

Title:
The history and meaning of *Pirsumei Nisa*: An analysis of primary sources.

ההיסטוריה והמשמעות של פרסומי ניסא, ניתוח של מקורות ראשוניים.

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1. Introduction

Whenever we hear the phrase “Pirsumei Nisa” (publicizing the Miracle), we immediately tend to think about the lighting of Hanukkah. From the time of the Talmud up until our days, the lighting of the *Hanukkiah* has been the most paradigmatic example of a commandment whose main purpose is to spread a miracle. Despite this fact, there are other commandments too that, according to the Babylonian Talmud, also involves *Pirsumei Nisa*. This is the case of the reading of the *Megillah* during Purim, the recitation of the *Hallel* in the festivals and drinking the four cups during the *Pesach Seder*.

Throughout this paper we will try to trace the origin of *Pirsumei Nisa*, its meaning in Talmudic literature and its expansion and interpretation in the Rishonim and in the post-Talmudic halakhic literature. The main goal, however, is to understand why especially in these three festivals (Passover, Hanukkah and Purim) we have this special claim of the rabbis of *Pirsumei Nisa* and why over these specific commandments. What do Passover, Hanukkah and Purim have in common? What do the commandments which the Talmudic dictum *Pirsumei Nisa* is applied have in common? Why is the commandment of *Pirsumei Nisa* on Hanukkah more popular and better known than in Passover? These are some of the questions that will lead our study.

In chapter two, we will explore the miracles in these three festivals and, in the following chapter, the striking connections that we could find surrounding these Jewish holidays. In chapter four, we will analyze and trace back the origin of the concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* in the Babylonian Talmud. In chapter five, we will try to understand the interpretations and understandings by the Rishonim about the idea of *Pirsumei Nisa* regarding the different commandments. In chapter six, we will focus our attention on another similarity that these three festivals have in connection to women and their obligation to perform each of the commandments that involve *Pirsumei Nisa*. At the end, we will present some conclusions and a hypothesis about the connection of these three important Jewish holidays and the deeper meaning of *Pirsumei Nisa*.

2. The Miracles in Passover, Purim and Hanukkah

As we will show, according to the Babylonian Talmud, in three festivals -and only in those three- there is a commandment of *Pirsumei Nisa*: Hanukkah, Purim and Passover. Each of them are discussed separately in different tractates but all of them are brought together in a discussion regarding the *Hallel*¹, and in all of them there is a suggestion of a miracle that occurred and it is marked. We will present now the complete sugyah and then we will analyze it. After making these first remarks, we will try to understand the specific and intrinsic connection between these three festivals.

<p>That [is not possible] because of R. Abbahu, for R. Abbahu said: “The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Why do the Israelites not sing a song before you on the New Year and on the Day of Atonement? He answered them: Would that be possible?; the King sits on the throne of Judgment, with the books of those destined to live and of those destined to die before Him, and Israel singing a song before Me?</p> <p>But there is Hanukkah, on which neither one nor the other [condition applies] and the Hallel is said? — That is due to the miracle.</p> <p>Then let it be said on Purim, on which, too, a miracle occurred? —R. Isaac said: [It is not said] because no song [Hallel] is said for a miracle that occurred outside the [Holy] Land. To this R. Nahman b. Isaac demurred: But there is the exodus from Egypt, which constitutes a miracle that happened outside the Land, and yet we say Hallel? —For it was taught: Before Israel entered the [Holy] Land, all the lands were considered fit for songs to be sung [if a miracle had occurred in their boundaries]; once Israel</p>	<p>משום דר' אבהו, דאמר רבי אבהו, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה: רבש"ע, מפני מה אין ישראל אומרים שירה לפניך בר"ה וביום הכפורים? אמר להן: אפשר, מלך יושב על כסא הדין וספרי חיים וספרי מתים פתוחין לפניו וישראל אומרים שירה לפני?</p> <p>והא חנוכה דלא הכי ולא הכי וקאמר! משום ניסא .</p> <p>פורים דאיכא ניסא לימא! אמר רבי יצחק: לפי שאין אומרים שירה על נס שבחוצה לארץ.</p> <p>מתקיף לה רב נחמן בר יצחק: והרי יציאת מצרים דנס שבחוצה לארץ הוא, ואמרינן הלל! כדתניא: עד שלא נכנסו ישראל לארץ הוכשרו כל הארצות לומר שירה, משנכנסו לארץ לא הוכשרו כל</p>
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¹ BT Arachin 10b

had entered the Land, no other countries were considered fit for songs to be sung.	ארצות לומר שירה.
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The context of the discussion of our sugyah is the Mishnah 2:3 of Arachin, which deals with the different instruments that were played in the Temple during the year and the number of times that each instrument is played. The Mishnah states: בשנים עשר יום בשנה החליל מכה לפני המזבח, “*twelve times during the year the flute is blown in front of the altar*”. According to the Talmud, in that days the *Hallel* was also recited. And this sugyah comes in related to what are the factors which make a day fitting to recite the *Hallel*. Generally speaking, in the days that are called “festive” in the Torah and which also involve the prohibition of working, a person should conclude the *Hallel* (Ligmor et Hallel). But this rule presents several problems which are presented in our sugyah. The first problem is Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, days which fulfill the two conditions but the *Hallel* is not recited on those days. Rabbi Abahu solves this first issue by saying that the Days of Awe, when the fate of the people is being judged, are not appropriate days to sing the *Hallel*. The other important objection, and much more important to our study, is the one raised by the *stamaim* about Hanukkah. This rabbinic festival does not fulfill neither of the conditions (it is not called “Chag” in the Bible and it is permitted to work). Despite of these facts, the Talmud notes, that “because of the miracle” (משום ניסא), the *Hallel* is recited during the eight days. Apparently, as we will further see in our analysis, the fact that a miracle occurred during the inauguration of the Temple displaces the general principle, and although the two conditions are not fulfilled, the *Hallel* is recited. The presence of a miracle changes the overall status of the principle.

The next stance in the Gemarah is the question that Rabbi Itzhak solves, the one whether this same “rule” applies to Purim, which even though it is not a biblical festival, a miracle occurred. If there was a miracle in Purim, then we should also recite the *Hallel*. But this is not the case, says Rabbi Itzhak, because we do not say the *Hallel* for miracles that occurred outside the Land of Israel, which is Persia in this case. Rabbi Nachman bar Itzhak is the one who brings a new challenge to the Gemarah. Apparently, Pesach involves the same case of Purim. In both instances there were miracles and both of them occurred outside the Land of Israel. But in Purim

we do not sing the *Hallel*, whereas in Pesach we do. The *stam gemara*, bringing a Tannaitic source, seeks to solve this contradiction by establishing that before entering the land of Israel (the history of Pesach in Egypt), it was permissible to sing in every country, but after Joshua's conquest, the prohibition came into force (and the story of Purim occurs over 600 years after entering the Land).

Regardless the specific discussion and halakhic consequences of this sugya, we can use this source as a starting point to our main topic: *the miracles in the rabbinic festivals*. According to this sugya, only in three festivals we remember a miracle attached to it: Hanukkah, Purim and Ietziat Mitzraim (Passover). If in this source the concept of משום ניסא is not brought regarding other festivals, we can assume that generally speaking no miracle is attached to them, because if that were the case, the Gemarah would have brought them to challenge the principle stated at the beginning of the sugya.

According to the Torah, no specific historical events established the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, so it is relatively easy to understand why there are no miracles associated with those biblical festivals. The other two main biblical festivals, Shavuot and Sukkot, have historical justifications according to rabbinic culture. Shavuot, according to the Talmud², marks the giving of the Torah, and even though we can say that the description of this event in the Torah³ is recorded as being full with lighting and splendor, no specific miracle is recorded. In regard to Sukkot, at least in the Torah, there are no specific miracles concerning this festival. The reason for its celebration is quite simple in the Torah: "*You shall live in Sukkot (booths) for seven days, all citizens in Israel shall live in Sukkot (booths); in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths, when I brought them out of the Land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God.*"⁴ In the Talmud⁵ we find the well-known discussion between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva, with one saying that the Sukkot were really the clouds of glory and the other stating that they were real and actual booths. Even though both

² BT, Shabbat 88a

³ Exodus 19:16: "*And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.*"

⁴ Leviticus 23:42-43

⁵ BT Sukka 11b

possibilities are recorded in the Talmud, we can assume that in general the rabbis did not see the *sukkot* as “clouds of glory” or as a miracle worthy of being advertised.

Presenting this scenario, we are left only with three festivals, two rabbinical and one biblical, where a significant miracle is recorded and the rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud think they deserve to be advertised. Let us now turn our attention to which are the miracles in this specific festivals which the rabbis apply the notion of *pirsumei nisa* to.

