

## **Mehadrin Min Ha-mehadrin**

### **How Many Candles Do We Light on Chanukah?**

**Shabbat 21b**

#### **Teacher's Guide**

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.

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#### **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?

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#### **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).

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מסורת הש"ס

[illegible]

בליזן הש"ס

גמ' כל השמים שבתחילת  
עין בראשית פ"ה מהלכות  
כוח הכחירה הלכה ה' עין  
כחשוכה כתי' הסוכה ח"ל  
בית ועד קימן א':  
תום' ה"ה שחיה מונה וכו'  
שלא הרימו. עין לקמן דף  
פד ע"כ תוספות ד"ס  
שעורם כ"ז:

### הגהות הערה"א

[א] נט"א (להשתמש לאורה)  
תל"מ:  
[ב] שם (ודלא להתענות  
בהון) תל"מ:

לְחַזְקָתוֹ וְיִשְׁמְרוּהוּ

אישטיבציל"א, ניצוצות.

## דביו חנואל

[illegible]

אין זקוק לה. הלך צחול שרי: ואסור להשפסם לאורה. שיהא  
יכר שהוא נר מזה ולכא למיחש להטייה: ולא קבלה. שלא  
תסב למקור על דבריו: אי זכאי. אילו הייתי זוכה ללמודה הייתי  
מורה כשעממיה ראשון: גירסא דיעקובא. מתקין יותר משל  
זקנה: אשעורא. שיהא בה שכן  
שעור הזה ומיהו אם כבשה א"ר  
זקוק לה: רגלא דסרמוראלי. שם אומה  
מלקטי עיני דקיס ומתעבינן שבוק  
עד שחולסין בני השוק לבניהם  
משחטה ומתעבירי בנתיבים אור  
וכשצריכין לעיני יואלס וקומין מהן:  
נר איש וניסו. נר אחד בכל לילה  
ואיש לכל בני ביתו סגי להו גבר אחד:  
והסהדרין. אחר המאות עושין נר  
אחד בכל לילה לכל אחד ואחד מבני  
הבית: כנגד ימים הנכנסים.  
העמידים נזא: ימים היוזאין. שלא  
כבר זה שהוא עומד דר ממנה עס  
העני. פרי חגו. מזהממט  
והולסין בהרצנות לפרש פסחא:

בביתה הדין מרדליק לה  
מרדליק וא"נ לשיעורה:  
ק ועד כמה אמר רבה  
הגון עד רבליא ריגלא  
חנוכה בר איש וביתו  
ואחר והמהדרין מן  
יום ראשון מרדליק  
ת והולך וב"ה אומרים  
ת מכאן ואילך מוסיף  
יג בה תרי אמוראי  
בין ר' יוסי בר בוריא  
כנגד ימים הנכנסין  
ים היוצאין אחד אמר  
ההג וטעמא דבית  
אין מורדין אמר רבה  
שני וקנים היו בצידן  
עשה כדברי ב"ה זה  
פרי ההג וזה נותן  
קדש ואין מורדין ת"ר  
גיחה על פתח ביתו  
עלייה מגיחה בחלון  
ת הסנה מניחה על  
אין צירין נר אחת  
אי איכא מדורה לא  
הוא אע"ג דאיכא  
מאי חנוכה רתנו  
יומי החנוכה תמניא  
מסכת שבת פ"ג הל' א'

כל טמא <sup>א</sup>כל השמנים שבהיכל וכשגברה מלכות  
בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה  
גדול ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה  
מונה ימים לשנה אחת קבעום ועשאוּם ימים טובים  
תם ג' היוצא מתחת הפטיש ויצא והזיק חייב <sup>ב</sup>גמל  
ברשות הרבים ונכנסה פשתנו לתוך החנות ודלקה  
את הכירה בעל הגמל חייב <sup>ג</sup>הניח חנוני את גרו מבחוץ  
ובינא <sup>ד</sup>"(משום דרכה) זאת אומרת <sup>ה</sup>נר הנוכה מצוה  
ל'ה היה לך להניח למעלה מגמל ורוכבו ודילמא אי  
כהנא דרש רב נתן בר מניומי משמיה דרבי תנחום  
נר

וְאִין יִכּוּל לְהַדְלִיק בִּשְׁמַח ו"ל ד'א"ב לֹא הוּא רָצוֹן לֵיה לְמִימַר בֵּין  
בְּחוּל בֵּין בִּשְׁמַח כִּיּוֹן דְּחַד טַעמָא הוּא אֱלֵא ה"ל לְמִימַר (א) אִין  
מְדַלִּיקוּן קַטָּם מְדַקְאֲמַר בֵּין בְּחוּל בֵּין בִּשְׁמַח ש"מ שְׂעוּד יֵשׁ טַעַם  
אַחֲרָא בִּשְׁמַח שְׁלֵא לְהַדְלִיק לְבַד מִטַּעַם חוּל וְהִיטוּ שְׂמַח יֵטֵא וְא"כ

