

# The Message of “Mehadrin Min Ha-Mehadrin” on Chanukah

One of the most famous passages in the entire Gemara, which outlines the details of the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles, states as follows:

תנו רבנן: מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו. והמהדרין - נר לכל אחד ואחד. והמהדרין מן המהדרין, בית שמאי אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק שמנה, מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך; ובית הלל אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך. אמר עולא: פליגי בה תרי אמוראי במערבא, רבי יוסי בר אבין ורבי יוסי בר זבידא, חד אמר: טעמא דבית שמאי - כנגד ימים הנכנסין, וטעמא דבית הלל - כנגד ימים היוצאין. וחד אמר: טעמא דבית שמאי - כנגד פרי החג, וטעמא דבית הלל - דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין. אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: שני זקנים היו בצידן, אחד עשה כבית שמאי ואחד עשה כדברי בית הלל, זה נותן טעם לדבריו - כנגד פרי החג, וזה נותן טעם לדבריו - דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין. מסכת שבת דף כא עמוד ב



Rabbi Michael Taubes

YUHSB Class of 1976

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS and YU High School for Boys

*The Rabbis taught: The mitzvah of [lighting candles on] Chanukah is [to light] one candle [per] man and his household [each night]. And those who pursue mitzvos [with greater enthusiasm light] one candle for each and every one [in the household each night]. And [as for] those who pursue mitzvos with even greater enthusiasm, Beis Shammai say that [on] the first day [of Chanukah] one lights eight [candles, and] from then on continuously decreases [the number of candles lit each night], and Beis Hillel say that [on] the first day [of Chanukah] one lights one [candle, and]*

*from then on continuously increases [the number of candles lit each night]. Ulla said: Two Amoraim in the west (i.e., in Eretz Yisrael) disagree about this (i.e., about the basis for these opposing positions, namely): Rabbi Yose bar Avin and Rabbi Yose bar Zevida. One [of them] said [that] the reasoning of Beis Shammai [is that the nightly decreasing of the number of candles lit is done so that the number of candles lit each night] corresponds to the [number of] days [of the holiday] yet to come, and the reasoning of Beis Hillel [is that the nightly increasing of the number of*



Rav Noach Borenstein zt"l

*Note: Much of this presentation is based on a shiur delivered by HaRav Noach Borenstein, zt"l. HaRav Noach was recognized at a young age as one of the most outstanding talmidim of the “Brisker Rav,” the famed gaon HaRav Yitzchak Zev (“Reb Velvele”) Soloveitchik, zt"l, in Europe, and eventually, HaRav Noach served as a Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS for several decades. His son, HaRav Shmuel Borenstein, zt"l, who was niftar just this past Rosh HaShanah, was an extraordinarily dedicated and beloved rebbe for over forty years in MTA/YUHSB, where he also learned as a student himself. His profound devotion to and deep concern for his talmidim, his willingness to cheerfully do anything that was asked of him, his love for and trust in our yeshiva and its mission, his respect for all other human beings, about whom he never spoke a word of lashon hara, and his ever-present smile will always be remembered by those who were privileged*

*to know him. Several years ago, I came across a written summary of the shiur from HaRav Noach that this essay is based on, in a sefer that I chanced upon which contained several Divrei Torah published by a member of his family, and I (orally) shared it then with HaRav Shmuel and a number of others. I present some of the ideas here to the best of my understanding in the hope that I will be able to accurately relate them and that the learning that they may inspire will serve as an aliyah for the neshamos of both HaRav Noach and HaRav Shmuel, zichronam leverachah.*

candles lit is done so that the number of candles lit each night] corresponds to the [number of] days [of the holiday] that have [already] passed. And one [of them] said [that] the reasoning of Beis Shammai [that the number of candles lit decreases each night is that this mitzvah] corresponds to [the mitzvah of offering] the [sacrificial] bulls [in the Beis HaMikdash] on the holiday [of Sukkos], and the reasoning of Beis Hillel [that the number of candles lit increases each night is based upon the principle] that we ascend in sacred matters and we do not descend. Rabbah bar bar Channah said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: There were two elders in [the city of] Sidon, one performed [the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles] in accordance with the words of Beis Shammai, and one performed [it] in accordance with the view of Beis Hillel. This [one, who followed the ruling of Beis Shammai,] gives [as] the reason for his opinion [that the number of candles lit should decrease each night that this mitzvah] corresponds to [the mitzvah of offering] the [sacrificial] bulls [in the Beis HaMikdash] on the holiday [of Sukkos], and this [one, who followed the ruling of Beis Hillel,] gives [as] the reason for his opinion [that the number of candles lit should increase each night] that we ascend in sacred matters and we do not descend.