- **The miracles of Passover: The plagues and the parting of the Red Sea**

From all of the Jewish festivals, Passover, which commemorates the exodus from Egypt, is the one where more miracles are recorded and remembered. According to the Torah, God wrought two types of miracles for the people of Israel to enable their freedom from Egypt: *the ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea*. The sources speak for themselves. Concerning the plagues, it is stated: “*Therefore say unto the children of Israel: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out from their bondage, **and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.**’*”⁶ In relation to the parting of the sea, the Torah states: “*But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea... **And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD** when I have gotten Myself honor above Pharaoh, above his chariots, and above his horsemen.*”⁷ Both divine acts are presented as miracles or signs according to the biblical text. According to the Torah, both divine actions have a double purpose: the first is to take the children of Israel out of Egypt and the second is to enlarge the name of God and make all the world, especially the Egyptians, aware that the God of Israel is the one who is freeing them⁸.

- **The miracle of Hanukkah: The hidden oil and/or the military victory**

⁶ Exodus 6:6

⁷ Exodus 14:16-18

⁸ The idea of God performing miracles to show His power is recorded several times through the story of Exodus. Some examples of it could be found in: Exodus 7:3-5, 8:18 and 9:16

In regard to the Hanukkah miracle, we are presented with a striking phenomenon. According to the Talmudic tradition, the main miracle of the festival is the discovery of a small amount of pure oil that lasted for eight days: *“For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days.”*⁹

However, in all of the previous literature, in the book of Maccabees and in Josephus, there are no references to this miracle; the main point of the celebration of Hanukkah was the Hasmonean victory over the Greeks and the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty over the Temple and Judah. The history of Hanukkah is mainly recorded in the first book of Maccabees. In the apocryphal text, in chapter 4 (36-59), the purification and dedication of the Temple after the victory of the Maccabees is recorded. However, no miracle is recorded there. There is no mention of the oil miracle, though the lamps of the Temple are specifically recorded: *“They burned incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and there was light in the Temple!”*¹⁰. Josephus also relates Hanukkah to the purification of the Temple by Judah Maccabee.¹¹ According to Noam Vered: *“He states that the festival is called "Lights" and offers his own reason for this name, an indication that he is unfamiliar with the miraculous kindling of the candelabrum in the Temple.”*¹² Many authors have suggested so that the real commemoration of Hanukkah is the military victories as well as a religious rededication.¹³ According to our approach to *Pirsumei Nisa*, this second and more original perspective, as we will try to prove, makes much more sense. The real “miracle” that the lighting of the Chanukah candles intends to spread is the military victory of the Jewish people over a foreign oppressor.

- **The miracle of Purim: the hidden miracle**

⁹ BT, Shabbat 21a

¹⁰ I Maccabees 4:54

¹¹ Ant. 12:325.

¹² Vered Noam, The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil: The Metamorphosis of a Legend, p. 3.

¹³ Ad. loc.

Of the three festivals where we have a rabbinical commandment of *pirsumei nisa*, the most struggling one is Purim. The Torah is clear about the wonders that God brought to Egypt to free the people of Israel. When it comes to Hanukkah, whether the miracle is the oil that lasted for eight days (according to the Talmud) or the marvelous victory of the Hasmoneans (according to Josephus and I Maccabees), we clearly have a tradition that something “spectacular” happened in those days. But what particular miracle occurred in the story of Purim worthy of being publicized? There are no evident miracles in the Book of Esther.

However, we may understand what the “miracle” that we should publicize during Purim is. The “miracle” of the change of luck: *“because Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot) to consume them and to destroy them.”*¹⁴ On the same day when Haman planned to destroy the Jews, the Jewish people in the kingdom of Ahasuerus rose upon their enemies and destroyed them: *“Now in the twelfth month [that is, the month of Adar] on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king’s commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them (though it was turned to the contrary, so that the Jews had rule over those who hated them), the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on such as sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them, for the fear of them fell upon all people.”*¹⁵ The central memory of Purim that should be publicized is the vengeance of the Jewish people upon their enemies, the day that luck changed and, through Esther and Mordecai, the Jewish people emerged victorious against their enemies.

¹⁴ Esther 9:24

¹⁵ Ibid. 9:1-2

3) The connection between Passover, Purim and Hanukkah

As we have seen, according to the Talmud, only in these three festivals an important “miracle” occurred, and there is a commandment to publicize it. On Passover we remember how God delivered the Jewish people out of Egypt by displaying his power against the Egyptians. In Purim we remember the change of “luck” in favor of the Jewish people, who on the day that they were supposed to be exterminated, they killed thousands of their enemies in Persia. On Hanukkah we remember how the Hasmoneans recovered the Holy Temple and Jerusalem and expelled the Greeks from the Land. So, what do these three festivals have in common? *They all mark the victory of the Jewish people over a foreign oppressor.* They are the only three festivals through the Jewish-rabbinical calendar which mark a “military” victory over the enemies.

While in general we may not tend to unite these three festivals under a common denominator, a close reading of the texts and their stories shed important similarities: (1) In the three stories there is an outside power/kingdom who somehow oppressed or intended to kill the Jews; (2) in the three stories something changed and the Jewish people come out victorious; (3) in the three stories there is a kind of war, in the story of the Exodus of Egypt God is the deliverer, and in Purim and Hanukkah Jews themselves are their own deliverers; (4) in all of the stories, there is a description of a great slaughter on the enemy front; (5) all the stories present a commandment in rabbinic literature, which marks this event; (6) according to the Babylonian Talmud, in these three festivals there is a commandment of *Pirsumei Nisa*. (7) As we will see according to the Babylonian Talmud only in these three festivals women are also obligated to perform the commandments of the day.

All three festivals are about redemption; they mark the transition of a bleak moment in Jewish history towards a time of independence, from a time of weakness to a time of strength. In the words of the book of Esther (9:22): “*as the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and joy*”. This verse applies also to Passover

and Hanukkah. Early rabbinic tradition and modern scholars¹⁶ also found striking connections between these festivals. For example, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Megillah 1:5) says the following:

[With reference to Est. 9:27, "In each and every year."] R. Abbahu in the name of R. Eleazar: "The reference to 'each and every year' serves to draw an analogy from a year which is intercalated to one which is not intercalated, with the result that we come to the following conclusion: Just as in a year which is not intercalated, Adar [in which Purim is celebrated] is next to Nisan, so too in a year which is intercalated, Adar [which Purim is celebrated] is next to Nisan." R. Helbo said, "It is so as to link up one redemption [the one of Purim] with another [the one of the Exodus from Egypt]."

Both redemptions are connected. "*Even among the earliest works of rabbinic exegesis of Esther is noted a connection between the two feasts inasmuch as the fast undertaken by Esther and Mordechai coincided exactly with the first three days of the feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread*", Wechsler suggest¹⁷, basing himself on several rabbinic recordings.¹⁸ In the Jewish liturgy of post-Talmudic times, starting in the Geonic period, the connections between Purim and Hanukkah are much stronger. The Amidah prayers of both festivals incorporate a special paragraph called Al-Hanisim¹⁹, and before the reading of the Megillah or the lighting of the Hanukkah, a special blessing is added: "*SheAsah Nisim LaAvoteinu*"²⁰.

¹⁶ For example between Hanukkah and Purim: "Purim and Hanukkah: A phenomenological Comparison, Harold Fisch". Between Passover and Purim: "THE PURIM-PASSOVER CONNECTION: A REFLECTION OF JEWISH EXEGETICAL TRADITION IN THE PESHITTA BOOK OF ESTHER, Michael Wechsler" or "Esther, Exodus, Purim, and Passover. David J. Zucker". Between many others.

¹⁷ THE PURIM-PASSOVER CONNECTION, Michael Wechsler. p. 324.

¹⁸ For example: Midrash Esther Rabbah.8:7; Pirke Rabbi Eliezer, 50

¹⁹ Also in the Pesikta Rabati (Hosafa Alef, Pesika Bet) it is stated that the Jewish people should praise God for all the wonders (Al-Hanisim) for killing the firstborns in Egypt. For the first sources who record the praise Al-Hanisim in the liturgy of Purim and Chanukah: Sefer Halakhot, Siman 9 (Hilkhot Chanukah) and Seder Rav Amram Gaon in his Seder of Purim and the one on Chanukah.