סבר דמותו להשתמש לאורה ומיהו  
 דקאמר מדליקין בין בחול בין  
 בשבת להא' הוה מנא' יממור מדליק  
 סתם דה"א דוקא בחול אבל בשבת  
 אין מדליקין שמה יטה דנשתמא לא  
 יתיי' אומר ששום אדם יתמיר לאסור  
 להשתמש לאורה וכן הלכתא דגר  
 המורה אסור להשתמש לאורה וכן  
 זכר' יוחנן ורבי' נמי קרייה' דר  
 יוסף נמי משמע לקמן דס"ל הכי  
 ובתנא' אין זקוק לה דכולהו סבידא  
 לאו הכי ורבי הונא יחיד הוא ולית  
 הלכתא כיוצא;

דאי לא ארליק מדליק. אבל מכאן  
ואילן עבר הזמן ואומר הכ"י  
פורט דיש לחסר ולהדליק בליה מיד  
שלא ייחסר יותר מנאלי ומנאלי חס  
אמר דילק מספק דאז נאמנ שניין  
אחרינא ולר"י נראה דעמא אין לחוש  
ממי דילק דאז אין לנו היכרא אלא  
לגבי היית שסרי מילקין מנפסוס:  
והמהדרין מן המהדרין. נראה  
לר"י דנ"ה ונ"ה

קיימי אלל אגר איז וציטו שכן ים  
ויחור הידור דליכע היכרע כשמוסיף  
והולך או מוסר עסאל כנגד ימים  
הננסים או היוצאים אלל אם עשה  
אבל לל אחד אפי' ויסיף מאלל ואילן  
ליכע היכרע זיסברו שכן ים ניי  
**צבי: מצודה להניחה ע**  
פתח ביתו מבחוץ. ומיירי דליכע  
החאר אלל בית עומד סמוך להר"ר  
ואכל אס יש חצר לפני הדימ למען  
להניח על פתח דאמר קמא  
החאר שיש לה ב' פתחים לריכה ב'  
ותחת ואחר' נמי נר שיש לה שני  
פיות עולה לשני בני אדם משמע  
לשני בתים ולפי שהיו מניחים על פתחי  
הבתים היה להם וימין ואלה משמאל  
אכל אי מניחים על פתח החאר אחי  
שמיר: **בשעת הסבה.** גרלה  
לר' דהיינו מתי אמו תברי לבבל  
בדמור בפ' טירה (לקמן דף מה. ושם)  
מורי לעולם שגרא דהוטומה מקמי  
חבריה בשבחא וא"ת דעל השלחן נמי  
יקחו אורו בדמור בגיטין (דף ח"ו.)  
רצה בר חנה משל אמה חברה  
שקל שגרא מתקיים וי"ל דלון  
רגילות כ"כ תפש בגמית:

בית חשמונאי ונצחיה	מונה בחותמו ש"ס כ"ג.	שהיה	מונה
מונה בחותמו של כ	כבר גזרו על	אס	כס
בו גם והדליקו ממנו	במס' (מ"ה פ"ה)	הליות	הנכרים
בהלל והוראז' תנן	בחותמו	ז"ל	דף ד.ה.
שמעון פשתן והוא ע	הסיוט הכללי:	שלא	בקרע

עין משפט  
גר מצוה

ב' א' ח' מ' פ' ש' ת' ט' י' י"ב י"ג י"ד י"ה י"ו י"ז י"ח י"ט כ' כ"א כ"ב כ"ג כ"ד כ"ה כ"ו כ"ז כ"ח כ"ט ל' ל"א ל"ב ל"ג ל"ד ל"ה ל"ו ל"ז ל"ח ל"ט מ' מ"א מ"ב מ"ג מ"ד מ"ה מ"ו מ"ז מ"ח מ"ט ש' ש"א ש"ב ש"ג ש"ד ש"ה ש"ו ש"ז ש"ח ש"ט ע' ע"א ע"ב ע"ג ע"ד ע"ה ע"ו ע"ז ע"ח ע"ט פ' פ"א פ"ב פ"ג פ"ד פ"ה פ"ו פ"ז פ"ח פ"ט צ' צ"א צ"ב צ"ג צ"ד צ"ה צ"ו צ"ז צ"ח צ"ט ק' ק"א ק"ב ק"ג ק"ד ק"ה ק"ו ק"ז ק"ח ק"ט ר' ר"א ר"ב ר"ג ר"ד ר"ה ר"ו ר"ז ר"ח ר"ט ש' ש"א ש"ב ש"ג ש"ד ש"ה ש"ו ש"ז ש"ח ש"ט ע' ע"א ע"ב ע"ג ע"ד ע"ה ע"ו ע"ז ע"ח ע"ט פ' פ"א פ"ב פ"ג פ"ד פ"ה פ"ו פ"ז פ"ח פ"ט צ' צ"א צ"ב צ"ג צ"ד צ"ה צ"ו צ"ז צ"ח צ"ט ק' ק"א ק"ב ק"ג ק"ד ק"ה ק"ו ק"ז ק"ח ק"ט ר' ר"א ר"ב ר"ג ר"ד ר"ה ר"ו ר"ז ר"ח ר"ט

מִזְמֶה רַעֲיוֹנִי

דן. אטענציע! הונאה מן  
הנחל כשהפטיש מכה עליו  
ביב בן. את הבירה. בית  
הדול וביב בן. בנר הנחלה  
פטר. שמחה להנחה  
הרה"ר לפרקומי נאם (שש).

