling that "*kavta – ein zakuk la*" (if the light is extinguished, one need not rekindle the flame), one must still provide enough oil for the light to burn for an extended period of time, "until the wayfarers leave the market." As such, even *ner Chanuka* is categorized as a *mitzva* whose performance extends over a period of time, warranting the text of “*le-hadlik*.” The Meiri (*Pesachim* 7b) and the Ramban (ibid.) reject this explanation.

By contrast, the Riva (Rabbi Yitzchak b. Asher Ha-levi), cited by the Rosh (*Pesachim* 1:10), maintains that the different formulations depend upon not the duration of a *mitzva's* performance, but rather the relationship between the person and the commandment. He claims that upon performing a *mitzva* which one may fulfill through a *shaliach* (agent), one recites "*AL mitzvat*…," as opposed to a *mitzva* which one must fulfill personally, upon which one recites "*LE*…." (This theory gives rise to numerous difficulties, a full discussion of which lies beyond the scope of our *shiur*.) The Riva comments that although the obligation of *neirot Chanuka* can be fulfilled through a *shaliach*, the proper text is still "*LE-hadlik,*” because people generally light their own candles.

Other *Rishonim* who discuss this opinion suggest that the *mitzva* of *hadlakat neirot* may actually be more 'personal' than we thought. The Ran (in the Rif, *Pesachim* 4a), for example, proves from the case of a lodger, who must share the costs of the Chanuka lights, that one may NOT fulfill the obligation of *ner Chanuka* through an agent, and therefore the formula of "*LE-hadlik*" is indeed appropriate.

The Ramban (*Pesachim* 7b) offers two other answers. First, he notes that one who sees *neirot Chanuka* burning, under certain circumstances, recites the *berakha* of *she-asa nissim*, indicating that there is a *mitzva* to view the Chanuka lights, in addition to lighting them. (This *halakha* will be discussed more fully later in this *shiur*). While one may fulfill the *mitzva* of LIGHTING through an agent, the *mitzva* to WITNESS the lit candles is, by definition, personal. Therefore, he explains, we recite the text of "*LE-hadlik*."

Second, the Ramban suggests that "the lighting is the *mitzva*” means that the lighting “achieves the *mitzva*." In other words, one does not fulfill the *mitzva* through the act of lighting; rather, the *mitzva* is fulfilled as a result of the fact that the candles burn. Ostensibly, the Ramban is suggesting that unlike most other *mitzvot*, which require a specific action, the focus of the *neirot Chanuka* obligation is not the act of lighting, but rather the result of having a *ner Chanuka* burning in one's house. One doesn’t fulfill the *mitzva* through the act of a *shaliach*, but rather by the fact that candles are lit in his house.

Thus, while the Yerushalmi's formula of the *berakha* is not accepted, it certainly raises interesting questions regarding the nature of *hadlakat neirot*, and the relationship between the person and the *mitzva*.

As we’ve discussed, *Halakha* follows the view that allows lighting through a *shaliach*, and the *shaliach* even recites the *berakha* of "*le-hadlik ner shel* *Chanuka*."

If a person lit the first candle before reciting the *berakha*, should he recite the *berakha* before kindling the remaining lights?

In an earlier *shiur* (<http://etzion.org.il/en/ner-chanuka-who-lights-and-how-many-candles>), we addressed the relationship between the first candle, which fulfills the basic obligation of "*ner ish u-veito*," and the other candles, which fulfill the higher standard of "*mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*." We also noted the debate between the *Beit Yosef* (citing the *Orchot Chayim*) and the *Peri Megadim* as to whether one who lights one candle with a *berakha*, and later receives additional candles, should light the new candles with a *berakha*. The *Beit Yosef* implies that if one did not have the additional candles in mind when he recited the *berakha*, he should recite the *berakha* again upon kindling the new lights. The *Peri Megadim* disagrees. The *Magen Avraham* (651:23) discusses this issue and rules in accordance with the *Beit Yosef*.

This debate, we suggested, may reflect different perspectives on the issue of whether the additional lights constitute an integral part of the basic *mitzva*, or are merely a *hiddur*, a means of enhancing the *mitzva*, but not part of the *mitzva* itself. Furthermore, it may also hinge on the question of whether a *berakha* may be recited on a *hiddur mitzva* (as we discussed). In other words, although one has already fulfilled the *mitzva* of *ner ish u-veito*, does the fulfillment of the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*, either as a *hiddur mitzva*, or as a separate *mitzva*, warrant reciting another *berakha*? Similarly, regarding our scenario in which one forgot to recite the *berakha* altogether, should one recite a *berakha* upon the remaining candles?

