



HOW SHOULD AN INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLER FULFILL THE MITZVAH OF CHANUKA LIGHTS?

The question of air travel during Chanuka poses an interesting halachic dilemma. Normally, we light Chanuka candles in our home. If we are elsewhere temporarily during the holiday, halacha may dictate that we share in our host's lighting, and sometimes we will light our own candles.¹ However, when traveling by airplane we may spend an entire night in the air, never reaching our home or any residence whatsoever before the end of the night. Chazal (*Shabbos* 21b) classify the mitzva as "*ner ish u'veiso*" — a candle for each of us and our home. How is the mitzva performed when travel plans are such that there is no "home" to speak of?

Our analysis begins with Chazal's discussion of the *birchas ha'roeh*. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 23a) describes an

individual who recites the bracha of *She'asa Nisim L'Avoseinu* upon seeing Chanuka candles lit by others. Tosfos offer explanations as to why other mitzvos, such as Lulav and Sukka, do not call for a similar bracha. It may be due to the uniquely beloved nature of Chanuka candles that this bracha was established.² Alternatively, Tosfos suggest that Chazal never intended that this bracha be recited routinely by anyone who sees Chanuka candles. Rather, it is meant as a substitute opportunity for those who are homeless and cannot perform the mitzva, the occasion upon which the bracha *She'asa Nisim L'Avoseinu* would normally be said.

Rashi offers two rationales behind the recital of the *birchas ha'roeh*. Initially, he describes it as a universal obligation

for anyone who passes a location where the candles are visible. Subsequently, in the name of Rabbeinu Yitzchak ben Yehuda, he records the interpretation of Rabbeinu Yaakov who explains that the bracha was instituted only for someone who has not yet lit candles at home, or finds himself on a boat, where he will be unable to perform the mitzva independently. It would appear that the two opinions cited by Rashi and the two by Tosfos, though not identical, are indeed parallel. If *birchas ha'roeh* is a special recital meant to highlight the precious nature of Chanuka, there are no self-evident reasons to exempt any individual from the obligation, as Rashi explains in his first answer. However, if the bracha was formulated specifically for those who lack a home in which to light, it would follow (along the lines of Rabbeinu Yaakov's interpretation)

that the bracha be more limited to those who cannot or have not yet fulfilled the mitzva as prescribed, *ner ish u'veiso*.

These two differing approaches may shed light on the fundamental obligation of Chanuka candles. If Chazal saw fit to create a new mitzva — *birchas ha'roeh* — for one who has no home, we would infer that this individual is exempt from lighting Chanuka candles otherwise. Evidently, owning or having access to a place of residence is a prerequisite of *ner ish u'veiso*, where the home is emphasized as part of the obligation. As a result, someone who is away from home and in transit overnight would be unable to fulfill the mitzva altogether and is not obligated to do so.³ However, if the bracha is incumbent upon anyone seeing the candles, we have no indication that a home is essential to the obligation. Instead, every Jew is obligated to light candles even if he is homeless or traveling.

Indeed, in the opinion of *Orchos Chaim* (cited in *Beis Yosef*, O.C. 667), one who is on a boat during Chanuka must light candles. *Levush* (O.C. 667:2) reflects this view and adds that even one who sleeps in a forest or other unenclosed locations is required to light there, even when no house is available. *Aruch HaShulchan* (O.C. 667:5) records that the accepted custom is to satisfy this position by lighting at least one candle even while in transit, such as when traveling through the night by coach or by train. He acknowledges that it might be difficult to light more than one candle, but it would be unfortunate for him to miss out a night of the mitzva altogether.

This position would not interpret the Gemara's term, "*u'veiso*," as a basic prescription for the mitzva, but merely as an ideal location. Alternatively, it may be a reference to one's family and not to any structure whatsoever. In other words, Chazal's term may simply state that the baseline obligation of Chanuka requires no more than one representative for the entire familial unit.⁴ In any event, many contemporary Poskim adopt the view of *Orchos Chaim* and state that one must light even when sleeping outside, such as in an army camp, as long as the area is somewhat enclosed and certainly when it is covered, such as in a tent or the like.⁵

Nevertheless, it is conceivable that the *Aruch Hashulchan's* ruling to light in a coach or railroad car is not in accordance with these Poskim. Rather, it is based on the premise that fare paid for such travel is adequately deemed as a rental of private space that satisfies the requirement of "*beiso*," and calls for the lighting of Chanuka candles. A similar line of reasoning is found in the responsa of Maharsham.⁶

Some authorities entertain a third approach that emphasizes both the "*ish*" and "*u'veiso*" simultaneously. That is, even one who is homeless or traveling must light candles. However, because the prescribed location is specifically a residence, this is the only place where the mitzva can be performed. This perspective results in a very novel stringency: one who lacks a personal, private space to stay on Chanuka must procure one by renting or purchasing a form of residence. Some ascribe this position to the Rambam, based on his rulings in *Hilchos Brachos*.⁷

It should be noted that in any scenario where one is traveling but there are family members lighting candles at home, the basic fulfillment of the mitzva is achieved even if the traveler does not light at all. Nevertheless, *Terumas HaDeshen* (101) explains that a traveler lighting away from home remains a component of the optimal "*mehadrin min hamehadrin*" standard that we generally seek in the mitzva of Chanuka candles. Moreover, the aforementioned Poskim emphasize that one would be remiss to go a night of Chanuka without encountering candles that publicize the miracles commemorated on the holiday,⁸ and this may occur if he does not light and he finds himself in a non-Jewish environment. A married person who wishes to make a bracha when lighting in such situations should stipulate that his or her spouse's lighting will not discharge the traveler's obligation.⁹

To summarize, there are some Poskim who rule that one who is not in any residence of any sort is not obligated to light Chanuka candles altogether. However, others believe that the obligation persists even in the absence of a home, either because one must light wherever he finds himself (especially if it is an enclosed location), or because he must procure some private space in which to light.

