

In the Light of Day

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Q: I am in a facility where I will be unable to light Chanukah lights and unlikely to see any. May I make the *bracha* of *shehecheyanu* on the holiday?

A: The Gemara (Shabbos 23a) states that one who sees Chanukah lights burning on the first night of Chanukah but is not lighting his own (e.g., he is traveling and unable to light) still recites the *brachos* of *she'asah nisim* and *shehecheyanu* (but not the first *bracha*, *l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah*). It seems from the Gemara that the *bracha* of *shehecheyanu* (and that of *she'asah nisim*) is recited on Chanukah only upon seeing Chanukah lights, but not if one did not see any or light any of his own. But this is puzzling, because it is evident in the Gemara in Eiruvim (40a) that *shehecheyanu* on Yom Tov can be recited with no concomitant mitzvah.

Indeed, the Me'iri (Shabbos 23a) says that someone in your position on Chanukah would make the *shehecheyanu*. Strangely, though, he says elsewhere (Megillah 4a) that if one is unable to read the megillah on Purim he does *not* recite *shehecheyanu*.

The Sheivet HaLevi (3:90) resolves this contradiction by distinguishing between Biblical and Rabbinic holidays: The *kedushah* of the latter is not sufficient to warrant *shehecheyanu* without a mitzvah, so on Purim, the *bracha* must accompany one of the day's mitzvos. But on Chanukah, because *Chazal* say that passive participation in the mitzvah of *ner Chanukah* by viewing the *neiros* suffices for *shehecheyanu*, the Me'iri maintains that one can mentally participate even with no lights at all. With regard to practical halacha, the Mishnah Brurah (692:1, and see Biur Halacha *ibid.*) cites the Mor Uketziah that logically, there is no difference between *d'Rabanan* and *d'Oraisa* holidays, so *shehecheyanu* requires no mitzvah on either Chanukah or Purim. But R' Moshe Feinstein (O.C. 5:20) says that the *kedushah* of a Yom Tov *d'Oraisa* is stronger than that of a Yom Tov *d'Rabanan* with respect to *shehecheyanu*, such that on Chanukah and Purim a mitzvah is required, and someone in your situation would not make *shehecheyanu*.

May your situation soon change so as to render the question moot.