The *Be'er Heitev* (676:5) rules that one who lights without reciting the *berakha* should recite the *berakha* at that point and then continue lighting. R. Akiva Eiger (1761-1837) devotes an entire response to this question (*Mahadura Tinyana* 13), and concludes that as long as the first candle has not been extinguished, one may recite the *berakha* and continue lighting.

***She-Asa Nissim* and *She-hecheyanu***

Regarding the second *berakha* recited over the Chanuka lights, "*she-asa nissim*," the Talmud (23a) teaches:

R. Chiya b. Ashi said: One who lights the lamp must recite a *berakha*; while R. Yirmiyahu said: One who sees the Chanuka lamp must recite a *berakha*. Rav Yehuda said: On the first day, one who sees must recite two *berakhot*, and one who lights must recite three *berakhot*; thereafter, one who lights recites two *berakhot*, and one who sees recites one *berakha*. What is omitted? — The 'season' [*she-hecheyanu*] is omitted. Why not let the 'miracle' [*she-asa nissim*] be omitted? The miracle is relevant every day.

According the Gemara, one recites the *berakha* of *she-asa nissim* in two situations: upon lighting, and upon seeing, *neirot Chanuka*.

The *Rishonim* discuss the circumstances under which one recites *she-asa nissim* upon seeing Chanuka candles. They also address the nature of this *berakha* and its relationship to the *berakhot* recited upon lighting the *neirot Chanuka*.

Under what circumstances does an observer recite the *berakha* of *she-asa nissim*?

1. Some *Rishonim* (see Rashi s.v. *ha-roe*, *Or Zaru'a* 325, Rambam 3:4) explain that one who has yet to light his own candles recites *she-asa nissim* upon seeing another person's lights. Some (see Ritva, *Shabbat* 23a) even suggest that one may recite the *berakha* upon seeing the *neirot Chanuka*, and then say the *berakha* again upon lighting his own candles. Others (Rosh 2:8, *Hagahot Maimoniyot* 3:1 in the name of R. Simcha and the Ra'avya) maintain that one who intends to light later should preferably wait to recite *she-asa nissim* upon lighting his own candles. In their view, only one who will not light his own candles later that evening recites *she-asa nissim* upon seeing somebody else’s Chanuka lights.

2. The Mordechai (267) and Maharshal maintain that even if somebody is away from home, and fulfills the obligation through the lighting performed by his family members back home, he should recite *she-asa nissim* upon seeing Chanuka lights.

The Bach (*Bayit Chadash* commentary to the *Tur* by R. Yoel Sirkis, 1561-1640), explains that there are two *mitzvot* fulfilled through *ner Chanuka*: the obligation of *HADLAKA* (lighting), and an obligation of HODA'A (thanking God for the miracle). One who has somebody lighting for him at his home fulfills his obligation to LIGHT, but does not fulfill his personal obligation of HODA'A, which one fulfills through reciting the *berakha* of *she-asa nissim* upon seeing lit Chanuka candles..

3. The Rashba (Shabbat 23a *s.v. ha-ro’eh*), Ran (Rif, *Shabbat* 10a *s.v. amar*), and *Tur* (676) disagree, ruling that only one who will not light, and who has no one at home lighting on his behalf, should recite this *berakha*. This is also the implication of Tosafot in Masekhet Sukka (46a s.v. *ha-ro’eh*). Tosafot there explain that the *berakha* upon seeing was instituted for *neirot Chanuka*, and not other *mitzvot*, because people without a home are unable to fulfill the *mitzva* of *hadlakat neirot*, and so *Chazal* instituted a special *berakha* to include them in the *mitzva*. This certainly implies that the *birkat ha-ro’eh* was intended for those who don’t fulfill the *mitzva* at all.

The *Shulchan Arukh* (676:3), and, subsequently, the *Taz* (4) and *Magen Avraham* (1), rule in accordance with the third opinion, that one recites this *berakha* only if he will not light and has no one lighting for him at home.