Therefore, one who is traveling by airplane on a night of Chanuka may indeed be exempt from lighting while in transit. However, many Poskim maintain that even in transit one is obligated. As such, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach instructed individuals on airline flights to light battery-operated



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incandescent flashlights without making a bracha, relying on the opinions that accept electric bulbs for use as Chanuka candles.¹⁰ In addition, the traveler would be instructed to appoint an agent to light on his behalf at the traveler's home.¹¹ He offered similar instructions to soldiers in the IDF following the Yom Kippur War who traveled and slept in tanks or tents while on field duty. Using the overhead light in an aircraft cabin or any other light on the control panel in a tank would be insufficient. The mitzva demands that the light be recognizable and designated specifically to publicize the miracles of Chanuka.¹² Any other candles that are routinely used in a given context will not accomplish that goal.¹³

It goes without saying that it is not a viable option to light candles in an airplane lavatory. Rav Asher Weiss dismisses this suggestion of a petitioner as ridiculous on the grounds of several obvious points. First, it would be a terrible disgrace to the mitzva to attempt to fulfill it in a restroom.¹⁴ Moreover, it is inconceivable to attempt to publicize the miracle of Chanuka in a deliberately private and restricted area. Of course, it is also violation of federal law to light a fire on an airplane. Beyond possibly undermining the mitzva, lighting an illegal fire may also constitute a form of theft because permitted passenger usage of the aircraft is contingent on the customer abiding by the relevant legal terms.¹⁵

As mentioned above, the mitzva of Chanuka candles is uniquely beloved by the Jewish people. This is one of the reasons why we endeavor to fulfill the mitzva in its optimal form.¹⁶ The Rambam exhorts that this special appreciation of the mitzva behooves us to be punctilious in publicizing the miracles of Chanuka, going to great lengths and expense to light the candles, and by thanking and praising Hashem for all He has done for us. Therefore,

whenever possible, travel should be planned in a way that does not force us to miss the opportunity to perform the mitzva.¹⁷ Understandably, there are situations in which we must travel. In these cases, we will rely on the lighting of others at home or attempt one of the above suggestions that may allow us to participate in the mitzva to some extent.

Endnotes

1. See *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 677:1 and *B'Ikvei HaTzon*, pg. 120.
2. See Rambam, *Hilchos Chanuka* 4:12.
3. See *Shut Minchas Shlomo* (2;51:1) and *Halichos Shlomo* pg. 257; *Shut Igros Moshe* (Y.D. 3:14:5; see also O.C. 5:43) and *Shut V'Dibarta Bam* (Vol. 1, no. 180).
4. It may also be intended to apply the mitzva to any enclosed area, even if it is not a place of residence, according to those who reject the extension of the Levush mentioned above.
5. See *Shut Titz Eliezer* 15:29:7.
6. See *Shut Maharsham* Vol. 4, Chap. 146.
7. See *Hararei Kedem* Vol. 1, pp. 276; *Yeshurun* Vol. 17, pg. 219; *Kovetz P'ninei Chanuka*, pg. 12; *Shut Rivivos Ephraim* 2:180:13.
8. See *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 677:3
9. *Mishna Berura* 677:14.
10. The flashlight used must have at least one half-hour's worth of battery power. For further discussion of the use of electric Chanuka candles, see Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's *M'orei Aish* (5:2), *Sukkas Chaim* (*Hilchos Chanuka*, pg. 75), *Mitzvas Ner Ish U'Veiso* (7:12).
11. Likewise, in the case of an evening flight, one might have sufficient opportunity to light candles at home before leaving for the flight. However, it is a matter of dispute if one can fulfill the mitzva with candles lit in a location where one is not sleeping on that particular evening. Therefore, this solution remains questionable. See footnotes to *Mishna Berura* (*Dirshu*) 677:15.
12. See *Shabbos* 22b.
13. *Halichos Shlomo* (pp. 259-260). It is important to note that Rav Shlomo Zalman himself adopted the first position, only requiring candles to be lit in a home. He was unsure if an airplane constitutes a home at all. The railroad

precedent mentioned by the Poskim may be incomparable, because the latter's fare was often for an extended journey that could last days or more and might include more individualized, private space in the railcar. A similar concern was raised by others, including Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (*Shut Rivivos Ephraim* 8:519). *Shut V'Dibarta Bam* (Vol. 1, no. 180) relates in the name of Rav Dovid Feinstein that Rav Moshe Feinstein allowed an individual to light Chanuka candles in an airport terminal, when no other option existed, because only those with a ticket may enter. Furthermore, it is a location that affords space to eat and even spend the night when flights are delayed.

14. See *Shabbos* 22a.
15. *Kovetz Darkei Hora'ah* Vol. 4, pg. 91.
16. See *Ohr Sameach*, commenting on Rambam, *Hilchos Chanuka* 4:12.
17. Rav Shlomo Zalman noted that the aforementioned Rambam rules that one must sell the shirt off his back in order to afford the mitzvah, and so it is inconceivable that one would purposefully plan travel that would interfere with his ability to perform the mitzva (*Halichos Shlomo*, pg.257, footnote 3). Rav Moshe Feinstein also stated that it is inappropriate to travel without a legitimate residence wherein to light candles (*Shut V'Dibarta Bam*, Vol. 1, no. 180).