### **Shabbos 21b**

As elucidated by Rashi, the Gemara is telling us that the basic requirement is to light one candle per household each night, regardless of how many household members there are. [Note that we will refer in this essay to lighting candles, but all the same issues are relevant if one uses oil to kindle the Chanukah lights.] The “*mehadrin*,” those who pursue mitzvos in general with a greater level of enthusiasm, go beyond the basic

requirement, and light one candle per member of the household each night. And the “*mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*,” those whose excitement for mitzvah observance is even greater, go even further and change the number of candles lit each night, depending upon which night of Chanukah it is. Exactly how they do this, however, is subject to a dispute between Beis Shammai, who are of the opinion that on the first night these people light eight candles and subsequently subtract one candle each night, thus concluding with one candle on the last night, and Beis Hillel, who hold the reverse: these individuals begin by lighting one candle the first night and subsequently add one candle each night, thus concluding with eight candles on the last night.

The Gemara then presents a further dispute, this time among Amoraim in Eretz Yisrael, as to the logic behind the respective positions of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel concerning the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option. According to one Amora, Beis Shammai hold that the number of candles lit per night should correspond to the number of days of the holiday yet to come — hence eight candles are lit on the first night, when eight days of the holiday are still in front of us, seven candles are lit on the second night when seven days of the holiday still remain, and so on, proceeding down to one candle on the eighth night, when just one day is left. Beis Hillel, on the other hand, maintain that the number of candles lit per night should correspond to the number of days of the holiday that have arrived — including the one on which the candles are now being lit. On the first night, when only one day has arrived (including that day itself), one candle is lit, on the second night,

when two days (including that day) have arrived, two candles are lit, and on the eighth night, when eight days (including that day) have arrived, eight candles are lit.

The second Amora suggests a very different rationale behind the opinions of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel. He contends that the position of Beis Shammai, that the number of candles decreases each night, is modeled after the special sacrificial offerings on the holiday of Sukkos, when the number of bulls offered as *korbanos* each day decreases, beginning with thirteen on the first day of the holiday and ending with seven on the seventh day (see Bamidbar 29:12-34). The view of Beis Hillel, on the other hand, that the number of candles increases each night, is based on a general halachic principle that when it comes to sacred matters, we ascend (i.e., we elevate or increase) and we do not descend (*ma’alin ba-kodesh ve’ein moridin* — see *Menachos* 99a for a source in the Torah for this idea). As the Gemara concludes, it is the explanation of this second Amora regarding the argument between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel that was apparently more widely accepted.

As a side point, it is interesting to ponder why Beis Shammai would choose to relate the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles to the “*parei ha-chag*,” the bull offerings sacrificed in the Beis HaMikdash on Sukkos. It is true that the fact that the number of bulls offered each day indeed decreased as the holiday progressed would seem to indicate that the aforementioned rule of *ma’alin ba-kodesh ve’ein moridin*, suggested as the reason for Beis Hillel’s view, is actually not always employed, especially if there is a

compelling indication otherwise; but the question is still why we should model our practice on Chanukah after those sacrifices.

Perhaps the answer lies in a ruling found earlier in that same Gemara (*Shabbos* 21b), where we are taught that it is prohibited to make personal use of the light provided by the Chanukah candles, a ruling codified by the Rambam (*Hilchos Chanukah* 4:6) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 673:1). Here it is noted that for this reason we customarily kindle one extra light — commonly known as the *shamash* — so that we can make use of that light and not the light of the candles kindled for the mitzvah itself. In order to explain why it is in fact forbidden to make use of the light from the actual Chanukah candles, the Ran writes:

הלכות חנוכה. שמע מינה אסור להשתמש לאורה. פירוש כל תשמישין ואפילו תשמיש מצוה דכיון שעל ידי נס שנעשה במנורה תקנוה עשאוה כמנורה שאין משתמשין בה כלל.  
ר"ן על הרי"ף, שבת ט.

