

Mehadrin Min Ha-mehadrin

How Many Candles Do We Light on Chanukah?

Shabbat 21b

Jews worldwide light Chanukah candles for eight straight nights, starting on the 25th of the Hebrew month of Kislev. Common practice is to light one candle on the first night of Chanukah, and to add an extra candle on each of the subsequent nights. In order to appreciate the depth of this mitzvah, we must explore its Talmudic roots.

In this *Thinking Gemara* class, we will take a comprehensive look at the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles, and examine a key passage in the Talmud that reveals the three levels of its performance. Through studying commentaries on the passage, we will uncover two major conceptual discussions that began in the twelfth century and continue to the present day.

Aside from analyzing the three levels on which the mitzvah of lighting candles can be performed, we will also focus on the variance in custom between Jews of different origins. As we will see, this difference also derives from questions of Talmudic interpretation, which Ashkenazi and Sephardic authorities dispute.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who is obligated in the mitzvah of Chanukah candles?
- What is the practical difference between how Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews light Chanukah candles?
- What are the sources in Talmudic literature for this difference, and what are its conceptual roots?
- Why do we add an extra candle every day of Chanukah – as opposed to lighting just one every day, eight every day, or starting with eight and finishing with one?

CLASS OUTLINE

Introduction: The Schwartz and the Sassoon Families

Section I. The Core Level of the Mitzvah: One Candle

Part A. “*Ner Ish Uveito*” – A Man and his Household

Part B. Why the Household?

Section II. Levels Two and Three: Enhancing the Mitzvah – “Mehadrin” and “Mehadrin min Ha-mehadrin”

Part A. How Many Candles do We Light?

Part B. Who Lights the Candles?

Part C. The Underpinnings of the Three-way Dispute

Section III. One to Eight Candles or Eight to One: Beit Hillel vs. Beit Shamai

Part A. The Chatam Sofer’s Approach: Fall or Elevation?

Part B. The Pnei Yehoshua’s Approach: Increasing Love or Decreasing Jug?

Part C. Rabbi Zevin’s Approach: Actual or Potential?

Note: This shiur is not intended as a source of practical *halachic* (legal) rulings. For matters of halachah, please consult a qualified *posek* (rabbi).

INTRODUCTION **The Schwartz and the Sassoon Families**

The “Lights in Israel” Chanukah mission – with students from fifteen campuses throughout North and South America – was led by Rabbi Dayan and Rabbi Goldfarb. On the fifth night of Chanukah the two rabbis led a Chanukah Menorah Tour through four different neighborhoods of Jerusalem.

They saw a few electric chanukiot (menorahs) on the tops of buildings, dozens of chanukiot lined up on the sidewalk outside yeshivot, and hundreds of glass boxes where Chanukah candles lit up the winter night.

At a certain point, Shani called out: “What’s going on here?”

No one else saw anything special – just two small, one-family houses with yards next to each other, each one filled with playing children.

“Why does the house on the left have seven menorahs in the window, and the one on the right just one?” she asked.

“They both seem to have large families, but one of them only lit one set of candles,” added José.

Adi read the Hebrew family names on the signs: “The one on the left is the Schwartz family and the one on the right is Sassoon.”

Rabbi Dayan and Rabbi Goldfarb looked at each other and laughed. “Well that explains it,” they said in unison. “The Schwartzes are probably Ashkenazim, and the Sassoons Sephardim.”

“Why should that make a difference?” asked Josh.

Rabbi Goldfarb turned to the entire group, “This will take us quite a while to explain. I think we owe you a class when we get back to the hostel. You’ll hear the whole story tonight from Rabbi Dayan over pizza.”

Let’s listen in on Rabbi Dayan’s Chanukah candles shiur, which will shed light on why Ashkenazim and Sephardim light Chanukah candles differently. Here is how he began...

SECTION I The Core Level of the Mitzvah: One Candle

1. Shabbat 21b

The Rabbis taught:

תנו רבנן:

1. The mitzvah of Chanukah [candles entails lighting] a candle, for a man and his household.

1. מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו

2. Those who enhance the mitzvah (*ha-mehadrin*) light a candle for each and every person.

2. והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד

3. Those who enhance the mitzvah the most: The House of Shamai says that on the first day one lights eight candles, and from then on decreases the number of candles [lighting one less each day]; the house of Hillel says that on the first day one lights one, and from then on adds [one more candle each day.]

3. והמהדרין מן המהדרין - בית שמאי אומרים יום ראשון מדליק שמנה מפאן ואילך פוחת והולך, ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת מפאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.

2. Rashi's Commentary on Shabbat 21b, "Ner Ish Uveito"

A candle for a man and his "bayit" (house) – One candle should be lit every night, and one candle is sufficient for a man and his entire household.

