A. Nissim: Origin and Parameters

In several instances in the Talmud, a halakha is formulated with precisely the same wording, in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, regarding the obligation of women in certain mitzvot:

će"d

Shabbat 23a
As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Women are obligated in the Chanuka lights since they, indeed/too, were part of that miracle.

Pesachim 108a
Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Women are obligated in these four cups since they, indeed/too, were part of that miracle.

Megilla 4a
Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Women are obligated in megilla reading since they, indeed/too, were part of that miracle.
Each of these mitzvot commemorates and publicizes a miracle:
- The four cups of wine at the Pesach seder commemorate the exodus from Egypt.
- Megillat Esther on Purim commemorates the defeat of Haman and his genocidal plan.
- The Chanuka candles commemorate the victory over Antiochus, the Seleucid Greeks, and their harsh decrees, and the rededication of Beit Ha-mikdash.

What does it mean to be "part of a miracle"?

Two perspectives emerge from early rabbinic authorities:

I) Central Part: Rashi in Pesachim (as well as his grandson, Rashbam) points to the active role women played in the miraculous redemptions that these mitzvot commemorate:

Rashi Pesachim 106b

They indeed were part of that miracle - As it says (Sota 11b) "they were redeemed in the merit of righteous women of that generation;" and we also say this regarding megilla reading, since they were redeemed through Esther. So, too, regarding Chanuka candles, in Tractate Shabbat (23a).

Rashi Shabbat 23a

Were part of that miracle - the Greeks decreed that all virgin brides be bedded first by the commander, and the miracle was performed through a woman.

II) Part of the People Tosafot disagree with Rashi's reading, and offer an alternative explanation:
Tosafot Megilla 4a s.v. She-af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes

...This is difficult, because “they too” (“af hen”) indicates they are ancillary; according to his explanation it should [just] say “they [were part of that miracle].” Therefore, it seems to me that “they too were” subject to the uncertainty (safek) “to destroy, kill, and annihilate.” So too on Pesach – they were enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. And on Chanuka, the decree was mightily against them...

Jerusalem Talmud Megilla Chapter 2:5
Bar Kappara said...”they, too, were in the uncertainty.”

Torah and Rabbinic Level Mitzvot

Tosafot ask why inclusion in the miracle does not oblige women in the mitzva of dwelling in a sukkka, which commemorates the miracle of the Exodus:

Tosafot Pesachim 108b s.v. Hayu be-oto ha-nes

...We say they [women] are exempt from sukkka even though they, too, were part of that miracle – “for I caused [Israel] to dwell in sukkot.” There [regarding sukkka] it is a positive Torah commandment, but the four cups [of wine at the seder] are rabbinic, and they enacted them for women as well since they too were part of that miracle.

Tosafot Megilla 4a s.v. She-af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes

Regarding matza one could ask why it is necessary to draw the analogy [hekeshe] that “Anyone who is included in the prohibition against eating chametz is included in the positive obligation to eat matza.” Why can’t it [women’s obligation to eat matza] be learned from the rationale of “inclusion in the miracle?” And one must say that it is for this reason, that this would only oblige women rabbinically were it not for the analogy.
This rationale [inclusion in the miracle] can obligate a woman only in a rabbinic-level mitzva, but in a Torah-level mitzva, it cannot obligate her even rabbinically. The reason for this is that in Torah-level *mitzvot* we don’t legislate based on rationales [behind the *mitzvot*] and we don’t [even] legally expound rationales for verses. So the sages cannot obligate a woman, even rabbinically, [in a Torah-level mitzva] from the vantage of inclusion in the miracle.

**Tosafot Sukka 38a s.v. Mi she-haya**

It seems from here that a woman is exempt from *hallel* on Sukkot and Shavuot, and the reason is that it is a positive time bound mitzva…. *Hallel* on Pesach is different because it is on a miracle, and they too were part of that miracle, but here [on other festivals] it is not recited because of a miracle.

**Rabbenu Tam - Responsa Sefer Ha-yashar 70:4**

In the matter of three meals [on Shabbat]…Whether women are obligated—it seems that they, too, were part of that miracle, because the double portion of manna was for everyone. So, too, they are obligated to break bread [on Shabbat] over two loaves…

**Maharam of Rothenburg IV 473**

The reasoning of “inclusion in the miracle” is only applicable to miracles that happened to Israel when they were in danger and escaped it, like *megilla*, the four cups, and Chanuka lights.
Iggerot Ha-Grid Ha-Levi' (in Hilkhot Chanuka 4:9-11) trans.,
David Silverberg