²⁰ Rav Byniamim Tabory gives an answer regarding why even, do that the four cups are also for Pirsumei Nisa, we do not say the blessing "SheAsa Nisim LaAvoteinu" before we drink: "*Given that the entire Pesach seder also involves "pirsumei nisa," and the mitzva of the arba kosot certainly constitutes "pirsumei nisa," why is no such blessing recited at the seder? Some Rishonim (Sefer Ha-Ora, 90; also see Orchot Chayim, Avudraham and other commentators on the Haggada) explain that, in truth, such a blessing indeed exists. Just before we drink the second cup, we recite the blessing, "Asher ge'alanu ve-ga'al et avoteinu" ("Who has redeemed us and our fathers"), which is akin to the blessing of "she-asa nisim."*"

As it will be proved, another striking connection that all of these festivals have in common has to do with the subject of our paper: *Pirsumei Nisa*, publicizing the miracle. As we have said, only in these festivals there is a special commandment of telling others about these victories of the Jewish people over their enemies. And as we will see in chapter six, in these festivals women are also obligated to perform these commandments, because “they were part of the miracle”. With this information in mind we can now turn to the Babylonian Talmud, where the first traces of the commandment of *Pirsumei Nisa* are found.

4. Pirsumei Nisa in the Talmud

The concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* is found neither in Tannaitic literature nor in the Palestinian Talmud. The only place where we find this concept is in the Babylonian Talmud. Six times in the whole Babylonian Talmud we find out this concept: 3 times in relationship to Hanukkah, 2 times in relationship to Purim (on one of these occasions in relationship to the *Hallel* too), and on one occasion in regard to Passover. In this section we will do a general analysis of these sugyot and then we will try to draw some conclusions out of them. We will try to trace the origin of this principle and find what the original sugya which the others took the concept from was. After revising the primary sources, we will try to understand the meaning of this halakhic concept in Talmud times.

Firstly, a linguistic clarifying note. The Aramaic expression נִסָּא פִּרְסוּמֵי could be translated -and is usually translated- as “publicizing the miracle”. According to Sokoloff²¹, the verb פִּרְסָם means in Aramaic “to publicize or to make well known”. In our context, נִסָּא פִּרְסוּמֵי is understood as making others know about the miracles that occurred to the Jewish people in different historical moments. Other Talmudic expressions that involve the same verb are פִּרְסוּמֵי מִלְתָּא²², which means “to make the matter public” and is used as a legal rabbinical principle to make the general Jewish population aware of the new status of someone or something, or just to make something public and well known to all. Another similar expression with identical meaning is צִיבּוּר דְּפִרְסָם חֲטָאִיהּ²³, meaning “a community whose sin is publicized”. The word נִסָּא as Sokoloff also states means in Babylonian Aramaic “miracle”²⁴ even do that in the Biblical times the word for miracle was other²⁵ and the Hebrew meaning of the word *Nes*²⁶ (the Hebrew

²¹ M. Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods, John Hopkins Univ. Press (2003), p. 936.

²² See for example Menahot 64b or Arakhin 29a

²³ TB Avodah Zarah 5a

²⁴ M. Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods, John Hopkins Univ. Press (2003), p. 752.

²⁵ “Biblical Hebrew has no word corresponding to the English “miracle.” Occasionally, the Bible mentions “wonders” (*pele*’, *nifla’ot*) meaning “*miracles*” (Ex. 3:20; Josh. 3:5; Ps. 78:11; etc.), but the meaning of “wonder” is much broader than “miracle.” A particular class of *miracles*, however, can be considered as a definite biblical concept, since it is designated by terms of its own. These are the “signs” (*’otot*, *mofetim*), i.e., extraordinary and surprising events which God brought about in order to demonstrate His power and will in particular situations, when men had to be convinced.” Encyclopedia Judaica, Miracle, p. 305.

equivalent in the rabbinic times of the Aramaic Nisa) did not have the meaning of miracle in the biblical hebrew. Now let us turn to the Talmud.

(1) Chanukah Lights

• Between Kiddush and Ner Chanukah: Shabbat 23b

<p>אמר רבא, פשיטא לי: (1) נר ביתו ונר חנוכה נר ביתו עדיף, משום שלום ביתו. (2) נר ביתו וקידוש היום נר ביתו עדיף, משום שלום ביתו. (3) בעי רבא: נר חנוכה וקידוש היום מהו? קידוש היום עדיף דתדיר, או דילמא: נר חנוכה עדיף, משום פרסומי ניסא? בתר דאבעיא הדר פשטה: נר חנוכה עדיף, משום פרסומי ניסא.</p>	<p>Rava said: It is obvious to me [that if one must choose between] (1) the house light and the Hanukkah light, the former is preferable, on account [of the importance] of the peace of the home; (2) [between] the house light and [wine for] the Sanctification of the Day, the house light is preferable, on account of the peace of the home. (3) Rava propounded: What [if the choice lies between] the Hanukkah lamp and the Sanctification of the Day: is the latter more important, because it is permanent; or perhaps the Hanukkah lamp is preferable, on account of advertising the miracle? After propounding, he himself solved it: The Hanukkah lamp is preferable, on account of advertising the miracle.</p>
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To our own same days, the most frequent citation of *pirsumei nisa* is in the context of kindling the lights of Hanukkah. The Babylonian Talmud, in the only long section that deals with the laws of this minor festival (Shabbat 21a-24a), brings a discussion in the name of Rava about which of the commandments takes precedence over which in times of distress, or when someone does not have enough money to buy all the elements necessary to fulfill some commandments. Rava brings three cases: (1) Between buying lights for the house or lights for Hanukkah, the first ones takes priority because of *Shalom Bait* (for the sake of the peace of the home); (2) the same is true between candles for the house or wine for the Kiddush, the first one taking priority for the

²⁶ "The almost universal word for a miracle in the talmudical literature is the term נִסָּ (nes), used in the Bible for a "sign" or "standard." Ibid. 306

same principle; (3) between Hanukkah candles and wine for the Kiddush, the candles take priority on account of advertising the miracle (משום פרסומי ניסא).

According to the diagram of this sugya, the last of these laws, according to Rava, is a *chidush*, it was not something well established in rabbinic tradition. The first two clauses are brought as axioms without discussion or without giving the reason of the position that is left aside. In the last instance, the one that we are interested in, it seems that Rava makes a rhetorical question to his students (בעי רבא). And afterwards, he gives reasons why we could tilt in favor of one position or the other. At the end, he himself answers the question -ביתר דאבעיא הדר פשטה- establishing the new application of this law about preferences on a budget. He establishes here that in this instance the Hanukkah candles take priority because with them we publicize the miracle.

In this sugya it is Rava, one of the most important of the Amoraim of the 4th generation in Babylonia, the one who presents the notion of *Pirsumei Nisa*. But here we do not see an explanation of what *pirsumei nisa* means or which miracle he is talking about exactly. And this will be the case for all of our sugyot. Also, from this source we can almost be positive that Rava did not himself create this concept, that is to say, *pirsumei nisa* is not a sui generis creation of his own, but he just quoted this principle “already known” to him and applied it to the issue of the lights of Hanukkah.

● **Hanukkah and Birkat HaMazon: Shabbat 24a**

<p>The scholars propounded: Is Hanukkah to be mentioned in grace after meals? Since it is a rabbinical [institution], we do not mention it; or perhaps it is mentioned to give publicity to the miracle? — Raba said in R. Sehora's name in R. Huna's name: It need not be mentioned; yet if one comes to mention it, he does so in the 'Thanks' [benediction].</p> <p>R. Huna b. Judah chanced to visit Raba's academy [and] thought</p>	<p>איבעיא להו: מהו להזכיר של חנוכה בברכת המזון? כיון דמדרבנן הוא לא מדכרינן, או דילמא: משום פרסומי ניסא מדכרינן? - אמר רבא אמר רב סחורה אמר רב הונא: אינו מזכיר, ואם בא להזכיר מזכיר בהודאה.</p>
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to mention it [Hanukkah] in [the benediction] 'he will rebuild Jerusalem.' R. Shesheth said to them [the scholars], It is as the Prayer: Just as [it is inserted in] the Prayer in the [benediction of] 'Thanks,' So [is it inserted in] grace after meals in the [benediction of] 'Thanks'.	רב הונא בר יהודה אִיקלע לבי רבא, סבר לאדכורי בבונה ירושלים. אמר להו רב ששת: כתפלה, מה תפלה בהודאה, אף ברכת המזון בהודאה.
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In the famous sugya of Shabbat that deals with laws of Hanukkah, there is another instance where the principle of *Pirumei Nisa* is evoked: in regard to the grace after meals. Generally speaking, during each festival a special paragraph is added in the *Birkat HaMazon* to remember that particular event. According to the Talmud, once the rabbis discussed in some Babylonian academy (probably Yeshivat Surah), in the late 3rd century, if we should also add a special paragraph during the eight days of Hanukkah. The *Stam Gemara* considers two possibilities: (1) We should not add a paragraph because it is a rabbinic- institutionalized festival (and it does not reach the same “level” as a biblical festival); or (2) Because of *Pirumei Nisa*, we should add a special paragraph even though it is a rabbinic enactment. Once again we see here the basic meaning of *Pirumei Nisa* in the Babylonian Talmud: the halakhic concept of *Pirumei Nisa* comes to give power and strength to a rabbinical commandment. In general terms, a rabbinical commandment does not take precedence over a commandment of the Torah, nor have the same status, but on some occasions, "if a miracle happened there", the commandment can have the same status or exceed (as in the case of the Kiddush and Hanukkah candles) a Torah commandment. In other words, "Pirumei Nisa" changes the status of the commandment and "elevates" it.

