



In Maimonides' *Iggeret Ha-shemad* (p. 43 in the *Mosad Ha-Rav Kook* edition), he provides the following historical account regarding the period of Greek persecution:

It is also well known what occurred to Israel under the wicked Greek Empire, which enacted harsh and evil decrees, including that a person would not close the door to his home in order that he not be secluded to occupy himself in any *mitzva*. The Sages pleaded on their behalf...

It would appear that Maimonides stresses this aspect of the Greek oppression in order to explain why the commemorative candle lighting during *Chanukah* is – ideally – to be performed by the entrance to one's home. It was the entranceways that prevented the Jewish family from maintaining religious life under Greek rule, and therefore quite appropriately we light Chanukah candles to celebrate our triumph over Greek oppression specifically by the doorway.

Rabbi Efrayim Borodiansky (cited by Rabbi Yitzchak Mirsky in his *Hegyonei Halakha*, p. 205) added that this aspect of the Greek oppression likely accounts for Maimonides' formulation of the *mitzva* of Chanukah candle lighting, in his *Mishneh Torah*: "The *mitzva* of the Chanukah candle is that each and every home lights one candle" (Hilkhos Chanukah 4:1). That the essential obligation entails the kindling of but a single candle by each household is already established in the Gemara (Masekhet Shabbat 21b), but Maimonides appears to have extended this notion one step further. One might have argued that in essence each individual bears a personal obligation to kindle the Chanukah candles, but practically one can fulfill his *mitzva* through the lighting of another family member (as is generally understood to be the case with regard to Shabbat candles). Maimonides, however, defines the obligation as cast from the outset upon the home, and not upon individuals. It would seem that in his view, a person without a home is exempt from the obligation of Chanukah candle lighting, just as he is exempt from the obligation of *mezuzah*. Since, as Maimonides indicates in *Iggeret Ha-shemad*, the Chanukah lights commemorate the decree requiring that the front door be left open, the Sages enacted an obligation that a candle be lit by every front door during Chanukah.

This decree also helps explain the traditional emphasis on public display with respect to Chanukah candles. The custom has evolved to light candles (with a *berakha!*) in the synagogue each night of Chanukah, and people commonly light candles at social functions and the like throughout the holiday. The Greeks sought to prevent the Jews from even private observance of *mitzvot*; we celebrate their defeat through the very public observance of this *mitzva*, rejoicing over our freedom to practice the Torah proudly and openly, without fear or intimidation.