נר איש וביתו - נר אחד בכל לילה, ואיש וכל בני ביתו סגי להו בנר אחד:

3. Sefat Emet's Commentary on Shabbat 21a

This topic must be investigated: Is the mitzvah

ויש לעיין אי המצוה

A. to light one candle per house, just like the mitzvah of mezuzah or Shabbat candles, whereby it is sufficient for anyone to light the candle for the sake of Shabbat in order to fulfill the mitzvah? It would thus follow that one candle is sufficient even for two families living in the same house. Or,

א. נר אחד בבית, כמו מזוזה וכמו נר שבת, דכל שהדליק לשם שבת אף שהדליק מי שהיה די. ולפי זה אפשר דגם שני בעלי בתים הדרים בבית אחד די להם בנר אחד... או ימא

B. do we say that each individual is obligated in the mitzvah, but the head of each household fulfills it on behalf of all its members?

ב. דהמצוה על כל אדם אלא דבעל הבית מוציא כל בני ביתו.

4. Rosh, Shabbat 2:8

Rav Sheshet said that a guest is obligated in Chanukah candles and does not fulfill his obligation through the candles of the homeowner, because he is not included in "ish uveito" ("a man and his household").

אמר רב ששת אכסנאי חייב בנר חנוכה ואינו יוצא בנרו של בעל הבית דלא הוי בכלל איש ואשתו [וביתו].

5. Responsa Chacham Tzvi (Tosafot Chadashim) #13

Answer: It seems to me that on Chanukah, because the obligation of lighting does not rest upon the individual, one of the homeowners lights at the entrance of the courtyard and the others are automatically exempted from their obligation, even though they did not hear the blessing nor see the lighting. Rabbi Zeira went beyond this, stating that: "Since I have been married, [when I have been away from home during the candle lighting] I need not light myself, because they [my wife] are lighting for me at home." It is thus sufficient for a child who has reached the age of mitzvah education to be the one who lights at the entrance of the courtyard. But Purim's mitzvah, reading the Megillah, *obligates each individual* to read or hear the Megillah. Therefore a child, even if he reached the age of mitzvah education, cannot fulfill the congregation's obligation on their behalf. This distinction seems correct to me.

תשובה: סבירא לי דבחנוכה
 פיון דלאו אקרקפתא דגברא
 מוטל חיוב ההדלקה אלא אחד
 מכל בעלי הבית מדליק בפתח
 החצר ושוב אין שום חיוב על
 שום אחד מכל בעלי הבית אף
 על פי שלא שמעו הברכה ולא
 ראו ההדלקה. ועדיפא מיניה
 אמר ר' זיירא פיון דנסיבנא
 אמיןא תו לא צריכנא דהא
 קמדלקי עלי בגו ביתאי.
 אמטו להכי סגי בקטן שהגיע
 לחינוך המדליק בפתח החצר.
 אבל בקריאת המגלה המוטל על
 כל אחד ואחד לקרות או
 לשמוע המגלה, אין קטן אף
 שהגיע לחינוך מוציא את
 הרבים. וחלוק זה מתקבל על
 הדעת. נראה לי.

6. Pnei Yehoshua on Shabbat 21b

The reason is that this mitzvah is different because the essential way to fulfill it is to light it adjacent to public thoroughfares in order to publicize the miracle [of Chanukah]. Therefore, they applied the obligation of this mitzvah as though it applies to the house itself. However, this topic still demands more thought and investigation.

אלא, דשאני הכא שאין
 הכא עקר המצוה אלא
 בסמוך לרשות הרבים
 שהוא משום פרסומי
 ניסא. משום כן הטילו
 חובת מצוה זו כאילו היא
 חובת הבית. ועדין צריק
 עיון:

7. Midrash Maaseh Chanukah (Eisenstein's Otzar Hamidrashim pp. 189-190)

... They (the Greeks) took action and decreed, "Any Israelite that makes a bolt or closing to his door will be stabbed by the sword." Why go this far? In order that Israel should have neither dignity nor privacy. For any house that has no door has no dignity or privacy, and anyone who wants to enter can, whether by day or by night. When the Jews learned of the decree, they responded by removing all the doors of their houses and they were not able to eat or drink or

... עמדו וגזרו: כל בן ישראל
 שעושה לו ברית או מסגר לפתחו
 ידקר בחרב, וכל כן למה כדי שלא
 יהיה לישראל כבוד ולא רשות
 (צניעות), שכל בית שאין לו דלת
 אין לו כבוד ולא צניעות וכל הרוצה
 לנגס נכנס בין ביום ובין בלילה. פיון
 שראו ישראל כן עמדו ובטלו כל
 הדלתות בתיהם ולא היו יכולין לא
 לאכול ולא לשותות ולא לשמש

have intimate relations, because of the thieves and bandits and the immodest Greeks.

מטותיהם, בשביל גנבין ולסטיין
ופריצי יונים,

8. Ibid.

The Greeks decreed that anyone whose wife goes to the mikveh will be executed by the sword.

עמדו וגזרו: "כל מי שאשתו
הולכת לטבילה ידקר בחרב."

9. Ibid.

When the Greeks saw that the Jews were not affected by their decrees, they came up with a new bitter and disgraceful decree, namely, that a new bride should not enter the *chuppah* (marriage canopy) on the first night of her wedding before first being secluded with the local Greek governor. After news of this decree spread, single girls were disheartened and refrained from getting betrothed, and the daughters of Israel would mature, and become old while still virgins.