It seems clear that this entire reason of 'af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes' applies only to those mitzvot where the miracle constitutes an independent halakhic entity within the actual fulfillment of the mitzva, that it [the mitza] entails a fulfillment regarding the miracle and publicizing the miracle... Moreover, regarding Chanuka candles and Megilla reading, a separate berakha was instituted – 'she-asa nisim,' for this halakha concerning the miracle constitutes a fulfillment within the actual mitzva itself, and so a berakha is established over it. Indeed, we find 'af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes' only regarding Chanuka candles, Megilla reading, and the four cups. This is due to the fact that in all these mitzvot, the halakha concerning the miracle is not merely the reason behind the mitzva, but is rather established as part of the actual fulfillment and act of the mitzva, as evidenced by the special berakha instituted over it. Regarding kiddush and matza, by contrast, although they involve a commemoration of the miracle, there is no independent halakha, requirement or entity within the actual mitzva act. It would therefore seem that the entire factor of 'af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes' does not apply.

B) Mitzvot: Level of Obligation
Does “inclusion in the miracle” obligate women in the same way as men?

**Sha'at Husot Yair Siman 15**

dinon deh mehik, mejnem belemshed hashok uzi bemehu cor ogeneshic mahiziyim

del meh [mehal mehora'] cuyni dzeoriimah [siman] lehej animo mozesi' ahmes.

**Responsa Chavot Yair 10**

Since they [women] are obligated [in megilla] based on the general rationale that they, too, were part of that miracle, and men are obligated based on the prohibition of straying from the sages’ directives, it [the obligation in megilla] is for them [men] akin to a Torah law. If so, for this reason women do not discharge men’s obligation.

**Chiddushei Ritva Megilla 4a**

... And it seems that, since they are obligated in megilla reading, they may fulfill the obligation on others’ behalf, as it says (19b) “All are fitting to read the megilla,” and the term “fitting” indicates reading for others. And we say in Erchin (3a) “All’ – to include women,” and it seems that the Mishna includes them. And also regarding Chanuka they said (Shabbat 23a) she lights on behalf of others since she is obligated.

**Rashi Shemot 15:20**

“With timbrels and with dances.” The righteous women of that generation had faith that God would perform miracles for them. Therefore, they brought timbrels [out with them] from Egypt.

18 ) Rabbanit Ora Rivka Weingort, “Kindle the Light for a Moment”

Women are obligated in the Chanuka lights even though it is a positive time-bound commandment, because ‘they, too, were part of that miracle,’ and because the miracle came about through a woman....The Divine miracle cloaks human dedication, and it is in our power to bring about its revelation. Thus one need not wait for the miracle of a respite
from challenges] to arrive. It is possible to create this illuminated space on our own, whenever we so desire.

C) Nerot: Nature of Mitzva of Candle-Lighting

Shabbat 21b

Our Rabbis taught [in a baraita]: The mitzva of Chanuka is a candle for each man and his household. Mehadrin [those who zealously chase after or glorify mitzvot] – a candle for each and every person. Mehadrin min ha-mehadrin [the most zealous among the mehadrin]: Beit Shammai say: The first day he lights eight, from here on he progressively decreases. Beit Hillel say: The first day he lights one, from here on he progressively increases...for we ascend in holiness and do not descend.

Rambam, Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 4:1

How many candles does he light on Chanuka? The mitzva is for each household to light one candle, whether the household has many members or only one person. One who chases after the mitzva lights candles according to the number of the household members, a candle for each person, both men and women. One who chases after the mitzva more than this and does the ideal mitzva lights a candle for each person on the first night and progressively adds a candle [for each person] each night.
כן אדם מים חכמים ואלהים אברם אמן עשה ר לולא אתחד אפל[הו] וסף מקץ ואילך
לכך יטטר שנב缒 שיש ביני אדם בידה.

Tosafot Shabbat 21b s.v. Ve-hamehadrin
And the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin: It seems to Ri that [the views of] Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel only apply to “a candle for each man and his household” for thus there is more glorification [hiddur]. For it is clearly recognizable that he increases or decreases, which corresponds to the days that are entering or elapsing. But if he makes a candle for each person, even if he adds from here on, it is not recognizable, for [those who see it] will think that this is the amount of people in the household.

Shulchan Aruch OC 671:2
On the first night he lights one, from here on he progressively adds one each night until on the last night there are eight, even if there are many household members, they should not light more. Rema: There are those who say that every member of the household should light (Rambam) and this is the simple custom. They should take care that each person puts his candles in a unique place, in order that it be recognizable how many candles they light.