In this case the answer is negative, there is no need to mention Hanukkah in the grace after meals.²⁷ This ruling once again has Rava as the communicator in the name of his master and his master master, Rab Sehora²⁸ and Rab Huna²⁹. He rules according to what he has studied that

²⁷Stefan Reif suggest that there are many possible readings of this talmudic clause: “Depending on how it is interpreted, one appears to suggest either than it need not to be mentioned but, if it is, the most suitable place is the second benediction dealing with the land of Israel, or that it should be mentioned only in the Amidah” (Problems with prayers, 293).

²⁸Amora from Babylon of the third and fourth generation. It was the student of Rab Huna and always when he is cited in the Talmud is in the name of his master and is enunciated by his most important student: Raba. Like in our case.

it is not necessary to add it but it is optional, and if one does, it should be done in *Birkat Hodaah*³⁰.

● **Between Chanukah and Megilath Taanit: Rosh Hashanah 18b**

<p>איתמר, רב ורבי חנינא אמרי: בטלה מגילת תענית, רבי יוחנן ורבי יהושע בן לוי אמרי: לא בטלה מגילת תענית... מתיב רב כהנא: מעשה וגזרו תענית בחנוכה בלוד, וירד רבי אליעזר ורחץ, ורבי יהושע וסיפר. ואמרו להם: צאו והתענו על מהשתעניתם! אמר רב יוסף: שאני חנוכה דאיכא מצוה. אמר ליה אביי: ותיבטיל איהי, ותיבטל מצותה! אלא אמר רב יוסף: שאני חנוכה דמיפרסם ניסא.</p>	<p>It has been stated [elsewhere]: Rab and R. Hanina hold that the Megillath Taanith has been annulled, whereas R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish hold that the Megillath Ta'anith has not been annulled. ... R. Kahana cited the following in objection: ‘On one occasion a fast was decreed in Lydda on Hanukah and Rabbi Eliezer went down there and bathed, and Rabbi Ioshua had his hair cut and they said to the inhabitants, Go and fast in atonement for having fasted [on this day]’! Rab Iosef said: Hanukah is different, because there is a religious ceremony [attached to it]: Let it be abolished and its ceremony with it! Thereupon, Rab Iosef said: Hanukah is different because it publicly commemorates a miracle.</p>
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This third sugya that brings the concept of *pirsumei nisa* in relation to Hanukkah deals with an Ammoraitic discussion about the status of Megillath Taanith in their time. Rab and Rabbi Chaninah bar Chama are two of the most important sages of the first generation of Amoraim in Israel (later in his life Rab will go to Babylonia and will establish there Yeshivat Sura). Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish are both Amoraim of the second generation in Israel. The editor of the Talmud creates a hypothetical discussion between this two pairs of sages. The first pair stated that Megillath Taanith is now annulled and this means that all the days that are written in this pre-Tannaitic document, on which it was forbidden to fast, it is now permitted.

²⁹ Amora from Babylon of the second generation. He replaced Rav as the head of Yeshivat Sura.

³⁰ In the blessing over the land (Rashi, Ibid.) Tosafot (ad. loc.) emphasizes that the addition of “Al Hanisim” should be in that blessing because is Hoda'ah (Thanksgiving praises) and not Tefilah.

The second pair of sages argues that Megillath Taanith is not annulled and it is forbidden to fast on those days.

The editor of the Talmud brings later on a questioning from Rab Kahana (2nd generation of Amoraim and a student of Rab and Rabbi Yochanan), apparently to both pairs but more direct to the first one. He relates a story that happened in Lydda during Hanukkah when the rabbis decreed a fast (needless to say that if they did that, it was because they thought that Megillat Taanith was annulled). In repudiation of this decree, two rabbis went on to do things that are forbidden during public fasts and then they discriminated against the people saying that they should make a fast for the incorrect fast that they did. For Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Ioshua, Megillath Taanith was not annulled and all those days should be days of celebration. It is *Rab Iosef bar Hiyah*, an Amora from Babylon of the 3rd generation,³¹ who tries to solve this apparent contradiction by saying that even though all the Megillat Taanit were indeed annulled, only Hanukkah was not because it involved a established rabbinic commandment (kindling the lights during eight days). Abaie questions this proposition, saying that it is possible to annul the festival with the commandment that this involves. But *Rab Iosef bar Hiyah* states that this cannot be done because Hanukkah involves **publicizing a miracle** (דמיפרסם ניסא). As we will see, this is probably the oldest quotation of the principle of *Pirsumei Nisa* in the Talmud.

(2) The reading of the Megillah

(a) Between the Megillah and a Met Mitzvah: Megilah 3b

אמר רבא: פשיטא לי: (1) עבודה ומקרא מגילה מקרא מגילה עדיף, מדרבי יוסי בר חנינא. (2) תלמוד תורה ומקרא מגילה מקרא מגילה עדיף,	Rava said: There is no question in my mind that, (1) as between the Temple service and the reading of the Megillah, the reading of the Megillah takes priority, for the reason given by R. Jose b. Hanina. (2) As between the study of the Torah and the reading of the Megillah, the reading of the Megillah takes priority, since the
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³¹ Toldot Tannaim veAmoraim, II, page: 742.

<p>מדסמכו של בית רבי. (3) תלמוד תורה ומת מצוה מת מצוה עדיף, מדתניא: מבטלין תלמוד תורה להוצאת מת ולהכנסת כלה. (4) עבודה ומת מצוה מת מצוה עדיף, אמו לאחתו [...] (5) בעי רבא: מקרא מגילה ומת מצוה הי מינייהו עדיף? מקרא מגילה עדיף משום פרסומי ניסא, או דלמא מת מצוה עדיף משום כבוד הבריות? בתר דבעיא הדר פשטה: מת מצוה עדיף. דאמר מר: גדול כבוד הבריות שדוחה את לא תעשה שבתורה.</p>	<p>members of the house of Rabbi based themselves [on the dictum of R. Jose].</p> <p>(3) As between the study of the Torah and attending to a meth mitzvah, the latter takes precedence, since it has been taught: The study of the Torah may be neglected in order to perform the last rites or to bring a bride to the canopy.</p> <p>(4) As between the Temple service and attending to a meth mitzvah, attending to a meth mitzvah takes precedence, as we learn from the text, or for his sister, as it has been taught: ‘Or for his sister. [...]</p> <p>(5) Rava propounded the question: As between the reading of the Megillah and [attending to] a meth mitzvah, which takes precedence? Shall I say that the reading of the Megillah takes precedence in order to proclaim the miracle, or does perhaps [the burying of] the meth mitzvah take precedence because of the respect due to human beings? —After propounding the question, he himself answered it saying, [Burying] the meth mitzvah takes precedence, since a Master has said: Great is the [obligation to pay due] respect to human beings, since it overrides a negative commandment of the Torah.</p>
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This source bears a great resemblance to the first one we have already brought (Shabbat 23b). Once again the concept of *pirsumei nisa* is brought by Rava and in a context of a discussion between different commandments and which takes precedence over the other. The sugyah is quite longer than the one that we find in *Shabbat* but the structure is similar. It presents five pairs of commandments and discusses which of them takes priority over the other, and each of them ends with a conclusion and a reason for that reasoning. The first four cases are obvious to Rava (פשיטא לי), there is no debate, regarding which commandments take priority. In the last case discussed (as in the instance of Shabbat 23b), there is a discussion and the object being

debated involves again *pirsumei nisa*. Rava, once again and in a rhetoric way, asks the question of which commandment takes priority: “Shall I say that the reading of the Megillah takes precedence in order to *proclaim the miracle*, or does perhaps [the burying of] the meth mitzvah take precedence because of the respect due to human beings?”. The commandment here that involves *pirsumei nisa* is the public reading of the Megillah during Purim. And Rava himself gives the answer - presents the chidush - to his students; in this case the commandment of met mitzvah takes priority. Once again we see here Rava addressing the issue of Pirsumei Nisa in some specific commandment but as a novel idea and not something already established and “canonized” in his time.