כיון שראו יונים שאין ישראל
מרגישים בגזרותיהם, עמדו
וגזרו עליהם גזרה מרה ועכורה,
שלא תפגס כלה בלילה הראשון
מחפתה אלא אצל ההגמון
שבמקום ההוא. כיון ששמעו
ישראל כן רבו ידיהם ותשש
כחם ונמנעו מלארס, והיו בנות
ישראל בוגרות ומזקינות כשהן
בתולות.

SECTION II Levels Two and Three: Enhancing the Mitzvah - "Mehadrin" and "Mehadrin min Ha-mehadrin"

10. Tosafot, Shabbat 21b, "Veha-mehadrin min Ha-mehadrin"

It seems to the Ri (Rabbeinu Yitzchak) that Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel are only modifying the level of one candle for a man and his family (and not that of "a candle for each and every person"). In this manner (the number of days are **not multiplied** by the number of people in the house) there is greater enhancement of the mitzvah. This is because there will be a clear sign that he is increasing or decreasing candles based on the incoming days or those that have passed. But, if he sets up a candle for each person in the household, there will not be a recognizable sign [of the outgoing days of Chanukah], since people will think that the number of candles corresponds to the number of people in the household.

והמהדרין מן המהדרין - נראה
לר"י דבית שמאי ובית הלל לא
קיימי אלא אגרי איש וביתו, שכן
יש יותר הדור, דאיכא היכרא
כשמוסיף והולך או מחסר שהוא
כנגד ימים הנכנסים או היוצאים.
אבל אם עושה גר לכל אחד
אפילו יוסיף מכאן ואילך ליכא
היכרא, שסיברו שפך יש בני
אדם בבית.

11. Rambam, Laws of Megillah and Chanukah 4:1-3

1. How many candles does one light on Chanukah? The [basic] commandment is that every household should light one candle, whether there are many people in the house or only one person. One who enhances the mitzvah lights a number of candles corresponding to the number of people in the household, one candle for each, both men and women. One who enhances it even more and does the choicest mitzvah, lights one candle for each [person] on the first night and adds another one each night.

2. To illustrate: If there were ten people in the household – on the first night he lights 10 candles; on the second 20; on the third 30; until he finally lights 80 on the eighth night.

3. The common practice in the cities in Spain is that all of the people of the house light one candle on the first night, and they light one more each night, until on the eighth night they light eight candles, whether they have a large household or whether there was only one person.

א כַּמָּה גֵרוֹת הוּא מְדַלֵּק בְּחֲנֻכָּה--
מְצֻוֹתָהּ שֶׁיְהִיָּה כָּל בַּיִת וּבֵית מְדַלֵּק
גֵר אֶחָד, בֵּין שְׁהָיוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת מְרֻבִּין,
בֵּין שֶׁלֹא הָיָה בּוֹ אֵלָּא אָדָם אֶחָד.
וְהַמְהִיר אֶת הַמְצֻוָּה, מְדַלֵּק גֵרוֹת
כַּמְנַנֵּן אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת, גֵר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד,
בֵּין אַנְשִׁים בֵּין גְּשִׁים. וְהַמְהִיר יוֹתֵר
עַל זֶה וְעוֹשֶׂה מְצֻוָּה מִן הַמְּבֻחָר,
מְדַלֵּק גֵר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּלֵילָה
הָרִאשׁוֹן, וּמוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל לַיְלָה
וְלַיְלָה, אֶחָד.

ב כִּיצַד: הָרִי שְׁהָיוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת
עֶשְׂרֵה--בְּלֵילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן, מְדַלֵּק
עֶשְׂרֵה גֵרוֹת; וּבְלַיִל שֵׁנִי, עֶשְׂרִים;
וּבְלַיִל שְׁלִישִׁי, שְׁלוֹשִׁים; עַד שֶׁנִּמְצָא
מְדַלֵּק בְּלַיִל שְׁמִינִי, שְׁמוֹנִים.

ג מְנַהֵג פְּשוּט בְּכָל עָרֵינוּ בְּסִפְרָד,
שֶׁהָיוּ כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת מְדַלִּיקִין גֵר
אֶחָד בְּלֵילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן, וּמוֹסִיפִין
וְהוֹלְכִין גֵר בְּכָל לַיְלָה וְלַיְלָה, עַד
שֶׁנִּמְצָא מְדַלֵּק בְּלַיִל שְׁמִינִי שְׁמוֹנֵה
גֵרוֹת - בֵּין שְׁהָיוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת מְרֻבִּים,
בֵּין שְׁהָיָה אָדָם אֶחָד.

12. Shulchan Aruch and Rema, Orach Chaim 671:2

(Shulchan Aruch) How many candles does he light? On the first night he lights one. From then on he adds one each night, until on the last night there are eight. Even if there are many people in the house they should not light more.

Note (Rema): Some say that each one of the people in the household lights, and this is the common practice. Each one should place his candles in a separate place, so that the number of candles they light can be recognized.