תום' ימים

(א) ובהא ליכא למימר דא  
די אחר אין מעליקין סתם  
דיא דהיינו כשנת ומשום  
ימותר לסתתם לאורה אכל  
החול מעליקין דכנתה אין  
קוק לס דהיינו לא הייל  
למימר דא מעליקין כמחנה  
לא נהיה הייל גיט יומר  
לסתתם לאורה:

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## 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

### Part A. “*Ner Ish Uveito*” – A Man and his Household (Level I)

Our first and primary source is the passage in the Babylonian Talmud on Shabbat 21b that outlines the three levels of this mitzvah:

#### 1. Shabbat 21b – What are the three levels of lighting Chanukah candles?

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 שמונה מנאן ואילך פוחת והולך, ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת מנאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.

Rashi explains the core level of the mitzvah:

#### 2. Rashi's Commentary on Shabbat 21b, “*Ner Ish Uveito*” – What is the basic unit obligated in Chanukah candles?

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:

There are two possible understandings of the principle whereby a person lights one candle on behalf of the entire household.

One understanding is that although each individual member of the household is obligated in fulfilling the mitzvah, only one person actually lights on behalf of the others. He effectively serves as their “envoy” for lighting the Chanukah lights.

Another understanding, however, is that the obligation is incumbent on households, rather than on individuals. The household must light Chanukah candles.

The issue is raised by the Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (1847-1905).



### 3. Sefat Emet's Commentary on Shabbat 21a – What is the basic unit obligated in Chanukah candles?

This topic must be investigated: Is the mitzvah

וַיֵּשׁ לְעֵינַי אִי הַמִּצְוָה

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. יֵרֵךְ אֶחָד בְּבֵית, כְּמוֹ מְזוּזָה וְכֵמוֹ יֵרֵךְ שַׁבָּת, דְּכָל שֶׁהִדְלִיק לְשֵׁם שַׁבָּת אַף שֶׁהִדְלִיק מִי שֶׁהֵיָה דִי. וּלְפִי זֶה אֶפְשָׁר דְּגַם שְׁנֵי בָעָלֵי בָתִּים הַדְרִים בְּבֵית אֶחָד דִּי לָהֶם בֵּינָר אֶחָד. . . אוֹ נִימָא

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. דְּהַמִּצְוָה עַל כָּל אָדָם אֶלָּא דְּבָעַל הַבֵּית מוֹצִיא כָּל בְּנֵי בֵיתוֹ.

The Sefat Emet assumes that if the obligation applies to the household, it follows that two families living in one house can fulfill the obligation with the same single candle. They are all, apparently, considered one household, the “house” binding them all together.

Yet, the Talmudic ruling on the status of a guest indicates that a house and a household are distinct entities. Citing Rav Sheshet, the Gemara states that a guest is obligated in lighting Chanukah candles, and does not automatically fulfill the mitzvah with the homeowner's lighting.

The Rosh (Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel, b. 1250 Germany – d. 1327 Spain) explains the principle:

#### 4. Rosh, Shabbat 2:8 – The status of a guest

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”).

אָמַר רַב שֵׁשֶׁת אֶכְסְנָאֵי חַיִּיב בֵּינָר חֲנוּכָּה וְאֵינוּ יוֹצֵא בֵּינָר שֶׁל בָּעַל הַבֵּית דִּלָּא הוּא בְּכָלֵל אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ [וּבֵיתוֹ].

Guests, the Rosh explains, are not an integral part of the household. For this reason, they are not automatically included in the homeowner's lighting. (However, by contributing towards the oil for the candles, they become included in the household; see Rabbi Asher Weiss, Minchat Asher, Bereishit, p. 354.) It is thus possible that two families living in the same house will be obligated in two Chanukah candles, since they can be considered two separate households.

An interesting ramification of the household-centered approach to Chanukah candles is the status of children.

The Shulchan Aruch (689:2) rules that on Purim a child (under bar mitzvah) cannot read the Megillah on behalf of the community. On Chanukah, however, the Shulchan Aruch mentions an opinion that he can light candles on behalf of the whole household (675:3). The Chacham Tzvi (Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi, 1656-1718, rabbi in Amsterdam) explains why:

### 5. Responsa Chacham Tzvi (Tosafot Chadashim) #13 – Can a child light the Chanukah candles?

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  
כיון 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 כיון דנסיבנא  
אמינא תו לא צריכנא דהא  
קמדיקי 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.

The point of the Chacham Tzvi is that there is no individual obligation to light candles; rather, the obligation is incumbent on the household – it is a “group mitzvah.” If any member of the household lights candles, the mitzvah is thus fulfilled, and all other members are exempt from lighting. Because there is no individual obligation (but only a group obligation), there is no need for the concept of *shelichut* – halachic agency. Where halachic agency is required, a person who is considered a minor cannot serve as an agent; here, however, it is possible that a minor who is part of the obligation (i.e. he has reached the age of education for mitzvot) can fulfill the mitzvah as the representative of the group.

