



THE NATURE OF MEHADRIN ON CHANUKAH

The Gemara, *Shabbos* 21b, quotes a *beraisa* that tells us that there are three levels of fulfillment when it comes to lighting the Chanukah lights:

ת"ר 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.

Our Rabbis taught: The mitzvah of Chanukah is one light for the entire household; the scrupulous (mehadrin) [kindle] a light for each member [of the household]; and the extremely scrupulous (mehadrin min hamehadrin) — Beis Shammai maintain: On the first day, eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced; but Beis Hillel say: On the first day, one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased.

The Nature of Mehadrin and Mehadrin Min Hamehadrin

The simple understanding of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is that it is an added feature of *mehadrin*. Instead of lighting one light for each member of the household (*mehadrin*), the number of lights per member of the household is increased each day. This is the opinion of the Rambam, *Hilchos Chanukah* 4:1-2. The Rambam writes that if there are ten members of the household, on the first night, the head of the household lights ten lights, twenty on the second night, increasing each night until eighty on the eighth night. [The Rambam differs from Ashkenazi practice where the members of the household each light their own *chanukiyah*. This issue is beyond the scope of this article.]

Tosafos, *Shabbos* 21b, d.h. *Vehamehadrin*, have a different approach. According to Tosafos, *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is not built upon *mehadrin*. If someone were to light twenty lights in the house on the second night, how is anyone supposed to know if there are ten people and it is the second night or if there are five people and it is the fourth night? The only way to increase each night while ensuring that it is recognizable which night is being represented is if only one person per household lights each night and the number of lights that are lit in that single *chanukiyah* increase each night.

How does the Rambam answer Tosafos' question? If there are twenty lights lit on the second night, how is it recognizable what those twenty lights

represent? Perhaps the Rambam will say simply that it doesn't matter. There is no need for the *hiddur* to be recognizable. What, then, is the *nekudas hamachlokes* (point of contention) between the Rambam and Tosafos? It all depends on how we view the nature of *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. [The following is based on the approach of Rav Betzalel Zolty, *Mishnas Yaavetz, Orach Chaim* no. 74.]

The Gemara, *Shabbos* 133a, teaches that there is a general requirement to perform mitzvos in a beautified manner (*hiddur mitzvah*). The Gemara, *Bava Kama* 9a, also teaches that there are certain objective standards to fulfill *hiddur mitzvah*. Are the standards of *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* part of the general requirement to perform mitzvos in a beautified manner? Or perhaps *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are a specific way to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights?

Rashi, *Shabbos* 21b, d.h. *Vehamehadrin*, writes that *mehadrin* (in the context of Chanukah) refers to people who normally perform mitzvos with *hiddur*. This implies that *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are the ways in which we can fulfill the general requirement of *hiddur mitzvah*.

There is an objective standard of *hiddur mitzvah* that would help explain Tosafos' opinion. Rashi, *Yoma* 70a, d.h. *L'haros*, writes that one of the ways to fulfill *hiddur mitzvah* of a sefer Torah is to bring it to Beis Hamikdash on Yom Kippur so that everyone can see its beauty. We see that part of *hiddur mitzvah* is how it is displayed or presented. Tosafos, *Menachos* 32b, d.h. *Ha*, have a similar idea. They quote Rabbeinu Tam that the requirement to have *sirtut* (scored lines) applies to sefer Torah because of *hiddur mitzvah*, but not to the parchment of tefillin because the parchment of tefillin remains inside

the *batim* and nobody sees it.

By combining these two ideas — that *mehadrin* on Chanukah is part of the general requirement of *hiddur mitzvah* and that *hiddur mitzvah* is fulfilled when others see it — we can understand Tosafos' need for the *mehadrin min hamehadrin* on Chanukah to be recognizable. If people can't tell which night of Chanukah it is, the *hiddur* is lost.

Why does the Rambam ignore the concern that the *hiddur* won't be recognizable? Because the Rambam is of the opinion that *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are not part of the general requirement of *hiddur mitzvah* but rather a specific fulfillment related to Chanukah lights. Perhaps the Rambam understood this from the fact that there are two levels: *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. Regarding all other mitzvos, there is only one level of *hiddur*. As such, it must be a specific aspect of Chanukah lights. Therefore, the general requirement that *hiddur mitzvah* must be recognizable does not apply to *mehadrin min hamehadrin* and lighting twenty lights on the second night in a ten-member household is a fulfillment of it.