*The laws of Chanukah. [We] learn from this [that] it is forbidden to make use of [a Chanukah candle's] light. The meaning [of this] is that all uses, even mitzvah [oriented] uses [are forbidden by the light of the candle], because since it was as a result of a miracle which was done with the Menorah [in the Beis HaMikdash that] they (i.e., the rabbis) established it (i.e., the mitzvah to light a candle on Chanukah), they made it (i.e., the Chanukah candle) like the Menorah [itself], which cannot be used [for any other use] at all.*

#### **Ran to Shabbos, 9a in Rif**

In other words, because the very mitzvah to light candles on Chanukah was introduced as a means of commemorating the miracle of the

burning of the oil in the Menorah of the Beis HaMikdash, the rabbis patterned the laws of the light from the Chanukah candles after the laws of the light of the Menorah — and after other sacred items of the Beis HaMikdash that may not be used for any other purposes. Just as, therefore, one could not make use of the light of Menorah of the Beis HaMikdash for any other needs, one likewise may not make use of the light of the Chanukah candles for any other needs. Once we have connected the Chanukah candles to the Beis HaMikdash and even declared that they are to be treated on par with other sacred items of the Beis HaMikdash, the sanctity of which precludes their being used for any external purposes, we can understand connecting the Chanukah candles to a sacrificial rite in the Beis HaMikdash, namely, the Sukkos offerings. The same laws forbidding making personal use of a sacred Beis HaMikdash item also apply to the animals dedicated for those offerings.

To return to the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel as to whether those who follow the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* practice should add or subtract a candle each night, one may legitimately ask if it makes any practical difference what their respective opinions are based on. That is, does it matter practically whether Beis Shammai's opinion (that the number of candles lit should decrease nightly) is based upon the idea that the number of candles lit each night should correspond to the number of days remaining in the holiday, or upon the connection between Chanukah candles and the bull offerings of Sukkos? And does it matter whether Beis Hillel's opinion (that the number of candles lit should increase nightly) is based upon the

notion that the number of candles lit each night should correspond to the number of days of the holiday that have already arrived or on the general rule that, regarding sacred matters, we ascend rather than descend?

The *Beis Ha-Leivi*, in one of his essays about Chanukah (printed at the end of his commentary to *Sefer Bereishis*), presents an interesting scenario. What if, on the third night of Chanukah, one has only two candles? Should he light both in order to fulfill the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* practice in accordance with the ruling of Beis Hillel? If Beis Hillel's reason for increasing the number of candles lit each night is based on the idea that the number of candles should correspond to the number of days of the holiday that have arrived (the first interpretation above), then the answer is no, since he will not be lighting the correct number of candles on the third night. If, however, Beis Hillel's reason is based on the principle that we ascend in sacred matters and do not descend (the second interpretation above), then the answer is yes, because although he will not be ascending from what he did the night before, as he is unable to do so, he is still not permitted to descend, and light fewer than he did previously.

The *Beis Ha-Leivi* then turns his attention to a fundamental disagreement between Tosafos and the Rambam regarding the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option. As noted above, whereas the basic requirement of the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles is to light a single candle per household per night, those who wish to fulfill the *mehadrin* option light an additional candle for each household member (though the number does not change from one night to the

next). But what about those who wish to fulfill the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option? As explained, Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel argue about whether they should start with eight candles on the first night and light one less each subsequent night, ending up with one candle on the eighth night, or start with one candle on the first night and light one more each night, ending up with eight on the eighth night. But should they be lighting on each night just one candle or set of candles, the exact number depending upon the particular night, regardless of how many household members there are? Or should they be lighting a separate candle or set of candles for each individual household member on each night, either subtracting or adding one each night as the holiday progresses, following the ruling of either Beis Shammai or Beis Hillel? The Gemara itself does not make this clear, and it is consequently the subject of a dispute among the Rishonim.

