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of Metropolitan Washington**

**Parshas Vayeshev
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The Chanukah House

By Rabbi Eliezer Lachman, Rosh HaKollel

As a rule, mitzvos are obligations incumbent upon each and every individual Jew. The mitzvah of Chanukah lights, however, is an exception. "The obligatory commandment of Chanukah is to have one light for the entire house, and [only] those who perform the mitzvah in a beautiful manner have a separate light for every member of the household" (Shabbos 21b). Although it is customary nowadays for each individual to light candles, the fact remains that this is not an obligatory practice, but only a more beautiful manner of performing the mitzvah. Why is this so? Why does the essential obligation of lighting Chanukah candles devolve upon the household unit and not upon the individual?

Actually, understanding the special role of the house in Jewish thought is essential to a proper appreciation of Chanuka. The Hebrew term "bayis," house, commonly denotes the unit of husband and wife and the family which they build together. This house is considered sacred, for it is a fundamental teaching that the Shechinah, Divine presence, dwells wherever a husband and wife live together in harmony (see Sotah 17a).

Furthermore, every place in which we relate to God in a specified manner is also termed a "bayis." The synagogue, in which we as a community gather and pray to God, is called a Beis HaKnesses, house of gathering. The study hall, in which we study God's Torah, is similarly termed a Beis HaMedrash, house of study. The Temple, in which we present God with offerings, is named the Beis HaMikdash, House of the Sacred.

Evidently, sanctity in Judaism is centered in, and develops out of, "houses." A house is an area with walls and a roof, set apart from the public domain. It is a place for private living. In it one can divest oneself of externalities and find the depths of one's own being, and then

relate to one's spouse and to God out of that inner self. Although most of one's living may be in the public domain, in work or in other activities, it is necessary that the anchor of one's life be the house. Only if one steps back from the public domain into a "house," may one can find God and His truth, and maintain the commitment to one's own deepest values as a Jew.

This concept of bayis came under attack at the time of the story of Chanukah. The public domain, at the time of the story of Chanukah, was dominated by the culture of Hellenism. From the Jewish perspective, this culture had indeed excelled in externalities, such as art and sport, political and social organization, but had neglected the more internal aspects of man, such as his values, relationships and connection with God. The campaign of the Hellenistic government against Jewish observance of the Torah was directed against these internal aspects of man that are centered in the bayis. And indeed, the government of the time made decrees against Jewish marriage (see Kesuvos 3b) to undermine the unit of husband and wife, and defiled the Beis HaMikdash and breached its outer wall in thirteen places (see Midos 2:3) to obliterate the concept of the Temple as a bayis in which we relate to God..

God miraculously delivered us from the hands of the Greeks, and we were able to rededicate the Beis HaMikdash and reaffirm our commitment to the concept of the bayis. The mitzvah of Chanukah candles thus devolves upon the house. It calls upon us to value and appreciate the light of the Jewish house, and not allow our involvement in the public domain to detract from it. To the contrary - we are commanded to light from the doorway or window of one's house out into the street, symbolizing that the light of the Jewish house should spread outwards and enlighten even the public domain.

About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org.

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel of Metropolitan Washington

18318 Georgia Avenue * Olney, Maryland 20832
FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org

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