שְׁלַחַן עֲרוּךְ: כַּמָּה גֵרוֹת מְדַלֵּק?
בְּלֵילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן מְדַלֵּק אֶחָד, מִכָּאן
וְאֵילָּךְ מוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ אֶחָד בְּכָל לַיְלָה
עַד שֶׁבְּלַיִל הָאַחֲרוֹן יְהִי שְׁמוֹנֵה,
וְאִפְּלוּ אִם רַבִּים בְּנֵי הַבַּיִת לֹא יְדַלִּיקוּ
יוֹתֵר.

הגה: וַיֵּשׁ אומרים דְּכָל אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי
הַבַּיִת יְדַלִּיק (הַרְמַב"ם), וְכֵן הַמְּנַהֵג
פְּשוּט; וַיִּזְהָרוּ לָתֵן כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד
גֵרוֹתָיו בְּמָקוֹם מְיֻחָד, כִּדִּי שֶׁיִּהְיֶה
הַיֵּכֶר כַּמָּה גֵרוֹת מְדַלִּיקִין (מהר"א
מִפְּרָאג).

13. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, 139:6, Laws of Chanukah

Common practice in our countries is [to light] like those that beautify the mitzvah in the best possible way. That is, **each and every one** of the household lights one candle on the first night of Chanukah, two candles on the second night, and adds [one] each night until on the eighth night [each one] lights eight candles.

מְנַהֵג פְּשוּט בְּמַדְיֵנוּתֵנוּ
כְּמַהְדָּרִין מִן הַמְהַדְרִין
שֶׁמְדַלִּיקִין כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד
מִבְּנֵי הַבַּיִת בְּלֵילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן
גֵּר אֶחָד, וּבַשֵּׁנִי, שְׁנֵי גֵרוֹת,
וְכוּן מוֹסִיפִין עַד שֶׁבְּלֵיל
שְׁמִינִי מְדַלִּיק שְׁמוֹנֶה.

14. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Rafael Toledano 612:4, The Order of Lighting Chanuka Candles

On the first night one lights a single candle, and from then on he adds another candle each night, until on the eighth night there are eight. On the rest of the nights he begins [the lighting] from that newly added candle and then lights the others that he lit on previous days. **Even if there are many in the household they should not light more.** The Ashkenazim are accustomed that each of the members of the household lights his own Chanukah candles, each putting his Chanukah Menorah in its own location.

בְּלֵילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן - מְדַלִּיק גֵּר אֶחָד,
וּמִכָּאן וְאֵילָךְ הוֹלֵךְ וּמוֹסִיף אֶחָד
בְּכָל לַיְלָה, עַד שֶׁבְּלֵיל אַחְרוֹן יִהְיוּ
שְׁמוֹנֶה. וּבַשָּׂאָר הַלַּיְלוֹת מֵתְחִיל
מֵאֹתוֹ גֵּר שְׂרוּצָה לְהוֹסִיף, וְאֶחָד
כֶּהָ אֲחֵרִים שֶׁהִדְלִיק בְּלַיְלוֹת
הָרִאשׁוֹנִים. וְאֶפְלוּ אִם רַבִּים
בְּנֵי הַבַּיִת - לֹא יְדַלִּיקוּ יוֹתֵר.
וְהָאֲשְׁכֵנַזִּים נוֹהֲגִים שֶׁכָּל אֶחָד
מִבְּנֵי הַבַּיִת יְדַלִּיק גֵּר חֲנֻכָּה שְׁלוֹ,
וְכָל אֶחָד מֵהֶם עוֹשֶׂה גֵרוֹ בְּמָקוֹם
מִיָּחָד.

15. Minchat Asher, Bereishit, p. 352

It seems that the reason that the Rema veered from the Rambam's approach is based on a fundamental issue concerning the meaning of "a candle for a person and his household" (Level I). Is this an **obligation on the household** (as opposed to other mitzvot where every individual is obligated), meaning that every household and family lights a candle. In this case, once a candle is lit in the house all members of the household are exempt from further lighting, even if they did not intend to fulfill their mitzvah through the one lighting and the person lighting did not intend to fulfill it on their behalf when he lit. Once a candle was lit in this house, all of the people of the house no longer have any obligation. [This is the Rambam's opinion.]