(b) The Case of Hallel and Megillah: Berakhot 14a

<p>בעא מיניה אחי תנא דבי רבי חייא מרבי חייא: בהלל ובמגילה מהו שיפסיק?</p> <p>אמרינן קל וחומר: קריאת שמע דאורייתא פוסק הלל דרבנן מבעיא, או דלמא פרסומי ניסא עדיף?</p> <p>אמר ליה: פוסק ואין בכך כלום.</p>	<p>Ahi the Tanna of the school of R. Hiyya posed a question to R. Hiyya: What about interrupting during the recitation of Hallel and the reading of the Megillah?</p> <p>Do we argue a fortiori that if he may interrupt during the recitation of the Shema', which is a biblical commandment, there is no question that he may do so during the recitation of Hallel, which is a rabbinical commandment, or do we say that proclaiming the miracle is more important? —</p> <p>He replied: He may interrupt, and there is no objection.</p>
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This is another source that deals with *pirsumei nisa* in regard to the commandment of the reading of the Megillah. Once again, like in several of the other sources we have dealt with the dictum *pirsumei nisa*, this comes surrounding an halakhic question. This time the question does not involve order of preference but a simple a fortiori classic argument in rabbinic thought. The question is if someone who is reading Hallel or the Megillah could stop for some reason in the middle (לשאלת שלום, says Rashi). The stammatitic stance of the Talmud presents the possible reasoning for this question. Someone could think that this is similar to the recitation of the *Shema Israel* and, if so, it is obvious that someone could stop to greet someone else, because the

Shema Israel is a biblical commandment and it is permitted to stop in the middle of the paragraphs to respond to a greeting, so much more should be the case of rabbinic commandments, such as the Hallel or the reading of the Megillah. But on the other hand, Hallel and the reading of the Megillah involve the issue of “proclaiming the miracle”, and in some way this could make the commandment stricter prohibiting to interrupt. After this stammaitic interruption, the Talmud goes back to Rabbi Hiyya’s answer, saying that it is possible to interrupt the reading of the Megillah and the recitation of the Hallel, and this does not involve any transgression.

(3) Between the four cups and being dependent on others: Pesachim 112a

<p>ואפילו מן התמחוי וכו'. פשיטא! לא נצרכא אלא אפילו לרבי עקיבא, דאמר: עשה שבתך חול ואל תצטרך לבריות הכא משום פרסומי ניסא מודה.</p>	<p>AND EVEN [IF HE RECEIVES RELIEF] FROM THE CHARITY PLATE, ETC. That is obvious! It is necessary only even according to R. Akiba, who said: Treat your Sabbath like a weekday rather than being dependent on man; yet here, in order to advertise the miracle, he agrees.</p>
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The third and last instance where the concept of *pirsumei nisa* occurs in the Babylonian Talmud is in relation to the four cups of Pesach. This is the main commandment on the night and the one which structures the Seder. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:1) states: “[...] *Even the poorest person in Israel must not eat [on the night of Passover] unless he reclines. And they must give him no fewer than four cups of wine, even [if he receives relief] from the charity plate*”. On the night of Passover every Jew should feel like a free person; this includes even the poorest people in the Jewish society. According to the Talmud, this quote of the Mishnah seems obvious, and according to the editor of the Talmud, this affirmation in the Mishnah is only necessary and stated against the idea of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva’s famous quote says: “*Treat your Sabbath like a weekday rather than being dependent on man*”, meaning that it is preferable not to have plenty of foods and wine on Shabbat rather than disturbing people asking for charity. One could have thought, the editor of the Talmud argues, that this also applies to the commandment of the four cups, that a poor person should not ask for charity to buy wine for this purpose, but this is

not the case. According to the *stam gemara*, Rabbi Akiva would agree in this case that he should receive money from the charity plate³² for this purpose, because the commandment of the four cups is for the sake of *pirsumei nisa*, to advertise the miracle of the power of God and the mighty way he took the children of Israel out of Egypt. Once again we see *Pirsumei Nisa* as an halakhic concept which hardens and strengthens a commandment.

This sugya adjudges the concept of *pirsumei nisa* to the time of Rabbi Akiva, but this is anachronistic. As we have seen, in the Tannaitic period the concept of *pirsumei nisa* was not even established, or at least we do not have evidence for its existence until much later in the rabbinic period. But one of the most problematic issues that this source presents is that in all the available manuscripts, the expression משום פרסומי ניסא is missing. This could explain why it is almost unknown to our own days that also with the four cups of Pesach we *advertise the miracle*.

The available manuscripts of tractate *Pesachim* are divided in the reading of this passage, but once again, not a single one of them states משום פרסומי ניסא, this phrasing only appears in the Venice Print (1520), and later on in the Vilna edition. As we have stated, the reading of this passage is divided: six manuscripts³³ state “הכא משום ניסא” (in this case because of the miracle), and the remaining four³⁴ state: “הכי משום מצוה” (in this case because a commandment is involved). Also, many of the Rishonim who deal in some way with this passage did not receive the version of משום פרסומי ניסא but rather the version משום ניסא; this is the case, for example, of Rabbeinu Chananel, Piskei RiD, and many others. From these sources we could guess that the original version of this sugya is משום ניסא, meaning that the Passover Seder involves telling all the miracles that God performed for the people of Israel as He took them out of Egypt. This concept seems either way very close to the dictum of “advertising the miracle”. This similarity and a later medieval tradition which says that the four cups also involve *pirsumei nisa* may have led the Venice editor of the Talmud to insert the word *pirsumei* just before the word *nisa*.

³² Rabienu Chananel ad hoc.: ואסיקנא אפילו לר' עקיבא דאמר עשה שבתך חול ואל תצטרך לבריות הכא משום ניסא
מתיר שיקח אפילו מן התמחוי

³³ Munich 6, Munich 95, Oxford, JTS Rab. 1608 (ENA 850), Vatican 125 and 134

³⁴ JTS Rab. 1623/2 (EMC 271), New York - Columbia X 893 T 14a, Vatican 109, Cambridge - T-S F2 (2) 16

Another fact that complicates the issue is that there is a late midrashic tradition in the collection Sechel Tov (Italy, 12th century) that relates that eating Matzah during the night of the Seder also involves the rabbinic commandment of *pirsumei nisa*.

דכתיב בערב תאכלו מצות (שמות יב יח), אבל מכאן ואילך דאי בעי למיכל מצה
אכיל ואי בעי לא אכיל, כי אכיל לה אין צריך לברך עלה על אכילת מצה, אלא
מברך המוציא לחם מן הארץ לבד, ומצה נמי בלילי פסחים כי אכיל לה צריך
הסיבה, משום פרסומי ניסא, אבל מרור לא צריך הסיבה...³⁵

In either case, there is something in the Seder night that involves and reminds of the miracles. The notion that the four cups or even the Matzah involve *Pirsumei Nisa*, as we will see, almost disappeared in post-Talmudic literature. But in Talmudic times, we may argue, the notion of *Pirsumei Nisa* or *Mishum Nisa* are almost equivalent and express the same idea.³⁶

Conclusions and summary

As we have seen, six times in the Babylonian Talmud appears the halakhic concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* in regard to four major rabbinical commandments: lighting the candles on Chanukah, reading the Megillah on Purim, drinking the four cups on Passover and chanting the Hallel during holidays. In none of all these sources the concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* is explained or the miracle that they are referring to is described. From these readings we may conclude that *Pirsumei Nisa* is an halakhic concept that may strengthen a rabbinic commandment, giving them the same status or even higher than a biblical commandment.

As regards the origin of this concept, we have established that the same is unknown in the Tannaitic periods (the phrasing in Aramaic is a simple proof of this fact) and also in the Palestinian Talmud. In three sugyot (Pesachim 112a, Berakhot 14a, Shabbat 24a) *Pirsumei Nisa* is brought by a later authority in the Stammatitic period of writing and compilation of the

³⁵ Shechel Tov (Buber Edition) Shemot, Bo, 12.

³⁶ The only other mention of the phrase משום ניסא in the Talmud appears in the already quoted Sugya of Arachin (10b) and its related to Hanukkah. In the Sheiltot deRab Achai (Vaiakel 67) he refers the concept of משום ניסא when he is talking about Purim.

Talmud. In the other three sources, two times it is brought by Rava (Megillah 3b and Shabbat 23b), and on one occasion by Rab Iosef bar Hiyah (Rosh Hashanah 18b). We may hypothesize that the origin of this concept could be traced back to Rab Iosef bar Hiyah, an *amora* of the third generation of Babylon. But it is his student Rava who popularized and expanded his master's teaching. Generally speaking, we could say that the term and idea of *Pirsumei Nisa* was coined at the beginning of the 4th century in the Babylonian rabbinical schools.

