

# Hiddur Mitzvah

Rabbi Yonason Sacks

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

Adapted from Rabbi Sacks' *Yemei Temimim* on *Pirkei Avos*

*Rebbi stated: What is the just path that a person should choose?*

*Anything that brings glory to oneself and glory from others.*

**Avos, 2:1**

רבי אומר, איזו היא דרך ישרה  
שיבור לו האדם כל שהיא תפארת  
לעשיה ותפארת לו מן האדם  
**אבות ב:א**

Rabeinu Yonah writes that the performance of mitzvos glorifies both HaKadosh Baruch Hu and those who perform them, and is therefore man's ultimate glory. Man should accordingly always strive to fulfill the precept of "*hiddur mitzvah*" by beautifying the mitzvos, as for instance, by buying a beautiful *lulav*, *tallis*, etc.

The Rashbatz, *Magen Avos* 2:1, contends that one may perform a mitzvah in a manner that is a credit to himself, but for which he receives no credit from others, such as if he performs a mitzvah at a time that people consider inappropriate. On the other hand, a person may fulfill a mitzvah in a manner that brings credit from others, but no true credit to himself, such as a person who performs a mitzvah without the proper intent, but in a manner designed to win the approval of others. Our Tanna therefore teaches that mitzvah performance should be both externally as well as internally glorified. Citing the Gemara (*Shabbos* 133b) that recommends building a beautiful *sukkah*, buying a beautiful *lulav*, *shofar*, *tzitzis*, etc. based on the *possuk* (Shemos 15:2) of "זה קלי ואנודהו" (this is my G-d and I will glorify Him) the Rashbatz writes that this is the way to gain the esteem of both one's Maker and one's fellows.

While the above Gemara makes clear that the precept of *hiddur mitzvah* applies to the beautification of a *chefetz shel mitzvah* --the *object* with which one performs a mitzvah, numerous sources appear to extend the concept of *hiddur* -- adornment, to the *manner* in which a mitzvah is performed (*ma'aseh mitzvah*) as well. For example, the Mishnah in *Meseches Pesachim* (99b) teaches that it is forbidden to eat on Erev Pesach from the time of Mincha and beyond. As Rashi and the Rashbam explain, this restriction serves to whet one's appetite for *matzah*, so that its consumption will be performed with a stronger desire, thereby fulfilling the precept of *hiddur mitzvah*. Although Rashi and the Rashbam are referring to the improved quality of an *action* (i.e., the act of eating *matzah*) as opposed to the improved quality of an *object* (i.e., such as purchasing a better quality *matzah*) they nonetheless apply the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*.

Similarly, Tosafos (*Sukkah* 38b, s.v. *Sh'ma*) extend the concept of *hiddur mitzvah* to the mitzvah of *tefillah*, which inherently lacks any physical *chefetz shel mitzvah*. Tosafos deal with the case of an individual who is in the middle of his personal silent recitation of the *Amidah* when the *shliach tzibur* reaches the communal *Kedusha*. While such an individual is halachically

prohibited from *verbally* responding to the *shliach tzibur's Kedusha* (such a response would constitute a *hefsek*, or interruption, of his own silent *Amidah*), the question arises as to whether he has any other options. Tosafos cite the opinion of Rashi in the name of the BaHa"G, who suggests that one should temporarily stop his own prayer and listen silently with the intent to fulfill the obligation of *Kedusha* vicariously through the *shliach tzibur*. By employing the halachic vehicle of "*shomei'a k'oneh*," which posits that listening (to a *beracha*) is considered tantamount to actually reciting the *beracha*, one can fulfill the mitzvah of *Kedusha* without physically uttering a word, thereby avoiding the problem of *hefsek* in his own *Amidah*. Once *Kedusha* concludes, he may continue his own silent *Amidah* from where he left off.

Tosafos themselves, however, question this ruling, citing the Gemara in *Berachos* (21b) that requires one to time the beginning of his silent *Amidah* in a manner that will enable him to have finished by the time the *shliach tzibur* reaches *Kedusha*. According to Rashi, ask Tosafos, why can't one simply begin his *tefillah* at any time, stop and listen attentively when the *shliach tzibur* reaches *Kedusha*, and then resume his prayer? Tosafos therefore disagree with Rashi's suggestion, maintaining that even the mere employment of *shomei'a k'oneh* without any verbal participation constitutes a *hefsek* of one's silent *Amidah* as well. Accordingly, one who finds himself in such a situation would have no option other than to ignore the *shliach tzibur's Kedusha*, and simply continue reciting his personal *Amidah*.