Or, do we say that the mitzvah of Chanukah candles is similar to every other individual mitzvah

וְנִרְאֶה בְּבֵאוֹר שִׁטְתוֹ
הַרְמ"א, שֶׁנִּטְּחָה מְדַבְּרֵי
הַרְמ"ב"ם, עַל פִּי מַה שֵּׁשׁ
לְחַקוֹר בְּגֵדֵר "גֵּר אִישׁ
וּבֵיתוֹ." הֵאֵם הֵיוּ חוֹבְתֵי
הַבַּיִת (וְלֹא כְּשֶׂאֵר הַמְצֻוֹת
שֶׁהֵם חוֹב עַל הָאָדָם כְּפָרְט)
דְּהֵיִינוּ: שֶׁכָּל בַּיִת וּמִשְׁפָּחָה
יְדַלִּיק גֵּר. וּמִכֵּן שֶׁהִדְלִיק
בְּבַיִת גֵּר אֶחָד נִפְטְרוּ כוֹלָם,
אִף שֶׁלֹּא הִתְכַּוְּנוּ לְצִאת
עַל יְדֵי הַמְדַלִּיק וְהוּא לֹא
הִתְכַּוְּנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָם. דְּמִכָּל
מָקוֹם הוֹדְלִיק גֵּר בְּבַיִת זֶה
וּנִפְטְרוּ כָּל אֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת.
אוּ, דְּהֵיוּ כְּכָל חוֹב הַפְּרָט,
אֵלֹא שֶׁאֶחָד מוֹצִיא אֶת

obligation, where [each individual is obligated in the mitzvah, but] one person can fulfill the obligation on behalf of everyone. The person lighting must thus intend to fulfill the obligation on behalf of the others, and they have to intend to fulfill it through his lighting. In this respect, Chanukah candles will be similar to all other mitzvot where one person fulfills a personal obligation through another who acts as an agent (*shaliach*). [This is the Rema's opinion.]

כולם ידי חובתם. וצריך
שׁיכנונו להוציא ולצאת ככל
מצוה שׁיוצאים בה על ידי
אחרים מדין שומע כעונה
או מדין שליחות.

16. Minchat Asher, Bereishit, p. 353

The Rema in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 677:3) and in the Darche Moshe (his commentary on the Tur) rules like the Maharil (that a guest can make a blessing over candle lighting at his host's house even though his family is lighting on his behalf). He is consistent with his approach in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 671, where he writes that each one of the family members lights by himself. But the Rambam holds that the mitzvah of lighting itself applies to the household. According to his approach, it is thus fitting that one person lights all the candles. We find that the Rema and the Rambam are each consistent in their approaches to the basic idea of lighting: "one candle for a man and his household."

והנה הרמ"א בשלחן ערוך
(תרע"ג) ובדרכי משה שם
פסק כמהרי"ל ולשיטתו
אזיל בסימן תרע"א שפכתב
שכל אחד מבני הבית ידליק
לעצמו אבל הרמב"ם סובר
דעצם מצות ההדלקה על
הבית היא ולשיטתו ניקח
דאחד מדליק את כל הנרות
והרמב"ם והרמ"א אזלי
לשיטתייהו ביסוד דין נר
איש וביתו ודו"ק בזה.

17. Minchat Asher, Bereishit, p. 353

It seems that according to the Rambam, the essence of the enhancement of the mitzvah at the level of mehadrin min ha-mehadrin is not through visually communicating the number of days the miracle has passed. Rather, our Sages instituted a daily increase in the number of candles as a mere hint or association of the outgoing days; yet the essence of the enhancement is not noting the days, but the incremental increase in candles itself... However, Tosafot... appear to maintain that the enhancement is to visually communicate the number of days. The Levush (672:2) says that there is an enhancement in publicizing how long the miracle lasted, and that this must therefore be recognizable by the public.

ונראה בשיטת הרמב"ם דיסוד
גדר ההדור במהדרין מן
המהדרין אינו בציון מספר
הימים אלא ברבוי הנרות בלבד,
אלא דחזו"ל תקנו להרבבות
בנרות כנגד ימי החג כרמזא
בעלמא אד מהות ההדור אינו
בציון ימי החג אלא בעצם רבוי
הנרות ... אבל התוספות ...
נראה דסבירא להו דההידור
הוי במה שׁהוא מצוין את
מנין הימים וכד כתב הלבוש
(תרע"א:ב) דייש הדור בפרסום
משד ימי הנס ובעינן שׁיהא לזה
היקר.

18. Beit Halevi on Chumash Bereishit (Genesis), Chanukah, “Ha-mehadrin min Ha-mehadrin”

The reason we find more and more *hiddur* (enhancement) in this mitzvah is the following. It seems that the goal of the initial miracle was exclusively in order to perform a *hiddur* mitzvah, and not to fulfill the essential level of the mitzvah (of lighting the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash). They found a flask of oil that had enough to light for one night, but they could have made smaller wicks, one eighth the size of the normal ones. This would have enabled them to fulfill the basic level of the mitzvah for eight days. We rule that the wicks have no minimum width. Therefore, the entire miracle enabled them to fulfill a *hiddur* mitzvah, to light candles as beautiful as the previous ones. Therefore the Sages instituted levels of beautification into this mitzvah more than in others.

הינהּ הָא דְּמַצְוֵנוּ בְּמִצְוָה זוֹ הַדּוֹר וְיִוְתֵר הַדּוֹר, הַנִּרְאָה מִשּׁוּם דְּעִיקָר הַיָּסָס תְּכַלִּיתוּ הָיְהָ רַק מִשּׁוּם הַדּוֹר מִצְוָה לְחֻדָּא וְלֹא מִשּׁוּם עִיקָר הַמִּצְוָה.