5) The Rishonim approach - and the Halakhic codes - to *Pirsumei Nisa*

According to what we have seen in the Talmud, the concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* is used mainly in relationship to Hanukkah, to a lesser degree to the Megillah and to the Hallel, and also doubtfully to the commandment of the four cups on Pesach. *Pirsumei Nisa* implies that in these particular cases there is a possibility to tighten the obligation to perform a commandment due to the fact that they are meant to publicize the miracle. In some cases the answer is positive and in some other cases the Talmudic answer is negative. But our point here is that the implications in the Talmud of the understanding of *Pirsumei Nisa* are quite narrow, namely:

Regarding Chanukah:

- (1) The lights of Hanukkah take precedence over the wine for the Kiddush if money is not enough (TB Shabbat 23b)
- (2) It is optional, and not mandatory, to include a paragraph of the episode of Hanukkah in the grace after meals. (TB Shabbat 24a)

Regarding the reading of the Megillah

- (3) One may stop at the middle of the reading to respond to a greeting. The same is true as regards the Hallel. (TB Berakhot 14a)
- (4) The reading of the Megillah does not displace the commandment of *Met Mitzvah*. (TB Megillah 3b)

Regarding the four cups of Pesach

- (5) Even the people who draw their livelihood from the *Tamchui* must enjoy -and get money for- the four cups of wine during the Seder. (TB Pesachim 112a)

In the Talmud, the concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* is restricted to these cases cited above. But as we will see now, especially regarding Hanukkah and in some degree regarding Purim too, the application of the concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* was extended and extrapolated by the Geonim, Rishonim and the Halakhic codes. In the place where the concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* appears, only in Shabbat 23b-24a do the Rishonim extensively debate the implications of this concept in all the

other folios of the Talmud where this concept is brought and where there is nearly not a single reference or discussion about *Pirsumei Nisa*. For that reason, before we could point out the general stipulations and understanding that the Geonim and Rishonim have of *Pirsumei Nisa*, we will present the main point of the rabbinic post-Talmudic discussions in the folios where they debate about it:

(a) The case of the lights of Hanukkah and the Kiddush: Shabbat 23b

The Talmud states that if one does not have enough money to buy wine for the Kiddush and for the lights of Hanukkah, one should buy only the light of Chanukah because of *Pirsumei Nisa*. Two are the main *chidushim* of the Rishonim to this evocation of the Talmud to *Pirsumei Nisa*: (1) Trying to explain why the lights of Hanukkah override the wine of the Kiddush and (2) stating that, because of *Pirsumei Nisa*, the Haftarah of Hanukkah also overrides the Haftarah of Rosh Chodesh.

Rabbi Yehizkaya bar Jacob of Magderburg (13th century, Germany, ad loc.) is one of the Rishonim to explicitly state that if Rosh Chodesh Tevet falls on Shabbat, the Haftarah of Hanukkah displaces the one of Rosh Chodesh: נר חנוכה עדיף, משום פרסומי ניסא. וגם בשבת שאיקלע. *Pirsumei Nisa* has the power to displace the common rabbinical principle that the activity that is performed more often should be performed first (see for example: Brakhot 51b or Zevachim 89a).³⁷ Because the Haftarah is publicly read in the synagogue, the miracle is made public and this takes precedence.

The other important fact that the Rishonim discuss here is important to our essay too: Why is it that the lights of Hanukkah override the Kiddush wine? The Talmud does not say explicitly. Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (1235-1310, Barcelona) states that this is only possible because the Kiddush could be done over the bread³⁹, and there is no other way to publicize the

³⁷ Tosafot (ad. loc) citing the Rashbah has the same opinion. In the Shelitot DeRab Achai (Vaishlaj 26) the same idea of the displacing of the principle of "regularly" is also mentioned.

³⁸ שמע הא לאו פרסומי ניסא תדיר קודם אפי' לדחות את שאינו תדיר... (Tosafot HaRosh, ad. Loc.)

³⁹ This is also the same approach of Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven of Gerona.

miracle but by lighting the candles⁴⁰. But if that were not the case, the Kiddush would bear more importance because it is a commandment from the Torah.⁴¹

(b) The Birkat HaMazon case: Shabbat 24a

According to the Talmud, we would consider that there is an obligation to add a special paragraph in the Birkat HaMazon during Hanukkah because of *Pirsumei Nisa*. The ruling there is that it is not necessary but only optional, and the same should be held for Birkat Hoda'ah if we decided to include it. The Tosafot (ad. loc.) give an answer, an important one to our study, to why the Talmud does not ask if we should remember Hanukkah in the Amidah prayer. This is their answer:

מהו להזכיר של חנוכה בבהמ"ז בתפלה פשיטא ליה דמזכיר משום דתפלה בצבור הוא ואיכא פרסומי ניסא אבל בבהמ"ז שבבית ליכא פרסומי ניסא כולי האי.

The difference for them is whether we can perform *Pirsumei Nisa* or not. It is mandatory, from their perspective, that a special addition should be added to the Amidah, because in synagogues there is surely *Pirsumei Nisa*. But in the privacy of the home it is not necessary to remember Hanukkah because we cannot publicize the miracle if we are eating alone.⁴² Rabbeinu Perahya bar Nissim (13th century, Egypt) gives another reason for the difference between these two. He says that the Birkat HaMazon said during the week is only optional (*reshut*), and the rabbis ordered to remember and publicize the miracle only in things that are obligatory (*Chova*).⁴³ The Meiri (1249 – c. 1310, Catalonia) adds important historical data. He says that in his day it became a tradition to remember Hanukkah in the Birkat HaMazon as if it were an obligation.

⁴⁰ נר חנוכה עדיף משום פרסומי ניסא דאפשר דמקדש אריפתא (Chidushei HaRashbah ad. loc.)

⁴¹ Chidushei HaRitvah (ad. loc.) adds another reason and says that the Kidush HaYom could also be done through the prayer of the Amidah like in the case of Iom Kippur.

⁴² Rashi (ad. loc.) and Chidushei HaRan (ad. loc.) gives the same explanation about the difference between the Amidah and the Birkat HaMazon.

⁴³ (ad. loc.) The same opinion was presented some centuries before that in Sefer Halakhot Gdolot, 9 Hilkhos Chanukah (Pages 157-158)

Now let us turn to see other implications of *Pirsumei Nisa* as different post-Talmudic scholars understood them. Let us begin with Purim and then we will deal more extensively with Hanukkah. At the end, we will present a few ideas in relation to the four cups of Passover.

Purim:

The first *chidush* about the understanding and application of *Pirsumei Nisa* concerning Purim is brought by Rav Achai of Shabcha⁴⁴ (7th century, Babylon). He understands that *Mishum Nisa*⁴⁵ *Purim* is even greater than the day the Torah was given, and for that reason we should send food to one another (*Mishloach Manot*) and gifts to the poor (*Matanot LaEvyonim*)⁴⁶. Rambam⁴⁷ also states that the reader of the Megillah should “*spread[s] the text out as an epistle (to show the miracle)...*” The special rolling and shape of the Megillah as an epistle is intended to show and publicize the miracle.

Rashi, in three comments on TB Megillah 5a, where the subject covered in the Sugya is the reading of the Megillah in its time (*Bizmana*) or not in its time (*Shelo Bizmana*), emphasized the notion that only on the 14th or 15th of Adar a person can read the Megillah without a Minyan. But on all the other possible dates, “*it should not be read unless with the presence of a Minyan because everybody reads it, and there is Pirsum Nes (publicity of the miracle)*”⁴⁸. In the same line, the Tosafot (Megillah 3a, Mebatlin Cohanin) also say that the reason why the priests could abandon their obligations to go to listen to the Megillah is because it is better to read it with the congregation, because it involves *Pirsumei Nisa*, and when one does it on another occasion and on his own, he is not taking part in publicizing the miracle.

As regards the repetition of the reading of the Megillah, both at night and during the day, the Tosafot (Megillah 4a, Chaiab Adam Likrot) state that even though one already blessed over the Megillah at night, one could repeat it during the day (without saying a *Brakha LeBatala*),

⁴⁴ Sheiltot deRab Ajai, Vaiakel 67

⁴⁵ We have already dealt about this two terms being almost the same in the rabbinic literature.

⁴⁶ See Esther 9:22 for the origin of this commandments.