In the course of their analysis, Tosafos parenthetically mention that even if the mechanism of *shomei'a k'oneh* serves to create a virtual halachic equivalency between listening and responding to *Kedusha*, it is nonetheless halachically preferable to verbally respond, as the actual physical involvement in reciting the *Kedusha* constitutes "*hiddur mitzvah*" (see the parallel Tosafos in *Meseches Berachos* 21a s.v. *Ad*). Although the Mitzvah of *Kedusha* clearly does not involve any physical object or *chefetz shel mitzvah*, Tosafos nonetheless apply the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*. Apparently, *hiddur mitzvah* extends beyond the mere beautification of an object used for a mitzvah to include even the *manner* in which the mitzvah is performed.

The *Avnei Nezer* (433) extends the concept of *hiddur mitzvah* of *ma'aseh mitzvah* to the context of the *arba minim* of Sukkos. Citing Rashi, the Ra'avad, and the *Yereim*, the *Avnei Nezer* notes that one fulfills *hiddur mitzvah* by completely binding the *lulav*, *hadasim*, and *aravos* together. "Beautification" in this case is a function of the manner in which one takes the species, as opposed to the actual quality or appearance of the species themselves. The *Avnei Nezer* cites the *Yerushalmi* (*Sukkah* 3:7), which notes the absence of a conjunctive "ו" between the mention of *esrog* and *lulav* along with the presence of a conjunctive "ו" between the mention of *lulav*, *hadasim*, and *aravos* in the *possuk*:

*And you shall take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook...*

**Vayikra 23:40**

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר  
 כפת תמרים וענף עץ עבת וערבי נחל ...  
 ויקרא כג:מ

From this difference, the *Yerushalmi* derives that the *lulav*, *hadasim*, and *aravos* must be taken together ("*lekicha achas*") in one hand. Given this requirement, binding these three species

together tightly in order to ensure an even greater fulfillment of *lekicha achas* constitutes an act of *hiddur mitzvah*.

In a similar fashion, the BaHa”G explains that one who holds the *arba minim* in an inverted fashion (i.e., not in the manner in which they grew on the tree) does not fulfill his obligation because he has not fulfilled the precept of *hiddur mitzvah*. Although the quality and appearance of the *arba minim* themselves in such a scenario is not at all deficient, the *manner* in which the mitzvah is performed, i.e., in an inverted fashion, does not bring splendor or beauty to the mitzvah.

R’ Asher Weiss (*Minchas Asher*, Shemos 25) further extends this concept to the mitzvah of *bris milah*. *Bris milah* requires that the complete foreskin (*orlah*) be removed, but given the halachic principle of *rubo k’kulo* -- the greater part of something is considered the Halachic equivalent of the entirety, a *milah* which simply removes the majority of the *orlah* is nonetheless considered valid, though not “*mehudar*” (optimal/beautified). *Hiddur*, in the case of *bris milah*, is thus fulfilled through the removal of the entire *orlah* as opposed to the mere majority. R’ Weiss notes that this type of *hiddur* is not simply a beautification of the object of the mitzvah of *bris milah*, but rather an enhancement of the *manner* in which the mitzvah of *milah* is performed, as one conducts a complete cut as opposed to a minimal cut. Because a complete removal of the *orlah* enhances the *manner* in which the mitzvah is performed, removal of any remaining *orlah*, even after the majority has already been removed, may be performed on Shabbos (i.e., at the time of the *bris milah*), since such an action is considered a part of the perfected action of the mitzvah, subsumed within the mitzvah itself. If this *hiddur* was merely a beautification of the object of *milah*, however, R’ Weiss suggests that it would not be permitted on Shabbos.