### Part B. Why the Household?

Why does this mitzvah, unlike other mitzvot, apply to the household, and not to individuals? The Pnei Yehoshua (Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, Poland and Germany 1680-1756) suggests that the house was chosen as the means of publicizing the miracle.

## 6. Pnei Yehoshua on Shabbat 21b – Why does the mitzvah of Chanukah candles focus on the house?

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.

אֵלָּא, דְּשֵׂאנִי הָכָא שְׂאִין  
הָכָא עֲקֵר הַמִּצְוָה אֵלָּא  
בְּסִמּוּךְ לְרֵשׁוֹת הָרַבִּים  
שֶׁהוּא מְשׁוּם פְּרִסּוּמִי  
נִסָּא. מְשׁוּם כִּךְ הֵטִילוּ  
חֻבַּת מִצְוָה זוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הִיא  
חֻבַּת הַבֵּית. וְעַדִּין צָרִיךְ  
עֵינִן:

This can be compared, perhaps, to the idea of hanging out a flag on every house on a national holiday, as a sign of patriotism. It is appropriate that the “national custom” (assuming there is one) applies to houses, not to individuals.

Another explanation for why the lighting applies to the household relates to the Greek assault against the Jewish nation, which included decrees against Jewish observance and the very means of Jewish continuity – family life.

## 7. Midrash Maaseh Chanukah (Eisenstein's Otzar Hamidrashim pp. 189-190) – The Greeks made decrees against Jewish family life.

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

... עָמְדוּ וְגִזְרוּ: כָּל בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל  
שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה לוֹ בְּרִיחַ אוֹ מַסְגֵּר לְפִתְחוֹ  
יִדְקָר בַּחֶרֶב, וְכָל בֶּן לָמָּה כִּדֵּי שֶׁלֹּא  
יְהִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּבוֹד וְלֹא רֵשׁוֹת  
(צְנִיעוּת), שֶׁכָּל בֵּית שְׂאִין לוֹ דֶּלֶת  
אֵין לוֹ כְּבוֹד וְלֹא צְנִיעוּת וְכָל הָרוּצָה  
לָפָּנִים וְנָכֹס בֵּין בַּיּוֹם וּבֵין בַּלַּיְלָה. כִּי  
שָׂרְאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּךְ עָמְדוּ וּבִטְלוּ כָּל  
דְּלָתוֹת בֵּיתֵיהֶם וְלֹא הָיוּ יְכוּלִּין לֹא  
לֶאֱכֹל וְלֹא לְשָׁתוֹת וְלֹא לְשִׁמֵּשׁ  
מִטּוֹתֵיהֶם, בְּשִׁבְלֵי גִנְבִין וְלִסְטִין  
וּפְרִיצֵי יוֹנִים,

The Midrash refers to two additional decrees that were directed specifically against Jewish family life.

## 8. Ibid. – The Greeks outlawed *mikveh* (ritual purification bath).

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

עָמְדוּ וְגִזְרוּ: “כָּל מִי שֶׁאֲשַׁתּוֹ  
הוֹלְכָת לְטְבִילָה יִדְקָר בַּחֶרֶב.”

The ban on mikveh meant, of course, that the Jews could not engage in marital relations. Another renowned decree of the Greeks was that every Jewish bride must first be defiled by a Greek officer.

### 9. Ibid. – The Greeks made decrees against Jewish family life.

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.

כִּיּוֹן שֶׁרָאוּ יוֹנִים שְׂאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל  
מְרַגִּישִׁין בְּגִזְרוֹתֵיהֶם, עָמְדוּ  
וְגִזְרוּ עֲלֵיהֶם גִּזְרָה מְרָה וְעִכְבֹּרָה,  
שֶׁלֹּא תִכְנַס כְּלָה בְּלֵילָהּ הָרִאשׁוֹן  
מִחֻפָּתָהּ אֶלָּא אַחַר הֶהָגְמוֹן  
שֶׁבְּמָקוֹם הַהוּא. כִּיּוֹן שֶׁשָּׁמְעוּ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּדָרְכּוֹ יְדִיעָה וְתִשְׁשׁ  
כָּחֶם וְנִמְנְעוּ מִלְּאָרֶס, וְהָיוּ בָנוֹת  
יִשְׂרָאֵל בּוֹגְרוֹת וּמִזְקִינוֹת כְּשֶׁהָיוּ  
בְּתוּלוֹת.