⁴⁷ Mishneh Torah, Megillah VeChanukah 2:12

⁴⁸ Tosafot HaRid (ad. loc.) also share the opinion of Rashi in other of his comments that at first, the ideal is to find the presence of a Minyan to read the Megillah for *Pirsumei Nisa* but if it is not possible to get it there is no prohibition to read it without a Minyan.

because the main part of *Pirsumei Nisa* is during the day. One could guess that the reasoning of the rabbis is that the vast majority of the people attended the Shacharit services of Purim and not the night services, so the publicizing of the miracle would be much stronger during the day. As regards the reading of the Megillah, the Tosafot (Brakhot 45b, Shani Atam) establish that the reason why people fulfill the obligation of listening to the Megillah in the language they understand is because the main reason of the reading is *Pirsumei Nisa*.⁴⁹

Another sui generis interpretation for *Pirsumei Nisa* comes from the commentators of the *Mishneh Torah*. The Kesef Mishneh (on Megillah veChanukah 1:2) also states that the one who is reading the Megillah cannot do it in silence or in a very low voice. He should be able to hear his own reading with his ears. Otherwise, there is no *Pirsumei Nisa*.⁵⁰ Another of the commentators of the Rambam, Rabbi Shem Tov ben Rabbi Abraham ibn Gaon (13th century, Spain), also learns from the idea of *Pirsumei Nisa* that it is desirable for the Megillah to be read with the presence of a Minyan to publicize the miracle.⁵¹ The Tur and the Beit Yosef also address this issue, stating the difference between the commandments that require a Minyan and those which, even though a gathering is preferable because of *Pirsumei Nisa*, performing them in the presence of a Minyan in the synagogue is not required.⁵²

Hanukkah:

We have already seen that from all the other instances where *Pirsumei Nisa* occurs, the most developed and worked by the post-Talmudic rabbis has to do with the lighting of the Hanukkah candles and the festival in general. We had shown that one of the first expansions of the legal principle was that if Rosh Chodesh Tevet falls on Shabbat, the reading of the Haftarah of Hanukkah –as it involves *Pirsumei Nisa* – displaces the regular reading of Rosh Chodesh. But it was in relationship to the lighting of the Chanukiah where most of the expansions of the term took place.

⁴⁹ The same reasoning is used in Tosafot Iom Tov (Megillah 2:1): “ויהיב טעמא דכיון דעיקר מצות מגילה משום פרסומי ניסא. עיקר פרסום הנס תלוי בידיעה.”

⁵⁰ “דמגילה שאני דבעינן בה פרסומי ניסא וכל שלא השמיע לאזנו ליכא פרסומי ניסא”
⁵¹ “ידוע שמקרא מגילה עיקר תקנתה בעשרה בין בזמנה בין שלא בזמנה משום פרסומי ניסא. Migdal Oz to the Mishneh Torah, Brakhot 12.”

⁵² Tur, Orach Chayim, 691 and Beit Yosef ad. loc.

Many laws on how, where and when to light the candles that appear in the Talmud without any connection whatsoever with the concept of *Pirsumei Nisa* were understood by post-Talmudic scholars as having an intrinsic connection with publicizing the miracle. Let us bring just a few examples. Rashi brings the clearest example in his commentary on the Talmud (Baba Kama 30a and Shabbat 21a). He states there that the location of the Chanukiah in the outer part of the house is intended to publicize the miracle, and not only for the people in the house but especially for the passersby.

The Tur⁵³ states that the reason why it is forbidden to put a Chanukiah above the height of 20 amot (cubits) is because “*the eye could not see and if so there is no Pirsumei Nisa*”.⁵⁴ Another new understanding of *Pirsumei Nisa* is found in the *Shulchan Aruch*⁵⁵ that for the sake of *Pirsumei Nisa*, so that more people could see the lights, the Chanukiah should also be kindled in the synagogue and we should recite the appropriate blessings. The Tur and the *Shulchan Aruch*⁵⁶ also state that the time and the length of the lighting of the candles are also meant to be part of *Pirsumei Nisa*. The optimal time to light them, to publicize the miracle, is from sunset for about half an hour because that is the time when people usually return from the market. After that period of time, the Chanukiah is no longer used for *Pirsumei Nisa* and we can use its lights for other purposes.

Passover:

The Mitzvah of the four cups of wine as publicizing the miracles, as we have said, is the least discussed in rabbinic literature and in post-Talmudic literature as a commandment that fulfills the notion of *Pirsumei Nisa*. But as we shall see, the notion of the four cups, the main element of the festive dinner, could also be considered *Pirsumei Nisa*. First of all, the prevalent source of this obligation, as it appears in the Talmud⁵⁷, is that the four cups correspond to the four expressions of redemption as stated in Exodus 6:6-7, a clear connection to the divine

⁵³ Orach Chayim, 671

⁵⁴ This idea was also stated previously by Ramban in his Chidushim to TB Shabbat 22a

⁵⁵ Orach Chayim, 671

⁵⁶ Orach Chayim, 672

⁵⁷ Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 10:1

miracle of rescuing the people of Israel from Egypt. And the reason why we drink four cups also states our notion of *Pirsumei Nisa*: “*Our Sages instituted that the arba kosot be drunk in a manner expressing freedom*”⁵⁸; it is a public way to show that the Jewish people was free.

As we have stated above, according to the Talmud, in general the notion of *Pirsumei Nisa* is to tight up rabbinic commandments. Like in the case of the lighting of the Hanukkah lights and the reading of the Megillah, it is generally understood that the four cups in Pesach is a rabbinic institution, but because of *Pirsumei Nisa* (in some cases explicit and in some others implicit) some stringencies are attached to this commandment: “*Despite the presumed rabbinic origin of arba kosot, we nevertheless find a number of stringent laws associated with this mitzva.*”⁵⁹. The first stringency is that while drinking wine may affect the health of an individual, he or she is obligated to drink the four cups.⁶⁰ Even the Talmud⁶¹ relates a famous story of Rabbi Yehudah bar Illai, who would have to bind his sides from Pesach to Shavuot because of the aftereffects of the four cups of wine he had drunk at the Seder. The other stringency appears in the Mishnah (Pesachim 10:1) and it is developed in our sugya. A poor person who depends on public money must be provided with wine for the four cups.⁶² According to the Maggid Mishne (on Megillah vChanukah 4:12), the Rambam learns about all the stringencies of the laws concerning the kindling of the Hanukkah lamps from the notion that, according to the Talmud, the poorest person should also be given money for the four cups.

⁵⁸ TB Pesachim 117b

⁵⁹ Binyamin Tabory, The Four Cups of Wine and the Mitzvah of Publicizing the Miracle.

⁶⁰ Shulchan Arukh, O.C. 372:1

⁶¹ TB Nedarim 49b

⁶² The Shulchan Arukh (Orach Chayim 372:13) even says that a indigent person should sell his clother or borrow money to purchase the wine for the four cups.

6) Women and miracles in Passover, Purim and Hanukkah

Now that we have shown the origins and the later applications of the idea of *Pirsumei Nisa*, we may go back a step earlier and try once again to see the connection between these three holidays, the miracles and women. There is an intrinsic connection between *Pirsumei Nisa*, the three festivals described above (Passover, Purim and Hanukkah) and women. Generally speaking, women are exempt from time-bound positive commandments⁶³. But this is not the case for the main commandments surrounding Passover, Purim and Hanukkah.⁶⁴ This principle is true in relation to the positive commandments of many Jewish festivals. For example, women have to hear the sound of the Shofar but they cannot blow the Shofar to take others for their obligations. And they are also exempt from the commandment of sitting in the Sukkah.

This principle, however, is displaced in our three festivals.⁶⁵ This *chidush* is brought four times in the Talmud (two times in relation to the reading of the Megillah, once in relation to the lighting of the candles in Hanukkah and another time in relation to the four cups of Pesach). The format is always the same: *R. Joshua b. Levi also said: "Women are under obligation to X, since they were also profited by the miracle then wrought"*. Every time it is Rabbi Joshua ben Levi⁶⁶ who brings this concept and new teaching. Before we can jump to some conclusions about this striking connection, let us review the three main instances where this dictum appears in the Talmud:

I. Megillah 4a

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: Women are under obligation to read the Megillah, since they were also profited by the	ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: נשים חייבות במקרא מגילה, שאף הן היו באותו הנס. ⁶⁷
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⁶³ יוכל מצות עשה שהזמן גרמה אנשים חייבין ונשים פטורות (Mishnah Kidushin 1:7)
⁶⁴ שאף הן היו: ("She Af Hen Haihu Veoto Nes): the Tosafits in Pesachim 108b. This connection is already noticed by the Tosafits in Pesachim 108b ("She Af Hen Haihu Veoto Nes): באותו הנס, שכתבו וז"ל: "ואי לאו האי טעמא לא היו חייבות משום דנשים פטורות ממצות עשה שהזמן גרמא אף ע"ג דארבעה כוסות דרבנן כעין דאורייתא תיקון..

⁶⁵ Many were the scholars that deal with this topic. For example: שנה בשנה. ספר ישרון (תשנ"ט) 121-129 (תשס"ג) 197-211 (ספראי, חנה). "אף הן היו באותו הנס".

⁶⁶ Amora of the 1st generation who lived in the land of Israel in the first half of the third century. He headed the school of Lydda.