The opinion of Rabbeinu Yitzchak is cited in Tosafos:

נראה לר"י דב"ש וב"ה לא קיימי אלא אנר איש וביתו שכן יש יותר הידור דאיכא היכרא כשמוסיף והולך או מחסר שהוא כנגד ימים הנכנסים או היוצאים אבל אם עושה נר לכל אחד אפי' יוסיף מכאן ואילך ליכא היכרא שיסברו שכן יש בני אדם בבית. תוספות, שבת כא: ד"ה והמהדרין

*It appears to the Ri (Rabbeinu Yitzchak) that [in describing the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin option,] Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel are referring to [enhancing the basic requirement to light] one candle [per] man and his household [each night], because that way there is a greater embellishment [of the mitzvah] since there will be a [clear] distinction [as to which night of Chanukah it is] when he [either] continuously increases or*

*decreases [the number of candles each night], as that corresponds [either] to the [number of] days [of the holiday] yet to come or to the [number of] days [of the holiday] which have [already] passed [depending upon whether one is following the position of Beis Shammai or that of Beis Hillel]. But if [the person] lights one candle [on the first night] for each one [in his household], even if he will from then on add [another candle each night, in accordance with the view of Beis Hillel], there will be no [clear] distinction [as to which night of Chanukah it is], as those [who see the additional candles] will think that such is [the number of] people there are in the house [and the person is following the mehadrin option, and not the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin option].*

#### **Tosafos to Shabbos 21b, s.v. ve-ha-mehadrin**

In other words, according to Tosafos, one goal of the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option is to light the number of candles that will make it clear which night of Chanukah it is (with either one more or one less candle being lit each night in accordance with the view of either Beis Hillel or Beis Shammai). This can be best accomplished only if one lights, according to Beis Hillel, one candle for the entire household on the first night, two candles for the entire household on the second night, and so on, or, according to Beis Shammai, eight candles for the entire household on the first night, seven candles for the entire household on the second night, and so on. If, however, one were to light an individual candle or set of candles for each member of the household, it would be unclear to the on-looker which night of the holiday it is, as one who sees multiple candles will not know if those candles represent which night of Chanukah

it is or if they represent the number of people in the household. In short, according to Tosafos, the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option is an enhancement of the basic requirement to light one candle per household each night, and is not related to the *mehadrin* option to light one candle per member of the household each night.

The Rambam, however, disagrees:

כמה נרות הוא מדליק בחנוכה, מצותה שיהיה כל בית ובית מדליק נר אחד בין שהיו אנשי הבית מרובין בין שלא היה בו אלא אדם אחד, והמהדר את המצוה מדליק נרות כמנין אנשי הבית נר לכל אחד ואחד בין אנשים בין נשים, והמהדר יתר על זה ועושה מצוה מן המובחר מדליק נר לכל אחד ואחד בלילה הראשון ומוסיף והולך בכל לילה ולילה נר אחד. כיצד הרי שהיו אנשי הבית עשרה, בלילה הראשון מדליק עשרה נרות ובליל שני עשרים ובליל שלישי שלשים עד שנמצא מדליק בליל שמיני שמונים נרות.

רמב"ם הלכות חנוכה פרק ד הלכה א-ב

*How many candles does one light on Chanukah? The [basic] mitzvah is that in each and every household one lights one candle [each night], whether there are many members of the household or whether there is only one person [living] in it. One who embellishes the mitzvah lights [as many] candles [each night] as the number of members of the household [that there are], one candle for each and every one [of them], whether men or women. And one who embellishes [the mitzvah even] more than that, and does the mitzvah in the choicest fashion, lights one candle for each and every one in the household on the first night and continuously increases [the number of candles lit by adding] one candle [per household member] on each and every night.*

*For example, if there were ten members of the household, on the first night one lights ten candles, and on the second*

night twenty, and on the third night thirty, [and so on] until he ends up lighting eighty candles on the eighth night.

#### **Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 4:1-2**

Clearly, the Rambam is of the opinion that the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option is an enhancement not only of the basic requirement but also of the *mehadrin* option. Just as, therefore, the number of candles lit by one who fulfills the *mehadrin* option varies based upon the number of people in the household, as this person lights one candle for each member of the household each night, the same is true of one who fulfills the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option, as this person lights an additional candle each succeeding night (according to the accepted view of Beis Hillel) for each member of the household, to the point that on the eighth night he will be lighting eight candles per household member. Evidently, the Rambam is not troubled with the concern raised by Tosafos that if one lights multiple candles for each household member, the distinction in terms of which night of Chanukah it is will be somewhat blurred.