דְּהָרֵי הָיְהָ בְּפֶה שְׁמֹן לְהַדְלִיק בּוֹ לֵילָה אַחַת, וְהָרֵי הָיוּ יְכוּלִים לַעֲשׂוֹת פְּתִילוֹת דְּקוֹת בְּיוֹתֵר שְׁתַּתְּיָהּ הַפְּתִילָה חֶלֶק שְׁמִינִית מִן מַה שְׁתַּתְּיָהּ רְגִיל לְהִיּוֹת בְּכָל יוֹם מְקוּדָם. וְהָיְהָ מִסְפִּיק לְשִׁמוֹנָה יָמִים, וְהָיְהָ מְקַיִם עִיקָר הַמִּצְוָה. דְּהָרֵי אֵין שְׂעוּר לְעֵבִי הַפְּתִילוֹת. וְכָל הַיָּסָס הָיְהָ רַק מִשּׁוּם הַדּוֹר מִצְוָה שְׂתַּתְּיָהּ הַנִּרְוֹת יָפִים כְּמוֹ שְׂתַּתְּיָהּ מְקוּדָם. וְעַל כֵּן תַּקְּנוּ חֲכָמִים בְּמִצְוָה זוֹ הַדּוֹרִים יוֹתֵר מִבְּכָל מִצְוָה.

SECTION III One to Eight Candles, or Eight to One: Beit Hillel vs. Beit Shamai

19. Shabbat 21b

The Rabbis taught:

1. The mitzvah of Chanukah [candles entails lighting] a candle, for a man and his household.
2. Those who beautify the mitzvah (ha-mehadrin) light a candle for each and every person.
3. Those who beautify the mitzvah the most: The House of Shamai says that on the first day one lights eight candles, and from then on decreases the number of candles [lighting one less each day]; the house of Hillel says that on the first day one lights one, and from then on adds [one more candle each day].

תַּנּוּ רַבָּנָן:

1. מִצְוַת חֲנוּכָה גֵר אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ
2. וְהַמְהַדְרִין גֵר לְכָל אַחַד וְאַחַד
3. וְהַמְהַדְרִין מִן הַמְהַדְרִין - בֵּית שַׁמַּי אוֹמְרִים יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן מִדְּלִיק שְׁמֹנָה מִבָּאן וְאַיְלָךְ פּוֹחַת וְהוֹלָךְ, וּבֵית הִלֵּל אוֹמְרִים יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן מִדְּלִיק אַחַת מִבָּאן וְאַיְלָךְ מוֹסִיף וְהוֹלָךְ.

20. Shabbat 21b

Ulla said: Two Amoraim in the West (the land of Israel), Rabbi Yossi son of Avin and Rabbi Yossi son of Zevida, disputed this. One said that the reasoning behind Beit Shammai's approach is that the number of candles should correspond to the number of days yet to come, and the reasoning behind Beit Hillel's approach is that the number of candles should correspond to the number of outgoing days. The other said that the reason behind Beit Shammai's approach is that the daily change in the number of candles should parallel that of the "Oxen (sacrifices) of the Holiday (Sukkot)" [that decrease daily in number, offering thirteen on the first day of Sukkot and down to seven on the seventh], and the reason behind Beit Hillel's approach is that the daily change in the number of candles follows the rule "We increase in holiness and do not decrease." Rabba son of Bar Chana said, quoting Rabbi Yochanan, that there were two elders in Sidon; one followed Beit Shammai and the other followed Beit Hillel. One said that the reason behind his approach was to model after the Oxen of Sukkot, and the other said his reason was that we increase in matters of holiness, but do not decrease.

אָמַר עוּלָא: פְּלִיגִי בְּהַ
תְּרֵי אַמּוֹרָאִי בְּמַעְרְבָא
- רַבִּי יוֹסִי בַר אָבִין וְרַבִּי
יוֹסִי בַר זְבִידָא. חֵד אָמַר
טַעֲמָא דְּבֵית שְׁמַאי
כְּגִיד יָמִים הַנִּכְנָסִין
וְטַעֲמָא דְּבֵית הִלֵּל כְּגִיד
יָמִים הַיוֹצֵאִין, וְחֵד אָמַר
טַעֲמָא דְּבֵית שְׁמַאי
כְּגִיד פְּרֵי הַחֶג וְטַעֲמָא
דְּבֵית הִלֵּל דְּמַעְלִין
בְּקוֹדֶשׁ וְאַיִן מוֹרִידִין.
אָמַר רַבָּה בַר בַּר חֲנָה
אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: שְׁנֵי
זְקֵנִים הָיוּ בְּצִידוֹן - אֶחָד
עָשָׂה כְּבֵית שְׁמַאי וְאֶחָד
עָשָׂה כְּדְבַרֵי בֵית הִלֵּל.
זֶה נוֹתֵן טַעַם לְדְבַרֵי
כְּגִיד פְּרֵי הַחֶג וְזֶה נוֹתֵן
טַעַם לְדְבַרֵי דְּמַעְלִין
בְּקוֹדֶשׁ וְאַיִן מוֹרִידִין.