R’ Weiss cites the mitzvah of *kiddush hachodesh* (Beis Din’s sanctification of the new moon) as another example of *hiddur mitzvah* that pertains to a *ma’aseh mitzvah*. Even if the new moon is clearly visible and the members of Beis Din have seen it for themselves, *hiddur mitzvah* requires that witnesses attest to having seen it, even though the lack of witnesses would not be invalidating. Here, again, there is no physical *chefetz shel mitzvah*, but the concept of *hiddur mitzvah* nonetheless applies.

R’ Weiss adds that, in contrast to the aforementioned examples, *hiddur mitzvah* would *not* apply to the mitzvah of *shechita* (ritual slaughter). Although Halacha’s encouragement of severing the entire windpipe and esophagus – as opposed to the minimally required majority of the two – sounds like a form of *hiddur mitzvah* (i.e., reminiscent of the case of *milah*, in which removing the entirety of the *orlah* as opposed to relying on the majority, constituted *hiddur mitzvah*), this requirement is actually quite different from the aforementioned cases of *hiddur mitzvah*. Rather than “beautifying” or “enhancing” the object or act of the mitzvah, the encouragement of a complete cutting for *shechita* is simply a precautionary measure, in order to keep one from accidentally cutting less than the majority, a situation which would entirely invalidate the *shechita*. R’ Weiss explains that the concept of *hiddur mitzvah* is inapplicable to *shechita* because, as opposed to *milah*, *shechita* is considered to be a “*matir*”- *permit*, as opposed to a classic mitzvah. While all Jewish males are automatically obligated in the mitzvah of *milah* regardless of personal preferences or situations, only one who desires to eat meat must perform *shechita*,

simply in order to render the meat permissible for consumption. Because *shechita* is not a classic “obligation” but rather a “permit,” it is not subject to the principles of *hiddur mitzvah*.

The *Pri Megadim* (O.C. 656:1, M.Z. n. 1) writes that the notion of *hiddur mitzvah* extends even to the fulfillment of a mitzvah in a manner that satisfies the stringencies of all major opinions. For instance, although an *esrog* with a blemish might have been ruled halachically acceptable, *hiddur mitzvah* would still demand that one spend up to a third more to buy an *esrog* that satisfies all opinions of kashrus (see *Be’ur Halacha* there). Similarly, because the *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 473:5) rules that the preferred form of *maror* is *chazeres*, romaine lettuce, the *Chok Yaakov* (ibid., n. 22) notes that one should spend up to a third more to buy this preferred form of *maror*.

As a final note, R’ Asher Weiss adds that the concept of *hiddur mitzvah* extends to the person performing the mitzvah as well: by troubling to perform the mitzvah in a beautiful manner and with a beautiful item, a person actually adorns *himself*. This concept is beautifully illustrated by Rashi in *Meseches Yoma* (70a). There, the Gemara describes that after the Kohen Gadol’s public Torah reading on Yom Kippur, every person who had brought a *sefer Torah* to the *Azarah* (i.e., before the start of Yom Kippur) read from it “*l’haros chazuso larabim*” – in order to display its beauty to the masses. Rashi explains:

*To display the beauty of the script and the splendor of its owner who toiled to become beautiful through the mitzvah as it states (Shemos 15:2), "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him," be comely with mitzvos- a beautiful lulav, a beautiful sefer Torah with beautiful parchment, beautiful ink and an expert scribe.*

**Rashi, Meseches Yoma, s.v. L’Haros**

להראות נוי של ספר תורה, ותפארת בעליה שטרם להתנאות במצוה, שנאמר (שמות טו), זה אלי ואנוהו - התנאה לפניו במצות, לולב נאה, ספר תורה נאה, בקלף נאה, בדיו נאה, בלבלר אומן.  
רש"י מסכת יומא ע. ד"ה להראות

Beyond the beauty of the actual scroll, the owner himself is beautified through his meticulous attention to the enhancement of the mitzvah. Indeed, the *Midrash HaGadol* comments on the same *possuk*:

*Be comely with mitzvos, for adorning the mitzvos beautifies a person.*

**Midrash HaGadol, Shemos 15:2**

היה נאה במצוות שהוא נוי לאדם שמהדר במצוות.  
מדרש הגדול, שמות טו:ב

Accordingly, as our Mishnah hints, beautification of the mitzvos is most certainly a “תפארת”<sup>1</sup>, as it in turn brings glory and beauty to the person who does so.