In terms of the final halachah, the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 671:2) codifies the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* practice in accordance with the opinion of Beis Hillel, that a new candle is added each night of the holiday, but asserts that only one candle or set of candles is lit in every household, such that on the last night, a total of eight candles are lit regardless of how many members there are of that household. This is in line with the position of Tosafos that the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option does not build on the *mehadrin* option, and most Sephardic Jews to this day

conduct themselves accordingly. The Rama there, however, writes that the widespread custom is that a separate candle or set of candles is lit for each and every member of the household, as posited by the Rambam, and this is indeed the practice followed by most Ashkenazic Jews today. As an aside, it should be noted that the *Taz* (*ibid.* no. 1) points out that there is somewhat of an anomaly here in that the Sephardim have accepted the ruling of Tosafos, more generally followed by the Ashkenazim, while the Ashkenazim have accepted the ruling of the Rambam, more usually followed by the Sephardim. [See, however, *Sdei Chemed* (*Asifas Dinim, Ma'areches Chanukah* 9:4), among others, for further discussion of this point based on what the Rambam himself writes about the common Sephardic practice in *Hilchos Chanukah* 4:3; see also *Chidushei Maran Ri"z Ha-Leivi 'al Ha-Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah* 4:1, for an analysis of an important distinction between the actual Ashkenazic practice and the Rambam's ruling.]

In considering this dispute between Tosafos and the Rambam regarding the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option, the *Beis Ha-Leivi* suggests that it may

point to another important difference between the two aforementioned interpretations in the Gemara as to the reasoning behind the respective positions of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel. Basing himself on a comment of the Vilna Gaon in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Bi'ur Ha-Gra ibid.*, s.v. *ve-yeish omrim*), the *Beis Ha-Leivi* posits that according to the second of those interpretations, according to which Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel are unconcerned about a need to demonstrate what night of Chanukah it is (and thus do not argue about what is more important — the number of days yet to come or the number of days that have already arrived, but rather about whether this mitzvah is modeled after the descending number of bull offerings on *Sukkos* or after the standard policy that we ascend in sacred matters and do not descend), there is no requirement that there be any visible indication to an on-looker as to what night of the holiday it is. The objection raised by Tosafos, as presented above — that if a candle or set of candles is lit for each member of the household in order to satisfy the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option, there will be no clear distinction on a given night as to



Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein zt"l (Class of 1960) with YUHSB student Gabi Steinberg (Class of 2013)

which night of Chanukah it is because those who see multiple candles will not know if they represent which night of the holiday it is or if they represent the number of people in the household — is thus of no concern and is hence irrelevant. That concern is relevant only according to the first interpretation, which focuses upon the idea that the number of candles corresponds to the day of the holiday (whether yet remaining or already passed). Since, as described above, the Gemara subsequently records that the elders of Sidon accepted this second interpretation of the views of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel, the Rambam too accepts that interpretation and thus rules as he does in terms of the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option, disregarding any concern about making it clear which night of Chanukah it may happen to be. Had the Rambam accepted the first interpretation, he would have shared the concern of Tosafos and ultimately ruled like Tosafos that to satisfy the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option only one candle or set of candles is lit each night regardless of the number of household members.

The opinion of Tosafos, however, is that everybody agrees — according to both interpretations of the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel — that the primary goal of the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option is to demonstrate clearly to any on-looker which night of Chanukah it is. According to the first interpretation, the dispute is about what the Sages wished to call attention to when establishing the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles — the days still to come or the days already gone by. According to the second interpretation, the dispute — given that everybody agrees that the number of candles must indicate clearly which

night of the holiday it is — is about whether the emphasis should be on the number of remaining days and we should proceed in descending order as we do with the bull offerings of Sukkos or whether the emphasis should be on the number of days that have already arrived and we should proceed in ascending order because of the general rule that in sacred matters we ascend and do not descend. Since in any case, though, the number of candles should demonstrate something about which night of Chanukah it is, the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option requires only one candle or set of candles per the entire household so as to minimize any potential lack of clarity in this demonstration. According to the *Beis Ha-Leivi*, then, there is a significant practical difference between the two interpretations of the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel, relating to the disagreement between Tosafos and the Rambam regarding the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option. It may be noted that the Chida, in his *Birkei Yosef to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* (*ibid.* no. 1), writes explicitly, citing the *Pri Chadash* (*ibid.* no. 1) and others, that the two interpretations in the Gemara regarding the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel indeed centers around this point of disagreement between Tosafos and the Rambam.