Kolbo 44
Women are obligated in the Chanuka candle for they, too, were part of that miracle. That means that the enemies came to destroy everyone, men, women and children. There are those who explain that the great miracle occurred by means of a woman, and her name was Yehudit, as is explained in the aggada. Yochanan, the High Priest, had a daughter who was very beautiful. The Seleucid Greek king ordered that she lie with him. She fed him a cheese dish so that he would grow thirsty and drink a lot and become drunk and lie down and fall asleep. So it was, and he lay down and slept, and she took his sword and cut off his head and brought it to Yerushalayim, When the army saw that their hero had died,
they ran away. For this reason, it is customary to make cheese dishes on Chanuka.

Rashi Shabbat 23a s.v. Hayu be-oto ha-nes
That the Seleucid Greeks decreed that all virgin brides be bedded first by the commander, and the miracle was performed through a woman.

Ran on the Rif Shabbat 10a
For they too were in that miracle. For the Seleucid Greeks decreed that all virgin brides be bedded first by the general. Through a woman a miracle was performed, for we say in the midrash that the daughter of Yochanan fed the enemy chief cheese to get him drunk, and she cut off his head, and they all fled.

Megillat Ta'anit
...Matityahu ben Yochanan the High Priest had one daughter. When her time came to marry, the [Seleucid Greek] officer came to defile here. But Matityahu and his sons did not allow it [droit du seigneur] and they were zealous and they defeated the Seleucid empire...

(26) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(25) מגילת העונית

(24) ר"ן על המ"ק שבת

(23) רא"ש, שבת כ"ד, הוי בכות ענס

(22) שבת א"ב, על כל בנותו הנשהות לصاحب לבשعل תחתלו, והוה יאשה נעשה

(21) Rashi Shabbat 23a s.v. Hayu be-oto ha-nes
That the Seleucid Greeks decreed that all virgin brides be bedded first by the commander, and the miracle was performed through a woman.

(20) Ran on the Rif Shabbat 10a
For they too were in that miracle. For the Seleucid Greeks decreed that all virgin brides be bedded first by the general. Through a woman a miracle was performed, for we say in the midrash that the daughter of Yochanan fed the enemy chief cheese to get him drunk, and she cut off his head, and they all fled.

(19) מגדלי המקרא (מגדלי המקרא) בחכמה עוזר

(18) ויהי יגוע מתחלת בנותו של ישראל, ונתנה יבנה הישנה לCHANUKAH ושתה過ぎ דחפה יל乘用车 בך...

(17) ויהי יגוע מתחלת בנותו של ישראל, ונתנה יבנה הישנה לCHANUKAH ושתה過ぎ דחפה יל乘用车 בך...

(16)Megillat Ta'anit
...Matityahu ben Yochanan the High Priest had one daughter. When her time came to marry, the [Seleucid Greek] officer came to defile here. But Matityahu and his sons did not allow it [droit du seigneur] and they were zealous and they defeated the Seleucid empire...

(15) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(14) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(13) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(12) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(11) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(10) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(9) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(8) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(7) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(6) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(5) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(4) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(3) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(2) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר

(1) יאושר המדרשים (אוסישט prerequisites) חוכמה עוזר
The Seleucid Greeks would abuse the virgins of Israel, and they did this for three years and eight months until the deed of the daughter of Matityahu the High Priest, who was marrying a son of Chashmonai named Elazar. When her wedding day arrived, they seated her in her litter. When the time of the meal arrived, all the great ones of Israel gathered in honor of Matityahu and the son of Chashmonai, for there were none greater than they in that generation. When they sat down to feast, Chana daughter of Matityahu stood up atop her litter and clapped her hands together and ripped her royal cloak and stood before all of Israel exposed, and also before her father and her mother and her father-in-law. When her brothers saw this they were ashamed and their faces fell to the ground and they rent their garments and they stood over her to kill her. She said to them “Listen to me my brothers and my kinsmen: If when I stood before the righteous naked without any sin you would be zealous for me, why are you not zealous when it comes to handing me over to the uncircumcised to abuse me? Shouldn’t you learn from Shimon and Levi, the brothers of Dina, who were only two and were zealous for their sister and killed a large city like Shechem and gave themselves up for the Oneness of God, and God helped them and did not shame them. You are five brothers Yehuda, Yochanan, Yonatan, Shimon, and Elazar, and young Kohanim, more than two hundred young men. Put your trust in God and He will help you, as it is said “For nothing gets in the way of God’s salvation” (Shemuel I 14). She opened her mouth and wept and said “Master of the world, if You will not have mercy on us, have mercy on the sanctity of Your great Name which is called upon us and avenge us today. At that time, her brothers became zealous…

I) LIGHTING FOR THE HOUSEHOLD

Ha-agguda Shabbat II

Women are obligated and for this reason if a widow is the head of the household and she knows how to recite the beracha, she should light [the Chanuka candle] and discharge the obligation of the members of her household, as we say, “a woman certainly lights.”
Shabbat 23a
Rabbi Zeira said: Initially, when I was at yeshiva, I would participate [in my host’s lighting by contributing] coins [to pay for the lighting materials] together with the host. Once I married a woman I said, “Now I certainly don’t need to [pay my host], since they light for me in my home.”