21. The Chatam Sofer's commentary on Shabbat 21b

It seems to me that the House of Shammai focused on the **fall of the hateful enemies**. Therefore the candles decrease like the seventy ox offerings of the Holiday (Sukkot) that correspond to the nations of the world (thirteen were offered on the first day of Sukkot, twelve on the second, eleven on the third, and so on until the seventh day). According to the House of Hillel, they set the number of candles to correspond to the **elevation of Israel**, therefore we apply the principle of "increase in matters of holiness."

וְנִרְאָה לִי, לְבֵית שְׁמַאי עָשׂוּ
עֵיקָר מִמְּפֻלַת הַשּׂוֹנְאִים, עַל
כֵּן פּוֹחֶת וְהוֹלֵךְ כְּשִׁבְעִים פְּרֵי
הַחֶג שֶׁהֵמָּה נִגְדַּ שְׁבָעִים
אוֹמוֹת. וּלְבֵית הִלֵּל קָבְעוּ
נִגְדַּ עֲלֵיתָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַל כֵּן
מַעְלִין בְּקוֹדֶשׁ:

22. The Pnei Yehoshua's commentary on Shabbat 21b

The reason of the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin is that on each day the miracle and God's love for us became more widely known, and it was therefore fitting to connect the enhancement of the mitzvah with the publicizing of the miracle and the Divine love it expresses. This is the reason why we should align the number of candles we light with the number of outgoing days – for on the first night the only miracle that was known was the miracle of that night, as the Beit Yosef writes (Orach Chaim 671), whereas with each additional night the miraculous candles stayed lit even more. Therefore it is proper to increase the amount of candles according to the number of those days.

The reason behind [Beit Shamai's] approach that the number of candles should decrease corresponding to the number of days yet to come is that... the main miracle was evident in the jug of oil. On the first night only an eighth was removed from it, and from this they filled all the candles of the Menorah... Since the main miracle was in the jug, and the jug would decrease every day it was therefore appropriate for the number of candles to decrease every day.

אָלָא, דְּטַעֲמָא דְּמַהְדְּרִין מִן
הַמְהַדְּרִין, דְּכִיּוֹן שְׁבֻכָּל יוֹם וְיוֹם
נִתְרַבָּה פְּרָסוּם הַיְיָסָא וְחֵיבַת
הַמְקוּם יוֹתֵר בְּיוֹתֵר, לְכַךְ רָאוּ
לְעֲשׂוֹת הַדּוּר מְצֻנָּה לְפִי עֶרְךָ פְּרָסוּם
הַנֶּס וְהַחֲבָה. וְהֵינּוּ טַעֲמָא דְּמֵאן
דְּאָמַר כְּנֻגַד הַיָּמִים הַיּוֹצְאִין, שְׁהֵרִי
בְּלִילָה הָרֵאשׁוֹנָה לֹא נִתְפָּרְסָם הַנֶּס
כִּי אִם עַל אוֹתָהּ לִילָה בְּלִבְדָּ כְּמוֹ
שֶׁכָּתַב בְּבֵית יוֹסֵף [אוֹרַח חַיִּים
סִימָן תַּרְע"א]. מַה שְּׂאִין בְּכָל לִילָה
בְּהַתְּוֹסֵף הַיָּמִים הָיָה הַנֶּס יוֹתֵר
שֶׁהָיָה דוֹלֵק וְהוֹלֵךְ כָּל אוֹתָן הַיָּמִים
מִשׁוּם הַכִּי רָאוּ לְהַרְבּוֹת בְּגִרוֹת כְּפִי
מִסְפַּר אוֹתָן הַיָּמִים.

וְטַעֲמָא דְּמֵאן דְּאָמַר פּוּחַת וְהוֹלֵךְ
כְּנֻגַד יָמִים הַנִּכְנָסִין, הֵינּוּ מִשׁוּם...
שֶׁעֲקָר הַנֶּס לֹא נַעֲשֶׂה אֶלָּא בַּפֶּה
שֶׁבְּלִילָה רֵאשׁוֹנָה לֹא הוֹרַק מִמֶּנּוּ
אֶלָּא חֵלֶק שְׂמִינִית. וּמִזֶּה נִתְמַלְאוּ
כָּל גִּרוֹת הַמְּנוּרָה... דְּמִשׁוּם שֶׁהָיָה
עִקָר הַנֶּס בַּפֶּה וְהַפֶּה בְּכָל יוֹם הָיָה
מִתְּמַעֵט וְהוֹלֵךְ מִשׁוּם הַכִּי רָאוּ
לְעֲשׂוֹת הַדּוּר מְצֻנָּה גַם כֵּן בְּעֲנַן זֶה
דְּפוּחַת וְהוֹלֵךְ.

23. "The Approaches of Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai," in *Leor Hahalacha*, p. 304, footnote 2

... The oil's potential [on the first day] was eight-fold, but its actual [miraculous burning] was just the opposite – on the first day they saw the miracle only one night, and the next night they saw it another night, and so they saw more of the miracle each day.

