



A Goal Unto Itself

Two of the most prominent candles that we light as Jews are Shabbat candles and Chanukah candles. While they share much in common, their differences are also very telling and can teach us important lessons about each set of candles.

Shabbat candles are lit for a purpose. They are either a form of honoring shabbat,¹ ensuring that one finds pleasure on shabbat,² or simply to provide light to allow people to walk without tripping in the dark which facilitates an environment of peace in the home.³ If one lights in a situation that does not accomplish one or all of these goals, then one does not fulfill the mitzvah and cannot recite a blessing over the lighting.

Chanukah candles, however, are different. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that one cannot say that he lights Chanukah candles for an external purpose or as a means to ensure a different goal.⁴ Rather, the purpose of the lighting is entirely enwrapped in the lighting itself. Even though the Talmud sounds like the goal of lighting is to publicize the miracle, if one finds themselves in a circumstance where there is no one around to spread the miracle to, one still lights with a blessing. On a halakhic level, the “goal” of the mitzvah is the very fact that a flame exists.

What does this mean? Why would there be a mitzvah simply to have a flame? The Rebbe explained that Chanukah celebrates the essential relationship of the Jewish people with God. The Jewish people do not connect with God in order to ensure some other goal or to facilitate another broader value. Rather, the relationship with God *is* the ultimate goal, the end of all ends. Therefore, the flame of Chanukah is similarly an end unto itself to symbolize this relationship.

This idea also helps us understand the Jewish people’s connection to Yerushalayim. Usually one moves to a city in order to actualize an external goal – for the sake of a career, one’s social life or

¹ Rambam, hilchot Shabbat 5:1

² Rambam, hilchos Shabbat 30:5.

³ Shabbat 23b.

⁴ *Sha’arei HaMo’adim, Chanukah, siman 47.*



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the like. Similarly, one could imagine a member of the Sanhedrin moving to Yerushalayim in order to shorten his commute or the like. However, the Torah refers to our holy city as “the resting place and the inheritance.”⁵ This indicates that Yerushalayim, from a certain perspective, is the final destination, in the sense that living there is an end unto itself.

The reason for this is that Yerushalayim is an essential part of our relationship with God. God’s presence dwells in His holy city and we have access to that when we are within the city’s environs. As God is the end of all ends and our relationship with God is the ultimate goal imaginable, it follows that on the spatial plane Yerushalyim is the ultimate and essential location. Being in Yerushalayim actualizes our essential relationship with God.

⁵ Devarim 12:9.