The victory over the Greeks meant not only a restoration and rededication of the Temple and political independence; it meant a restoration of the essential role of Jewish family life. Therefore, focusing on the “household” when we light the menorah underscores the critical function of the Jewish family in Jewish continuity.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- The Gemara tells us that the basic level obligation of Chanukah candles is to light “*ner ish uveito*,” a candle for a man and his household.
- It is possible that each individual is obligated in the mitzvah, but one person does the mitzvah by lighting on everyone’s behalf. He is their agent to perform this mitzvah. However, another understanding, which emerges from a number of sources, is that the family unit is obligated, and one family member lights for the unit.
- Possible ramifications of the debate are:
  1. If two families live within one house, must both light?
  2. Can a child be the one that lights the candles?
- Why does the mitzvah focus on the “household” rather than the individual? We offered two suggestions: 1) Since the goal of the mitzvah is to publicize the Chanukah miracle to the people of the public domain, the house is a logical focus; 2) Since some of the Greek decrees sought to undermine Jewish family life, the household was therefore made a focus in commemorating Chanukah.

## SECTION II Levels Two and Three: Enhancing the Mitzvah – “*Mehadrin*” and “*Mehadrin min Ha-mehadrin*”

### Part A. How Many Candles do We Light?

The second and third levels of the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles are referred to as “*mehadrin*” and “*mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*” (see Source 1 above). The second level involves lighting a candle for each person, whereas the third (according to Beit Hillel) involves adding a candle for each night.



Thus, on Level I of the mitzvah, one lights a single candle for all nights of Chanukah. On Level II, one lights the number of candles corresponding to the people in the house. The household, we might say, is represented by the number of candles. But what happens on Level III?

The big question is: Are Level II and Level III mutually exclusive, or not? Does a person doing this mitzvah have to choose **either** to light as many candles as there are people in the household, **or** to light as many candles as the outgoing days of Chanukah? Or is there, perhaps, a way of simultaneously enhancing the mitzvah in **both** ways?

### Tosafot's Approach: Levels II and III – Two Alternate Tracks

Tosafot asks a basic question about our Gemara:

#### 10. Tosafot, Shabbat 21b, “Veha-mehadrin min Ha-mehadrin” – mutually exclusive tracks.

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 אגד איש וביתו, שכן  
יש יותר הדור, דאיכא היכרא  
כשמוסיף והולך או מחסר שהוא  
פגוד ימים הנכנסים או היוצאים.  
אבל אם עושה נר לכל אחד  
אפילו יוסיף מכאן ואילך ליכא  
היכרא, שישברו שפך יש בני  
אדם בבית.

According to Tosafot, if someone lighting on the third level would multiply the number of people in the household by the number of outgoing days of Chanukah, he will defeat his purpose. People seeing his candles will not have instant recognition of how many days of Chanukah have passed. An observer might just think that the number of candles in the window corresponds to the amount of people in the house.

For example, if a family of five people lights ten candles on the second night of Chanukah, people might think there are ten people in the household. In contrast, it will be clear that anyone who lights two candles on the second night of Chanukah is calling attention to the two outgoing days.

## The Rambam's Approach: Cumulative Enhancement

The Rambam (Maimonides) takes a different approach to combining Levels II and III.

### 11. Rambam, Laws of Megillah and Chanukah 4:1-3 – The Rambam contrasts his own approach with that of the prevalent Spanish custom.

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 גֵּרוֹת הוּא מְדַלֵּק בְּחִנּוּכָה--  
מִצְוַתָּהּ שְׂיִהְיֶה כָּל בֵּית וּבֵית מְדַלֵּק  
גֵּר אֶחָד, בֵּין שְׁהָיוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת מְרֻבִּין,  
בֵּין שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה בּוֹ אֵלָּא אָדָם אֶחָד.  
וְהַמְהִדֵּר אֶת הַמִּצְוָה, מְדַלֵּק גֵּרוֹת  
כְּמִנְיָן אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת, גֵּר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד,  
בֵּין אַנְשִׁים בֵּין נָשִׁים. וְהַמְהִדֵּר יוֹתֵר  
עַל זֶה וְעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה מִן הַמְּבֻחָר,  
מְדַלֵּק גֵּר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּלִילָה  
הָרִאשׁוֹן, וּמוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל לֵילָה  
וְלֵילָה, אֶחָד.

ב בַּיּוֹם: הָרִי שְׁהָיוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת  
עֹשֶׂה--בְּלִילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן, מְדַלֵּק  
עֹשֶׂה גֵּרוֹת; וּבְלִיל שֵׁנִי, עֹשֶׂה שְׁנַיִם;  
וּבְלִיל שְׁלִישִׁי, שְׁלוּשִׁים; עַד שֶׁנִּמְצָא  
מְדַלֵּק בְּלִיל שְׁמִינִי, שְׁמוֹנִים.

ג מְנַהֵג פְּשוּט בְּכָל עֲרִינוֹ בִּסְפָרָה,  
שְׂיִהְיֶה כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת מְדַלִּיקִין גֵּר  
אֶחָד בְּלִילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן, וּמוֹסִיפִין  
וְהוֹלְכִין גֵּר בְּכָל לֵילָה וְלֵילָה, עַד  
שֶׁנִּמְצָא מְדַלֵּק בְּלִיל שְׁמִינִי שְׁמוֹנֶה  
גֵּרוֹת - בֵּין שְׁהָיוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת מְרֻבִּים,  
בֵּין שְׁהָיָה אָדָם אֶחָד.