This was the argument between the House of Shamai and the House of Hillel: The House of Shamai followed their general approach, to focus on a thing's potential, which decreased every night; and the House of Hillel was consistent with their approach, focusing on actualization.

... בְּכַחוּ שֶׁל הַשֶּׁמֶן לְדִלּוֹק פִּי
שְׂמוּנָה. בְּפוּעַל הָיָה לְהִיפֵךְ:
בְּיוֹם הָרֵאשׁוֹן רָאוּ הַנֶּס בְּלִילָה
אַחַד בְּלִבְדָּ, וְלִמְחָרְתוֹ רָאוּ
עוֹד בְּלִילָה אַחַד, וְכֵן בְּכָל לִילָה
הוֹסִיפוּ לְרֵאוֹת הַנֶּס.

וּבְכַךְ נִחְלְקוּ בֵּית שְׁמַאי וּבֵית
הִלֵּל: בֵּית שְׁמַאי לְשִׁטְתָּם
מִחֲשִׁיבִים אֶת הַדֶּרֶךְ כְּפִי מַה
שֶׁהוּא בְּכַחוּ, וּבֵית הִלֵּל לְשִׁטְתָּם
מְעִרִיכִים אוֹתוֹ מִנְקוּדַת
הוֹצְאָתוֹ לְפוּעַל.

24. Rabbi Berel Wein, www.yeshiva.co/midrash/shiur.asp?id=17660

Chanukah in its halachic discussions and various applications represents the necessary two components of Jewish life. These are reality and potential... Beit Shammai is always dealing with potential while Beit Hillel deals with reality and actuality. Thus on the first night of Chanukah there is a potential for eight days of holiday to come yet and therefore Beit Shammai suggests that all eight lights be kindled. However Beit Hillel in dealing with the actuality of the situation states that only one day of the holiday has arrived and therefore only one light is to be kindled. And these two different views will naturally govern the amount of lights to be kindled on all of the successive nights of Chanukah as well.

The halachic process always busies itself with deciding in a practical manner which of two conflicting opinions is to become the practice of normative Judaism. The halacha has taught us that we follow the opinion of Beit Hillel in our fulfillment of the ritual of lighting the Chanukah flames. Yet the opinion of Beit Shammai is not to be ignored and completely discarded. The Talmud teaches us that the opinions of Beit Shammai and of Beit Hillel are both "the words of the living God." We humans can only in practice follow one of the opinions and the halacha has instituted the opinion of Beit Hillel as the accepted practice of Jewish tradition and society. But we are bidden not to forget the underlying value that the opinion of Beit Shammai represents.

A society that lives only in the present and deals exclusively with the reality that it faces eventually loses spirit, drive and enthusiasm. Actuality rarely creates innovation and creativity. Those qualities stem from intuition, seeing potential, and if you wish, dreams and as yet unrealized ideals. In education many times the failure of the school or the teacher and thus of the pupil as well stems from seeing the student only in his or her present actuality and ignoring the great potential that lies within the young.

When I was the head of a yeshiva in Monsey, New York, the great sage Rabbi Yaakov Kaminitzky warned me about the treatment of the mischievous student. He told me that he should not be summarily expelled from the school since mischievous students many times are the ones that usually possess great potential which in later life when activated will be of benefit to all.

Chanukah represents the combination of these two essential values in Jewish national and personal life. The military victory of the Hasmoneans over the pagan Syrian Greek idolaters was necessary and practical and realistic. It restored Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel and because of it Jewish rule continued for more than one hundred years until the arrival of Pompeii and the Romans in the country. Chanukah must therefore commemorate that physical, practical military victory. But Chanukah also represents the rededication of the Temple to its holy service and purpose. Holiness and spiritual achievements are always measured not only in terms of their current

achievements but in their unlimited potential for later generations as well.

The lights of Chanukah kindled almost twenty-two centuries ago are still the spark that kindles our Chanukah lamps in our homes and society today. The miracle of the small cruse of oil that somehow burned for eight days was the harbinger of the story of the inexplicable potential of the Jewish people to survive and still flourish in the dark night of an awful exile. Therefore Chanukah bids us to be practical and realistic in our behavior and policies. But it also guides us to see beyond the moment and to see the great potential that lies within Jews and Jewish society and to attempt thereupon to actualize that potential. The reality of the problems that face us should never be allowed to eclipse the talented, holy potential that lives within us.

**RECOM-
MENDED
ADDITIONAL
READING**

Hebrew

A comprehensive collection of sources on these topics is available in three well-developed articles, Sections 8, 9, and 10 of the **אוצר עיונים** section of the **מתיבתא** edition of the Talmud. Through their footnotes you can reach much of the relevant source material.

Harav Chaim Goldvicht has a beautiful article, **התפשטות גווני האור בנרות חנוכה**, in his **אסופת מערכות**, which brings beauty and depth to the topic.

Online Articles

“Mehadrin Min Ha-mehadrin,” by Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman, refers to many of the Acharonim who speak about this topic, and is available online at http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/711093/Rabbi_Daniel_Z_Feldman/Mehadrin_Min_Ha-mehadrin#