



Chanukah of Peace
A Chanukah Special

The phone rang incessantly, a weeping woman on the phone pleaded with my wife to be present at the lighting of the first Chanukah candle in our home. My wife gladly invited her together with her husband. I generally light the Chanukah candles at a later time than most, because of my many obligations and engagements, and so we agreed to call her a half an hour before candle lighting.

They came however they arrived separately. It turns out that they live apart; their children had been dispersed throughout the neighborhood. We were pained to witness this, even though it was not our first time to witness a family deteriorate and dissolve.

I invited the husband to stand next to me near the Menorah, and his wife stood beside my wife. I began to recite the pre-lighting prayers.

I stopped in the middle and told them I wished to share with them a story I heard from my father.

The Chafetz Chayim would habitually visit his teacher. He did so once during the first night of Chanukah. The Chafetz Chayim was ready for the lighting at sundown, but his teacher did not come out of his room, and so the Chafetz Chayim resumed his studying. A few hours passed, and yet the teacher refused to emerge from his room. The Chafetz Chayim was surprised, as his Rabbi was usually very punctual with his fulfilling of the Mitzvos.

At some point the teacher's wife came back from the market with groceries, and only then did the rabbi come out and light the candles. The Chafetz Chayim was bewildered. "Rabbi, women are not commanded to light the candles and her husband's lighting is sufficient?"

The Rabbi's face lit up, and he extracted a volume of the Rambam¹ and read that if a person has one candle he should use it to light his house, as opposed to using it for the Chanukah lighting: "If a person has the opportunity to fulfill only one of two Mitzvots, lighting a lamp for one's home (i.e., Shabbos candles) or lighting a Chanukah lamp - or, alternatively, lighting a lamp for one's home or reciting kiddush - the lamp for one's home receives priority, since it generates peace within the home. Peace is of primary importance, as reflected by the mitzvah requiring G-d's name to be blotted out to create peace between a husband and his wife. Peace is great, for the entire Torah was given

to bring about peace within the world, as stated: "Its ways are pleasant ways and all its paths are peace."

One's Shalom Bayis, peace at home, is of great significance. Peace is a fundamental concept throughout the entire Torah, and the candle itself represents peace.

"I feared that if I lit the candles and did not wait for my wife she would be upset, and therefore I chose to wait for her even if in the process I forfeited the preferable timing for the lighting."

The family listened with intent, and then I added that our Sages teach us in a few places the peace is symbolized by light. The Reshis Chochmah teaches us that G-d began the creation of the world with a peaceful element - light.

Peace represents light. Chanukah, the holiday of light signifies peace more than all other holidays.

We find another interesting point in the laws of Chanukah. In an extraordinary ruling, Ashkenazi Jews go according to the Rambam who rules that each family member should light candles, and Sephardic Jews go according to the European Tosafos that only the head of the family lights.

I pointed out lightheartedly that Chanukah is a time of peace, and Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews exchange rulings to express the peace among themselves.

The couple came back the last night of Chanukah. This time, they came together. They told us of how they had led their household to darkness, and now they wished to fill it up with light.

I was glad for them, but cautioned that the darkness is not expelled easily. However, one does learn to appreciate the light in the face of darkness.

Chanukah is celebrated in the dead of winter, when the nights are the longest, and darkness descends upon the world and enters the hearts. Our Sages bestowed upon us the gift of light, of peace between everyone.

Happy Chanukah.

¹ Rambam, laws of Chanukah 4:14.