The prevalent Spanish custom is exactly that of the Tosafot (who lived in France and Germany!). The Rambam differs, and, apparently, was not bothered by the problem raised by Tosafot.

According to the Rambam, at Level III one enhances the mitzvah with a double-enhancement, by lighting a number of candles corresponding both to the number of people in the household (ten in the Rambam's example) and to the night of Chanukah. The ten person family thus lights eighty candles – ten multiplied by eight – on the eighth night of Chanukah. Level III builds upon Level II.

## Part B. Who Lights the Candles?

In order to get the complete picture of how to fulfill Chanukah candle lighting on the highest possible level (the third level), that of the *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*, we have to ask another question: Who lights the candles?

According to the simple reading of the Rambam's presentation, one person lights all the candles: "**He** finally lights 80 on the eighth night." In halachot 1 and 2, the Rambam always uses the third person **singular** – "**he** lights."

As we read the next source, the final ruling of the Shulchan Aruch and the Rema, compare their approaches with those of the Rambam and Tosafot.

## 12. Shulchan Aruch and Rema, Orach Chaim 671:2 – The final rulings.

(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.

שלחן ערוך: בַּמָּה גֵּרוֹת מְדַלֵּק?  
בַּלֵּילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן מְדַלֵּק אֶחָד, מִכָּאן  
וְאֵילָן מוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ אֶחָד בְּכָל לַיְלָה  
עַד שֶׁבָּלִיל הָאַחֲרוֹן יִהְיוּ שְׁמוֹנֶה,  
וְאִפְּלוּ אִם רַבִּים בְּנֵי הַבַּיִת לֹא יְדַלְּקוּ  
יֹתֵר.

הגה: וְיֵשׁ אוֹמְרִים דְּכָל אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי  
הַבַּיִת יְדַלֵּק (הַרְמַ"ם), וְכֵן הַמְּנַהֵג  
פָּשׁוּט; וַיִּזְהָרוּ לִתֵּן כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד  
גֵּרוֹתָיו בְּמָקוֹם מְיֻחָד, כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּהְיֶה  
הַיָּכָר בַּמָּה גֵּרוֹת מְדַלְּקִין (מהר"א  
מִפְּרָאג).

The Shulchan Aruch's approach is identical to that of the Tosafot and the prevalent custom in Spain. (The Shulchan Aruch is also ruling in accordance with Beit Hillel, as we discuss below in Section III.)

The Rema's approach, though, is not entirely like the Rambam (even though in our editions, the Rambam's name appears in parentheses after the Rema's ruling). The number of candles lit, according to both the Rema and the Rambam, is identical, but the identity of the person lighting them is not. Whereas according to the Rambam, in a ten person household, on the eighth night of Chanukah one person lights eighty candles, according to the Rema the ten people would each light eight candles.

We can now return to the different customs of the Schwartzes and the Sassoons.

*Shani: "May I attempt to explain why the Schwartz family had seven sets of Chanukah candles in the window and the Sassoons only had one?"*

*Rabbi Dayan: "Go right ahead."*

*Shani: "As far as I know, Schwartz is an Ashkenazi name, and Sassoon is one of those famous Sephardic family names. And didn't you once tell us in a class that the Ashkenazim follow Rabbi Moshe Isserlis and the Sephardim follow Rabbi Yosef Karo?"*

*Rabbi Dayan: Yes, indeed. This is an interesting instance where the Shulchan Aruch (born in Sepharad = Spain) rules like the Tosafot (France and Germany = Ashkenaz), and the Rema (from Ashkenazic Poland) rules – at least partially – like the Rambam (from Sephardic Spain, then Egypt)!*

*The Schwartz family must have had seven people in the household. It is now the fifth night of Chanukah, so they lit seven sets of Chanukah candles, each one with five candles. (Every Chanukah menorah has a place for an additional candle we refer to as the shamash. It is used for lighting the rest and then is set in its place.)*

*The Sassoons, following Sephardic custom, just lit one set of five candles.*

*This is the source of contemporary Ashkenazi and Sephardic practice.*

The following sources, both entitled *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (one written by Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried in the 19th century, and the other by Rabbi Refael Toledano in the 20th), represent common custom among Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewry.

### 13. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, 139:6, Laws of Chanukah – What is standard Ashkenazi practice for lighting Chanukah candles?

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.

מנהג פשוט במדינותינו  
במהדרין מן המהדרין  
שפדליקין כל אחד ואחד  
מבני הבית בלילה הראשון  
גר אחד, ובשני, שני גרות,  
וכן מוסיפין עד שבליל  
שמיני מדליק שמונה.

### 14. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Rabbi Rafael Toledano 612:4, The Order of Lighting Chanuka Candles – What is standard Sephardic practice for lighting Chanukah 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.