It may be possible to suggest yet another practical difference between these two interpretations of the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel. Regarding the physical placement of the Chanukah candles, the Gemara states:

תנו רבנן: נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ . . . ובשעת הסכנה - מניחה על שלחנו, ודין: שבת כא:

*The Rabbis taught: The mitzvah [is] to place the Chanukah candle(s) at the doorway of one's house on the outside... and in times of danger, he should place it [inside] on his table, and that is sufficient.*

### **Shabbos 21b**

As explained there by Rashi, one of the important purposes of lighting Chanukah candles is to generate *pirsumei nissa* — publicity for the great miracle that the holiday commemorates. It is therefore proper to light the candles outdoors, where they will likely be seen by many individuals who are passing by in the street, thereby making more and more people aware of this miracle. If, however, one is not able to light outdoors due to some dangerous circumstance at the time (see Rashi, s.v. *ha-sakanah* and Tosafos, s.v. *u'veshe'as ha-sakanah* for details), he may light indoors at his table and that will suffice for him to fulfill the mitzvah. The Rambam (*Hilchos Chanukah* 4:7-8) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* *ibid.* no. 5) rule accordingly; the *Aruch HaShulchan* (*ibid.* no. 24) notes that the same is true when there may be no actual danger, but the weather conditions outside are adverse. The question not discussed in these sources is whether one who is forced to light indoors should nonetheless pursue the enhancement options of *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*, or whether he should, in such a case, simply fulfill the basic obligation of lighting one candle each night regardless of how many people are in his household.

The answer to this question may lie in our understanding of the nature of the enhanced options, such as the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option. As just pointed out, the notion of

*pirsumei nissa* is central to proper fulfillment of the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles. But is *pirsumei nissa* to be viewed as an actual component of that very mitzvah — in other words, is the requirement on Chanukah not only to light candles (that is, to perform a “*ma’aseh hadlakah*” — an act of lighting), but also to light the candles specifically in a manner that allows for the miracle to be publicized to as great an extent as possible? Or is *pirsumei nissa* a kind of separate obligation — in other words, in addition to lighting candles, one must also try to publicize the miracle, but the *pirsumei nissa* is not by itself part and parcel of the *ma’aseh hadlakah*? From the fact that when, for one reason or another, it is not possible to light the Chanukah candles outdoors, where *pirsumei nissa* can be properly attained, one is still obligated to light the candles indoors, where there will be no broad *pirsumei nissa*, it would seem that the “*ma’aseh hadlakah*” is an obligation even in the absence of the possibility for *pirsumei nissa*.

The same conclusion may be drawn from something else written by the Rambam:

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס, וימים אלו הן הנקראין חנוכה והן אסורין בהספד ותענית כימי הפורים, והדלקת הנרות בהן מצוה מדברי סופרים כקריאת המגילה. רמב"ם הלכות חנוכה פרק ג הלכה ג

*And because of this [story, outlined previously], the Sages who were [alive] in that generation instituted that these eight days, which start from the evening [of] the twenty-fifth of Kislev, should be days of rejoicing and of [reciting] Hallel,*

*and on [these days] in the evening we light the candles at the doorways of the houses each and every night of the eight nights [in order] to demonstrate and reveal [the greatness of] the miracle. And these days are the [days which] are called Chanukah, and they are forbidden [to be days on which one delivers] a eulogy or [on which one observes] a fast day just like the days of Purim. And the [mitzvah of] the lighting of the candles on [these days] is a mitzvah from the Rabbinic authorities just like [the mitzvah of] the reading of the Megillah [on Purim].*  
**Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 3:3**

**Conceptually speaking, is the embellishment accomplished by the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option similar to the embellishment accomplished by a regular *hiddur mitzvah*?**

From the fact that the Rambam here makes mention twice of the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles, once, toward the beginning of the passage, connecting it directly to concept of *pirsumei nissa* (“to demonstrate and reveal [the greatness of] the miracle”), but again at the end of the passage, presenting it as an independent rabbinic requirement with no reference to *pirsumei nissa*, it may be argued that he too is conveying the point that *pirsumei nissa*, while certainly very important, is not an

inseparable component of the mitzvah to light candles on Chanukah. Had the Rambam shared only the earlier part of the passage, one might have concluded that *pirsumei nissa* is absolutely necessary for this mitzvah and if for whatever reason there is no possibility to accomplish that, the mitzvah simply cannot be performed. With his remarks at the end of the passage, however, the Rambam clarifies that there indeed exists a Rabbinically mandated mitzvah to light Chanukah candles on its own, even without a possibility for *pirsumei nissa*.