Regarding the *berakha* of *she-asa nissim* recited upon lighting the *neirot Chanuka*, the *Rishonim* (see Ritva 23) discuss the timing, as well as the nature, of this *berakha*. Some maintain that one should recite the *berakha* before lighting the candles, as "one always recites *berakhot* immediately before their performance." Others insist that one should first recite the *berakha* "*le-hadlik ner*," light the candles, and then say *she-asa nissim* upon seeing the lit candles. This view is supported by a passage from *Masekhet Sofrim* (20:4).

These views likely disagree as to whether the *berakha* of *she-asa nissim* functions as a "*birkat ha-mitzva*," which must always be recited before the *mitzva*’s performance, or exclusively as a "*birkat ha-shevach*," which one generally recites after observing a specific phenomenon.

The Rema (676:2), citing the Maharil, rules that one should recite all the *berakhot* – including *she-asa nissim* – before lighting the candles.

Rav Soloveitchik (*Nefesh Ha-Rav*, pg. 225) records that his father (after the first night) would attempt to fulfill both opinions, by first reciting the *birkat ha-mitzva*, lighting the first candle, reciting *shasa nissim* and then lighting the remaining candles.

As mentioned, the Talmud (*Shabbat* 23a) teaches that one should recite the *berakha* of *she-hecheyanu* on the first night of Chanuka, regardless of whether he personally lights or merely observes the candles lit.

Interestingly, the Meiri (*Shabbat* 23a) cites those who assert that one who will neither light nor see *neirot Chanuka* should nevertheless recite the *berakha* of *she-hecheyanu* upon the occasion of Chanuka. The Chafetz Chayyim, in his *Sha'ar Ha-Tziyun* notes to the *Mishna Berura* (676:3), writes:

It is possible that just as we maintain in general that the *berakha* of *she-hecheyanu* may be recited [on Yom Tov] even in the marketplace, because it relates to the special quality of the festival itself, here, too, it relates to the special quality of Chanuka at which time miracles and wonders were performed [for us], though ideally [the Rabbis] adjoined it to the time of lighting. A similar argument is found in the Meiri.

Similarly, in his *Bi'ur Halakha* (692), the Chafetz Chayim cites a debate among the *Acharonim* as to whether one who is unable to read the *Megilla* on Purim should nevertheless recite the *birkat she-hecheyanu*.

Practically, the *Peri Chadash* (676:1), R. Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe* O.C. 1:190; 5:43:2) and R. Ovadya Yosef (*Yabia Omer* 6: 42:2) conclude that one does not recite *she-hecheyanu* on the occasion of Chanuka itself if one does not light candles.

***Ha-neirot Halalu***

The *Ha-neirot Halalu* prayer, which is traditionally recited after the Chanuka candle lighting, appears in the eighth-century minor tractate of *Sofrim* (20:4). Centuries later, this prayer appears in the writings of Maharam Mi-Rutenberg and the Rosh (2:8). The *Tur* (676) testifies that the Maharam, and his father the Rosh, would recite this prayer upon lighting the *neirot Chanuka*.

The formulation of the mishna in *Masekhet Sofrim* strongly implies that one should recite the *birkat ha-mitzva*, recite *Ha-neirot Halalu* at that point, and then conclude with *she-hecheyanu* and *she'asa nissim*. This sequence is quite puzzling, as the recitation of *Ha-neirot Halalu* would seemingly constitute an interruption between the first *berakha* and the second and third!

R. Soloveitchik, as cited by R. Hershel Schachter in his *Nefesh Ha-Rav* (pg. 224), explains that *Ha-neirot Halalu* is not simply a liturgical poem. Rather, just as the *pirsumei nisa* of Pesach and Purim require a text to properly publicize the miracle (the *Haggada*, and the *Megilla*), similarly, we recite *Ha-neirot Halalu* as the text through which our lighting properly publicizes the miracle of Chanuka. If so, as *Masekhet Sofrim* apparently maintains, one should integrate the text of the *pirsumei nisa,* i.e. *Ha-neirot Halalu*, within the fulfillment of the *mitzva*!

The Rema (676), however, as we learned above, cites the Maharil as requiring one to first recite all three *berakhot*, and only then recite *Ha-neirot Halalu*. The *Shulchan Arukh* (676:4) likewise rules that one should recite *Ha-neirot Halalu* AFTER lighting.

Should one recite *Ha-neirot Halalu* after lighting ALL the candles, or immediately after kindling the first light?