בלילה הראשון - מדליק גר אחד,  
ומבאן ואילך הולך ומוסיף אחד  
בכל לילה, עד שבליל אחרון יהיו  
שמונה. ובשאר הלילות מתחיל  
מאותו גר שרוצה להוסיף, ואחר  
כך האחרים שהדליק בלילות  
הראשונים. ואפילו אם רבים  
בני הבית - לא ידליקו יותר.  
והאשכנזים נוהגים שכל אחד  
מבני הבית ידליק גר חנכה שלו,  
וכל אחד מהם עושה גרו במקום  
מיוחד.

Having clarified the different opinions and practical custom, we are ready to delve into the depth of the matter.

## Part C. The Underpinnings of the Three-way Dispute

There is a rich literature concerning this three-way dispute between Tosafot and the Spanish custom (one person lights the number of candles corresponding to the number of days of Chanukah), the Rambam (one person lights the number



of candles corresponding to the number of days multiplied by the number of people in the household), and the Rema (each person lights the number of candles corresponding to the number of days of Chanukah).

We will focus on the approach suggested by Rabbi Asher Weiss, a leading contemporary halachic authority. His explanation takes us back to Section I and the basic definition of the Chanukah lights obligation: Is it an obligation on the **individual** or on the **household**?

The first question to address is why the Rema departs from the Rambam's position, and requires each person of the household to light his own candles.

### 15. Minchat Asher, Bereishit, p. 352 – Why did the Rema veer from the Rambam's approach?

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 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.]

וְנִרְאֶה בְּבֵאוּר שִׁטַּת  
הַרַמְ"א, שֶׁנִּשְׁטָה מִדְּבַר  
הַרַמְבַּ"ם, עַל פִּי מֶה שֵׁי  
לְחַקֹּר בְּגֵדֵר "נֵר אִישׁ  
וּבֵיתוֹ." הָאֵם הֵיוּ חֻבַּת  
הַבֵּית (וְלֹא כִשְׁאֵר הַמִּצְוֹת  
שֶׁהֵם חֻב עַל הָאָדָם כְּפֶרֶט)  
דִּהְיוּ: שֶׁכָּל בֵּית וּמִשְׁפָּחָה  
יִדְלִיק נֵר. וּמִכֵּיוֹן שֶׁהִדְלִיק  
בְּבֵית נֵר אֶחָד נִפְטְרוּ כֻלָּם,  
אִף שֶׁלֹּא הִתְכַּוְּנוּ לְעֵצָת  
עַל יְדֵי הַמְדִּלִיק וְהוּא לֹא  
הִתְכַּוְּנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָם. דְּמִכָּל  
מָקוֹם הוֹדִלֵק נֵר בְּבֵית זֶה  
וּנִפְטְרוּ כָּל אֲנָשֵׁי הַבֵּית.  
אוּ, דִּהְיוּ כָּל חֻב הַפֶּרֶט,  
אֲלֵא שֶׁאֶחָד מוֹצִיא אֶת  
כֻּלָּם יְדֵי חֻבָּתָם. וְצָרִיךְ  
שֶׁיִּכְוְנוּ לְהוֹצִיא וְלְעֵצָת כָּל  
מִצְוָה שֶׁיוֹצֵאִים בָּהּ עַל יְדֵי  
אַחֵרִים מִדִּין שׁוֹמֵעַ קְעוּנָה  
אוּ מִדִּין שְׁלִיחָה.

The Rambam does not see Chanukah candles as a personal obligation, but as a household or family obligation. It follows that even on the *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* levels, one person lights all the candles. Nobody else can light and recite a blessing in the same house, because the mitzvah of the household has been fulfilled.

The Rema, however, maintains that every individual has an obligation to light. When the Gemara says that the basic level of obligation is “a candle for a person and his household,” it means that when a single person lights he serves as an agent for all others – but the fundamental obligation applies to all.

Now, consider a guest who is away from his family during Chanukah. His family is lighting candles at home. Can he light and recite a blessing at his host's home?

According to the Rema, we can answer in the affirmative: The mitzvah is individual, and provided he does not mean to fulfill the mitzvah by means of agency (with his own family), he can fulfill it on his own. According to the Rambam, however, it seems that once a person's family has lit, he cannot perform the mitzvah again. As part of a household, his mitzvah has already been performed.

**16. Minchat Asher, Bereishit, p. 353 – The Rambam and the Rema are on two sides of a fundamental dispute about the mitzvah of Chanukah candles.**

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.”

וְהִנֵּה הָרַמְ"א בְּשִׁלְחוֹ עָרוֹךְ  
(תַּרְע"ז:ג) וּבְדַרְכֵי מִשְׁהָ שֵׁם  
פֶּסֶק כְּמַהְרֵ"ל וְלִשְׁיטְתוֹ  
אֲזִיל בְּסִימָן תַּרְע"א שֶׁפֶתַח  
שָׁכַל אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הַבֵּית יְדַלִּיק  
לְעֶצְמוֹ אֶבֶל הָרַמְבַּ"ם סוֹבֵר  
דְּעֶצֶם מִצְוַת הַהִדְלָקָה עַל  
הַבֵּית הִיא וְלִשְׁיטְתוֹ יִחָא  
דְּאֶחָד מִדַּלִּיק אֶת כָּל הַנֵּרוֹת  
וְהָרַמְבַּ"ם וְהָרַמְ"א אֲזִיל  
לְשִׁיטְתִּיהוּ בִּיסוּד דִּין גֵּר  
אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ וְדו"ק בְּזוֹה.