If this analysis is correct, we can now ask what is accomplished by lighting in accordance with the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option. Is that enhancement intended to embellish the *ma’aseh hadlakah*, the act of lighting the candles, which would make it similar to performing any other mitzvah in an enhanced fashion, through what is generally known as “*hiddur mitzvah*” — the “beautification” of a mitzvah? For example, the Gemara in *Shabbos* (133b), based upon a verse in the Torah (*Shemos* 15:2), encourages one to acquire a beautiful sukkah, a beautiful lulav, a beautiful shofar, beautiful tzitzis, and so on, as a means of embellishing the particular act of the mitzvah performed with each of those items. Is that what *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* regarding Chanukah candles is all about as well? To be sure, some of the parameters are not identical, as the Gemara in *Bava Kamma* (9b) teaches that to accomplish the goal of *hiddur mitzvah*, one must be willing to spend up to one third extra for the more beautiful item (see there for details; see also *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 656:1), while one who lights even one additional Chanukah candle a

night is spending more than one third extra. But conceptually speaking, is the embellishment accomplished by the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option similar to the embellishment accomplished by a regular *hiddur mitzvah*?

Or — maybe because of the above discrepancy between the means of fulfilling the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option and the standard *hiddur mitzvah* rules — should we say that *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* on Chanukah does not relate to the actual mitzvah of lighting candles — the *ma'aseh hadlakah* — at all, but rather to the unique requirement of *pirsumei nissa*? In other words, perhaps the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* enhancement is intended to embellish the *pirsumei nissa* element, as it attracts more attention from the on-looker, through the ever-increasing number of candles visible, to the special greatness of the miracle being celebrated on Chanukah? Which of the above two understandings of *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* on Chanukah is correct?

Perhaps the answer to this question depends on which of the two aforementioned explanations of the original dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel regarding the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* practice one accepts. The author of the first explanation, emphasizing that the number of candles lit in accordance with the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* practice relates to what day of the holiday it is, apparently holds that the goal of following this practice is to allow the on-lookers passing by in the

streets to recognize the greatness of the Chanukah miracle by considering how many “miraculous days” yet remain (Beis Shammai) or how many have already arrived (Beis Hillel). It seems clear that according to this view, the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option is designed to enhance the level of *pirsumei nissa*; consequently, one may suggest that when the person has to light indoors, where no significant *pirsumei nissa* is achieved in any event, there is nothing to be gained by adhering to the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* practice. In such a case, lighting one candle for the entire household each night would suffice to enable the person to fulfill his mitzvah, as there is no *pirsumei nissa* to enhance.

The author of the second explanation, however, who does not attach any significance to calling attention to what day of the holiday it is, apparently posits that the performance of the mitzvah in accordance with the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* practice is to be modeled after a pattern existing elsewhere in halachah, either that found regarding the sacrificial bull offerings on Sukkos (Beis Shammai), or that found more commonly, that we ascend in sacred matters and do not descend (Beis Hillel). According to this view, the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* option has nothing to do with *pirsumei nissa*, but rather relates to the *ma'aseh hadlakah*, the way one performs the act of the mitzvah of lighting the candles; consequently, even one who lights indoors, without any major *pirsumei nissa*, may still choose to

follow this option if he so desires, as he will thereby embellish his personal performance of the mitzvah. In any case, it seems clear that there are indeed practical differences between these two interpretations of the nature of the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel.

As a postscript, it may be added that in a way, at least homiletically, both of the above ideas are correct. There is value in embellishing one's personal performance of mitzvos, regardless of what is visible to others, and there is also value in enhancing the aspect of a mitzvah that one demonstrates to others, thereby showing his love for the mitzvah to the public. It is noteworthy that the Hebrew root of the word “Chanukah” is the same as that of the word “*chinuch*,” usually translated as education, training, or, most accurately, making someone (or something) suitable for the role he will ultimately fill. Anyone who wants to be involved in *chinuch*, to educate, train, or make someone suitable for his role, whether formally as a *rebbe* or a teacher, or just as someone who wishes to positively impact others, should himself be scrupulous and meticulous about his own mitzvah observance, and hence be an effective role model. He should also demonstratively communicate his love for, his joy in, and his happiness with his relationship with God through mitzvah observance. As we celebrate Chanukah, let us strive to influence and to be influenced in the best possible way.



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