The Maharshal (see *Magen Avraham* 676:3, and Taz 676:5) writes that one should recite *Ha-neirot Halalu* immediately after lighting the first candle, while lighting the remaining candles. Others recite it only after lighting all the candles (see *Peri Megadim* 676, *Mishbetzot Zahav* 5 and *Eishel Avraham* 3). The *Mishna Berura* (8) cites both opinions, though seems partial to the first practice.

R. Yosef b. Moshe (1423-1490), author of the *Leket Yosher*, an intellectual biography of his teacher R. Yisrael Isserlein (the *Terumat Ha-deshen*), records the custom of reciting the famous *Ma'oz Tzur* hymn. He relates (*Leket Yosher* 1, pg. 152) that the *Terumat Ha-deshen* would 'play' (*menagen*) this poem after reciting *Ha-neirot Halalu*. On Shabbat, however, he would recite it during the meal, along with the other *mizmorim*.

R. Yeshayahu Horowitz (the “Shela,” 1565-1630) records the final stanza (“*Chasof zero’a kodshekha…*”),in which we pray for the redemption from our current exile. This stanza does not appear in the earlier versions of *Ma’oz Tzur*.

**The Placement of the Lights: “*Chanukiyot*”**

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 23b) teaches:

Rava said: If one fills a dish with oil and surrounds it with wicks, and places a vessel over it, it is credited to many people; if he does not place a vessel over it, he turns it into a kind of *'medura'* (fire), and is not credited even to one.

This passage teaches two *halakhot*. Firstly, each person's lights must appear separate and distinct from the others’. Secondly, one must light a *NER Chanuka* (*Chanuka* CANDLE), and not what appears as a large fire (*medura*).

Nowadays, people customarily light separate candles or cups of oil, which are often held in place by the "*chanukiya*."

The Rema (671:4) rules that one should place the lights in a row, and not in a circle, which would give the appearance of a *medura*.

The *Ben Ish Chai* (R. Yosef Chayim b. Eliyahu al-Chakam of Baghdad, 1835-1909), in his work *Rav Pe'alim* (4:30), suggests that while the lights should preferably be arranged in a straight line, similar to the *menorah* of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, one might still suggest that our lights, which are generally separate and distinct candles, may be arranged in a circle. Similarly, R. Chizkiya da Silva (1659-1698), in his *Peri Chadash* (671:4), rules that one need not be concerned with the Rema's ruling, as long as the candles are separate from each other, similar to one who "fills a dish with oil and surrounds it with wicks, and places a vessel over it." It seems, however, that common practice follows the Rema’s ruling.

The *Magen Avraham* (3) cites the Maharil as opposing lighting the candles in a jagged line (one in, one out). The *Mishna Berura* (15) cites this ruling, as well, commenting that it is not "worthwhile" to arrange one's candles as such, as it may lead one to place the candles in a circular pattern.

**The Order for Lighting *Neirot Chanuka***

From which direction should one kindle the Chanuka lights?

The Mordechai (*Shabbat* 268) reports that his teacher, the Maharam Mi-Rutenburg, would begin lighting from the left, and then, while facing right, light the remaining candles. He cites the Talmud’s comment (*Yoma* 58b) regarding the *Yom Kippur* sacrificial service that one should always move towards the right ("all of your turns should be towards the right"). Similarly, the Maharil (40) would begin from the leftmost candle, and complete the lighting while facing towards the right. R. Yosef Colon (the Maharik, 1420–1480), a disciple of the Maharil, adds that on each night one should recite the *berakha* over the newest candle, added on the left, in order to highlight the miracle wrought on each additional day of *Chanuka* (*shoresh* 183).

The *Terumat Ha-deshen* (106) cites two customs in this regard. While the Western Rhine communities would begin lighting from the left side, in accordance with the Maharam and Maharik, the Eastern communities of Austria and its environs would light from the right side. The *Levush* (676:5) and Vilan Gaon (*Ma'aseh Rav* 232) also rule that one should begin from the right. (In his comments to the *Shulchan Arukh* (676:5), however, the Vilna Gaon writes that one should always begin with the candle closest to the door.)

The *Shulchan Arukh* (676:5) rules in accordance with the Maharam, and writes that on the first night one should light on the right side, and on subsequent nights, one should begin from the left and continue rightward. Common custom follows this view.

[Rav Brofsky’s *shiurim* on the laws of the holidays have been published as [*Hilkhot Moadim: Understanding the Laws of the Festivals*](https://www.korenpub.com/maggid_en_usd/hilkhot-moadim.html)(Maggid Books).]