⁶⁷ This same principle is later quoted in TB Arachin 3a but this is the original source.

miracle then wrought.	
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II. TB Shabbat 23a

But a woman may certainly light [it], for R. Joshua b. Levi said: The [commandment of the] Hanukkah lamp is obligatory upon women, for they too were concerned in that miracle.	אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: נשים חייבות בנר חנוכה, שאף הן היו באותו הנס.
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III. TB Pesachim 108a-b

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: Women are subject to [the law of] these four cups because they too were included in that miracle.	ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: נשים חייבות בארבעה כוסות הללו, שאף הן היו באותו הנס.
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The simple reading of the dictum of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is that in each of these particular situations, women are subject to these various laws because “they were included in that miracle”, they were also saved from the times of distress. But among the Rishonim there will be a great debate on whether they should be part of the commandment because they were also saved by a miracle from the hands of the Egyptians, Persians and Greeks, or whether they could perform the commandments because they are the cause of the various miracles.

As regards the story of Esther, Rashi⁶⁸, on TB Megillah 4a, explains Rabbi Joshua ben Levi’s dictum in the simplest reading, saying that Haman also dictated the death of women. And then he quotes from the book of Esther (3:13): “*And letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women...*”. In the Tosafot (ad. hoc), they first bring Rashbam’s understanding (1085-1158, France), who disagrees with his grandfather, saying as follows:

שאף הן היו באותו הנס פירש רשב"ם שעיקר הנס היה על ידן בפורים על ידי אסתר. בחנוכה על ידי יהודית. בפסח שבזכות צדקניות שבאותו הדור נגאלו...

⁶⁸ שאף הן היו באותו הנס שאף על הנשים גזר המן להשמיד להרוג ולאבד מנער ועד זקן טף ונשים וגו'.

His understanding represents the other main position of the Rishonim towards the understanding of שאף הן היו באותו הנס. He understands that they are obligated to perform these commandments because they were the main propulsion and generation of the miracles in each of the festivals: in Purim, because of Esther's actions and how she managed to save her people with her contact with the king; in regard to Hanukkah, the Rashbam cites the case of Yehudit, and as regards Pesach, he quotes the famous Talmudic dictum that the people of Israel were liberated from Egypt because of the merit of the righteous women of that generation.⁶⁹ But from the linguistic perspective, the Tosafot say, the interpretation of the Rashbam do not stand⁷⁰. Almost all the Rishonim are against the understanding of the Rashbam⁷¹. They all understand that women are obligated to perform those commandments not because they did something to produce the miracles but just because they were also slaves in Egypt and were exposed to great distress and danger under the Greek rule, and they also needed God's miracle⁷².

If we now turn to the case of Shabbat 23b –the case of Hanukkah– Rashi stands in flagrant opposition to what he commented in Megillah. He understands here that women are obligated because the *“Greeks dictated that all the virgins who were getting married had to have intercourse first with the governor, and the miracle was performed by a woman”*.⁷³ Rashi's voice here is the same voice of Rashbam in Megillah. The Tosafot do not make any comment in this respect in this Talmudic folio. But Chidushei HaRitvah (ad. loc.) repeats the same principle that he had enunciated in Megillah.

In the last instance where this principle appears – TB Pesachim 108a-b – Rashi has the same approach that he had in Shabbat 23b. It is because of the righteous women that the people of Israel were redeemed from Egypt. What is more curious is the case that here he understands the case of Purim as Rashbam does there, that it was because of Esther that the miracle

⁶⁹ See for example TB Sotah 11b or the parallel source in Shemot Rabah (Shinan) 1:12: According to Rab Awira the women tempted and seduced their husbands to have intercourse so they could reproduce.

⁷⁰ וקשה דלשון שאף הן משמע שהן טפלות ולפירושן היה לו לומר שהן לכך נראה לי שאף הן היו בספק דלהשמיד ולהרוג וכן בפסח שהיו משועבדותל פרעה במצרים וכן בחנוכה הגזירה היתה מאד עליהן

⁷¹ See for example: Ritvah (TB Megillah 4a), RaN (ad. loc), Tosafot HaRosh (ad. loc)

⁷² שאף הן היו משועבדות במצרים והיו בסכנה כשצרו עליהם מלכיון. (Ran. Ad. Loc.)
⁷³ היו באותו הנס שגזרו יוונים על כל בתולות הנשואות להיבעל לטפסר תחלה, ועל יד אשה נעשה הנס.

tradition of the first generation of the Amoraim, the miracle was started by the women. The liberation from an oppressive kingdom, the Egyptians, the Persians, and the Greeks, was started by pious and courageous women. This is reflected in the halakhic ruling on these festivals, which establishes that they are also compelled to perform the appropriate commandments. All the three commandments which involve *Pirsumei Nisa* are also the same commandments that, because of the miracle, women are obligated to perform as well.

7) Conclusion

According to what we have discussed in this short essay, we can hypothesize a singular idea. In a few words, we may say that the idea of *Pirsumei Nisa* is an halakhic concept devised in the time of the Amoraim (4th century c.e) in Babylon to emphasize the importance of a specific commandment that may overrule some other halakhic principles. We may guess that the origin of this concept comes from Hanukkah, where most of the laws and repetition of this term appear, and then it was extrapolated to the reading of the Megillah in Purim and in some degree to the recitation of the Hallel and the four cups of Pesach also. According to the sources of the Talmud the presence of a miracle to publicize in some specific commandment could strengthen the performance of them. Subsequently, as we have shown, the Geonim, Rishonim and in the Halakhic literature, many of the details and laws involving those festivals were attached to the notion of *Pirsumei Nisa*. Many specifications of the way and how to read the Megillah were explained by post-talmudic scholars in relation with *Pirsumei Nisa*. The same is true in regards of the lighting in Hanukkah when almost every single halakha about how, where and when was explained through the idea of *Pirsumei Nisa*.

Our questions now, to conclude this essay is: But why only in these three instances? Why only in Passover, Purim and Hanukkah? Why in only these three festivals we find the commandment of *Pirsumei Nisa*? Our guess and hypothesis is that because these are the only three festivals in the Jewish calendar where a “war” or liberation from an oppressive and foreign kingdom or agent is recorded. Many cultures and countries mark in their calendars specific days where important battles or wars began or were won, even do that we do not usually think with this criteria the same could be said in regards of the Jewish calendar. Of all the Jewish celebrations Pesach, Purim and Hanukkah (in chronological order) share that they all celebrate the victory of the Jewish people over an enemy.⁷⁹ These political and military victories are recorded with special commandments that include a specific regulation of *Pirsumei Nisa*. Three

⁷⁹ See, for example, Moshe Benovitz “*Ad Dechalia Riglah Detarmudai*” p. 77-78 where he states that the “reinnaguration” of the festival of Hanukkah in the land of Israel at the end of the third century was due to the presence and the fall of a foreign empire that conquer Palestine. In this sense the lighting of the Hanukkah lights was a political declaration against the enemy.

times in the year Jewish people should make themselves and others aware of these magnificent liberation stories by publicizing the miracles.

In this way, *Pirsumei Nisa* is not just an halakhic concept but a political idea. Three times in the year Jews should let others know and they should remember themselves, through specific commandments, that they were liberated from their enemies by a “miracle”. All of these commandments share the principle that, ideally, they should be done in front of others. On Pesach the four cups should be drunk in a Chavurah, in a social and family environment. On Purim the Megillah should be ideally read in front of as many people as possible. And on Hanukkah, the Menorah should be placed in a visible spot so that Jews and non-Jews can learn about the miracle.⁸⁰ These commandments are trying to convey that the Jewish people managed to overcome and beat all the great enemies that appeared throughout history. Two of them were intended only to the Jewish people to elevate their moral and their belief that in the future (or in the present) they could override their foreign oppressors. And one commandment, the most characteristic until modern times, *Pirsumei Nisa*, the lighting of the Chanukah candles, was enjoined upon the Jews to build their confidence, and to non-Jews so that they could also see the potential power of the Jewish people.⁸¹

This notion can be further strengthened if we include in the analysis the famous dictum of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, which states that women are obliged to these commandments since they were the ones who caused the "miracle". In Egypt God liberated the people of Israel because of the acts of righteous women. In Persia, Haman's threat was stopped by the audacity of Esther. In Hanukkah the revolt started by the actions of two courageous women, Yochanan's daughter and Yehudit. *Pirsumei Nisa* is thus the announcement that the Jewish people have known how to defend from their enemies and had overcome the main empires of ancient history.

⁸⁰ Binyamin Tabory, The Four Cups of Wine and the Mitzvah of Publicizing the Miracle.

⁸¹ Even do that later authorities will say that the commandment of *Pirsumei Nisa* is only for Jews (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaym 677:3) Benovitz in his essay “*Ad Dechalia Riglah Detarmudai*” has shown extensively that at the beginning it was thought especially for non-jews.

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