Mehadrin: An Intrinsic or Extrinsic Fulfillment?

This idea can be taken one step further. According to the Rambam, it seems that *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are intrinsic to the fulfillment of the mitzvah. According to Tosafos, *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are extrinsic, part of the general requirement of *hiddur mitzvah*. There are four practical applications to this.

First, the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 671:1, writes that a poor person must spend money to fulfill the mitzvah, even if he has to beg for money or sell his clothing. How much money does



the tzedakah fund have to provide? The *Mishna Berura* in *Beiur Halacha* there writes that it only needs to give enough to fulfill the basic mitzvah — one light per night. It doesn't need to provide tzedakah funds to fulfill *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. However, the *Ohr Sameiach, Hilchos Chanukah* 4:12, infers from the Rambam's formulation of this halacha that there is a requirement to provide this person with enough to fulfill *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. What is the point of contention? If *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are extrinsic, then the tzedakah fund doesn't need to provide added funds to fulfill something considered "extra." However, if *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are an intrinsic way of fulfilling the mitzvah of Chanukah lights, then the tzedakah fund should provide enough not only to fulfill the mitzvah, but to fulfill it properly.

Second, the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 676:5, writes that on the first night, we place the light on the right side of the *chanukiyah*, and then each night we add a light to the left of that one. However, when we light, we light from left to right (starting with the newest light). The Vilna Gaon there disagrees. He asks: why should we light the lights used to fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin* before we light the

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light used to fulfill the basic mitzvah? The answer is that the *Shulchan Aruch* holds that the added lights used to fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin* are an intrinsic part of the fulfillment of the mitzvah. As such, it doesn't matter which lights are lit first. The Vilna Gaon is working with the assumption that *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is an external fulfillment and therefore, we must first light the primary light before lighting the others.

Third, R. Akiva Eger in his teshuvos (Tinyana no. 13) discusses the question of someone who started to light the lights and realized in the middle that he forgot to recite the berachos. Normally, we are supposed to recite the beracha before performing the mitzvah. In this case, is it permissible to recite the berachos after lighting some of the lights for that night but not all of them? There are several factors that would allow one to recite a beracha: 1) Perhaps one can still recite the beracha while people are still out in the marketplace because the candles are still burning and there is a continuous

fulfillment of the mitzvah. 2) According to the *Hagahos Ashri*, cited by the Rama, *YD 19:2*, it is permissible to recite a beracha soon after performance of the mitzvah. 3) There is another mitigating factor that is relevant to our discussion. R. Akiva Eger notes that there is a machlokes between the *Eliyah Rabbah* and the *P'ri Chadash* as to whether one can recite a beracha on the fulfillment of *hiddur mitzvah*. In this situation, after lighting the first light, one already fulfilled the mitzvah, and the rest are only to fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. Is a beracha warranted in such a situation?

There is a general debate about whether one can fulfill *hiddur mitzvah* when it is not connected to the basic mitzvah. The Rambam (*Hilchos Milah 2:4*, see *Beis Halevi 2:47*) seems to hold that once the basic mitzvah is completed and the person is no longer involved, there is no fulfillment of *hiddur mitzvah*. As such, one certainly cannot recite a beracha in such a situation. However, that is true regarding other mitzvos because there is no intrinsic connection between

the *hiddur* and the mitzvah itself. On Chanukah, there is an intrinsic connection and therefore the Rambam might hold that a beracha is warranted.

Fourth, the Gemara, *Shabbos 22b*, seems to conclude that it is permissible to light one Chanukah light from another. Nevertheless, the Rama, *Orach Chaim 674:1*, writes that it is not proper to light one from another because the first light is used for the primary mitzvah and the rest are just used for *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. The *Shaarei Teshuva* there quotes the *Beis Yehuda* who doesn't understand why we can't light from one to another; what's the issue? This dispute seems to revolve around our issue. The Rama seems to view *mehadrin min hamehadrin* as extrinsic to the mitzvah. As such, it is inappropriate to use the primary light to light the extra lights. On the other hand, the *Beis Yehuda* seems to view *mehadrin min hamehadrin* as intrinsic to the mitzvah. The additional lights are the same fulfillment as the first light, and therefore, there is no issue to light one from the other.



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