Mishna Berura 675:9
When the man is not at home, the wife should light [the Chanuka candle] —for she is subject to the obligation—and with a blessing.

Ra'avan Shabbat 340
Just as a woman lights the candle on Shabbat night as we learn in the mishna, “On [account of] three transgressions women die in childbirth: because they are not careful with nidda, with challa, or with candle-lighting” (Shabbat 31b). So too a woman lights the Chanuka candle if her husband is not home... but in any case, when her husband is there, he takes priority for he too is obligated.

Mishna Berura 675:9
A woman lights: This means for all the members of her household. Even a man can make her an agent to discharge his obligation.

Beirur Halacha 675 s.v. Isha madleket
She is able to discharge even her husband’s obligation, but it is known what our sages said...A woman recites birkat ha-mazon for her husband, but the sages said a curse comes upon a man whose wife and children recite birkat ha-mazon for him.
Rav David Auerbach Halichot Beithah 23:6 note 16

...It seems that one can distinguish, and this is in accordance with what Rashi wrote in Sukka 38a “A curse should come upon him: because he did not learn [to recite hallel],”...Presumably he [the husband] certainly knows how to recite this short beracha [over Chanuka candles] himself, but for whatever reason tells his wife to light the candles and recite the beracha...Regarding lighting the Chanuka candles, where man and wife are fully equal in this obligation, one can say that there is no problem at all in designating his wife as an agent, and for this reason Bach and Taz and other halachic authorities omitted [mention of curse] and did not write that ideally it is improper to designate his wife as an agent [for lighting in his presence].

II) MEHADRIN - LIGHTING AS ONE?

Rambam, Laws of Megilla and Chanuka 4:1

One who chases after the mitzva lights candles in accordance with the number of household members for each and every one, both men and women.

Eliya Rabba 671

For ‘his wife is like himself’ and she is not counted among the mehadrin...For [a woman] lights specifically when she doesn’t have a husband or when her husband is out of town.
Chatam Sofer Shabbat 21b

...What is the reason that our women are not accustomed to be among the mehadrin?...In my humble opinion, when they originally enacted “a candle for a man and his household” outside the entrance to his home...then no woman would be found among the mehadrin because it is not respectable for her to go outside to the public domain at evening time and to light among the men...and nowadays, even though everyone lights indoors, the original custom still has not moved from its place...

Birkei Yosef OC 671

Nevertheless the practice does not make much sense, because for [a woman] to be "ishto ke-guvo" (one entity with her husband) means something is missing and her glory is removed. For are [women] of lesser status [than the offspring]...?

Sha’ar Ha-tziyyun 675:10

...So wrote Maharshal and Eliya Rabba, that “his wife is like himself” and does not need [to light mehadrin]; however, she is able to light on behalf of his entire household.

Rav Herschel Schachter, Nefesh Ha-Rav, p. 226

See Magen Avraham, that each household member should light, and see there in Mishna Berura that this is aside from his wife, for she is like himself...And our Rabbi [Rav Soloveitchik] said that this makes no sense, and it is correct that married women should also light for themselves.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, Women's Obligation to Light Chanuka Candles
In the home of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l, it was customary for women to light, and so is the custom in my home. As we have seen, the simple understanding of the law is that women are obligated just like men (on the level of the “extremely zealous”), and the burden of proof falls upon those who think otherwise.

III) LIGHTING IN THE SYNAGOGUE

ר"ת רחמליה חלף ב – אורות חיותים סוף
בְּרֵי נְחַנְךָ, דָּמְלֵי קְנָה, מַבֵּרֵיכֵי בַּכַּת הַנְּכָשָׁת וְלֵשָׁנָה
בֶּנוֹרָת חֲנוֹכָה; דִּילּוּ =דָּוִד לְוָאָר [מעני צִיוּר נֱשֶׁי בְּצוּר פְּרָסְמָא, נְזָמָה, נְכָשָׁת, נָטָם] רְבֵּי נְחַנְךָ, דִּילּוּ =דָּוִד לְוָאָר [מעני צִיוּר נֱשֶׁי בְּצוּר פְּרָסְמָא, נְזָמָה, נְכָשָׁת, נָטָם]

Rav Pe'alim II OC 62

Regarding the law of the Chanuka candle, which we light and recite a beracha over in synagogue in order to publicize the miracle ...For one can say that it works for women to combine [with men to a quorum of ten] in order to publicize the miracle.

חודש טוב והporate שמחה!