Now let us turn to the Rambam-Tosafot dispute? What conceptual issue underlies the matter of **how many** candles to light? Rabbi Weiss suggests that the question is whether the mitzvah is enhanced by increasing the number of candles lit, or by representing the days of Chanukah.

**17. Minchat Asher, Bereishit, p. 353 – The Rambam and Tosafot argue about how to enhance the mitzvah.**

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

וְנִרְאָה בְּשִׁיטַת הָרַמְבַּ"ם דְּיִסוּד  
גָּדֵר הַהַדְוִר בְּמַהְדְּרֵין מִן  
הַמַּהְדְּרֵין אֵינוֹ בְּצִיּוֹן מִסְפֵּר  
הַיָּמִים אֲלָא בְּרַבּוּי הַנֵּרוֹת בְּלִבְדּוֹ,  
אֲלָא דִּחְזוּ"ל תִּקְנוּ לְהַרְבּוֹת

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.

בְּנֵרוֹת כְּנִגְדַּי יְמֵי הַחֹג כְּרַמְיָא  
בְּעֵלְמָא אֲדָּהּ מֵהוּת הַהִדּוּר אֵינוֹ  
בְּצִיּוֹן יְמֵי הַחֹג אֲלָא בְּעֵצָם רַבּוּי  
הַנֵּרוֹת ... אֲבָל הַתּוֹסְפוֹת ...  
נִרְאָה דְּסִבְיָא לְהוּ דְּהַהִדּוּר  
הוּי בְּמַה שֶּׁהוּא מְצִין אֶת  
מִנְיַן הַיָּמִים וְכֵן כְּתֵב הַלְבוּשׁ  
(תַּרְע"א:ב) דִּישׁ הַדּוּר בְּפִרְסוֹם  
מִשָּׁד יְמֵי הַנֵּס וּבְעֵינֵי שְׂיָהָא לְזֵה  
הַיָּכָר.

Thus, we have a three-tier Chanukah system.

The Rambam's approach is the simplest. Who lights the candles? For all levels of the mitzvah one person lights for the entire house. The enhancement of the mitzvah is also simple: add more candles. The mehadrin custom adds more, and the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin even more. Thus, a family of ten lighting on Level I lights only **one** candle throughout Chanukah, even on the eighth night. At Level two the family will light ten candles on each day, and on Level III the number for each night is multiplied by the family members, so that on the eighth night **eighty** candles are lit (the number of days is therefore not discernable from the number of candles, because the number of people in the household also figures in the number of candles lit).

The Rema differs from the Rambam on one crucial point, maintaining that **participation** by each member of the household is part of the enhancement of the mitzvah. At the mehadrin level, each individual lights one candle a day; and at the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin level, each lights according to the number of days of Chanukah. The mitzvah is enhanced not only by the number of candles lit, but even by everyone participating in the lighting.

Tosafot differs from both opinions. According to Tosafot, there needs to be clarity to the observer, and the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin level is ineffective unless people on the street can see the candles and grasp the story of the miracle. On the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin level, there is only one set of candles for the entire household.

On the mehadrin level, however, whereby the number of outgoing days is not discerned, Tosafot will say that one person lights the number of candles corresponding to the members of the household, or that each member of the household lights one candle.

We end this section with an explanation of why, of all mitzvot, specifically Chanukah comes with special levels of enhancement.

## 18. Beit Halevi on Chumash Bereishit (Genesis), Chanukah, “Ha-mehadrin min Ha-mehadrin” – Why were two levels of enhancement introduced into this mitzvah?

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.

הנה הא דמצוינו במצוה זו הדור ויותר הדור, הנראה משום דעיקר הניס תכליתו היה רק משום הדור מצוה לחודא ולא משום עיקר המצוה.

דהרי היה בפה שמן להדליק בו לילה אחת, והרי היו יכולים לעשות פתילות דקות ביותר שתהיה הפתילה חלק שמינית מן מה שהיה רגיל להיות בכל יום מקודם. והיה מספיק לשמונה ימים, והיה מקיים עיקר המצוה. דהרי אין שיעור לעבי הפתילות. וכל הניס היה רק משום הדור מצוה שיהיו הנרות יפים כמו שהיו מקודם. ועל פן תקנו חכמים במצוה זו הדורים יותר מבכל מצוה.

### KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- There is a three-way dispute about how to light Chanukah candles on the level of *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*.
- The Rambam maintains that only one person lights, and the number of candles is calculated by multiplying the amount of people in the house by which night of Chanukah it is.
- The Ri in Tosafot also holds that one person lights, but the number of candles is determined exclusively by the number of outgoing days of Chanukah. He objects to the above approach because it will not be possible for onlookers to discern the days of Chanukah, and would therefore not properly publicize the miracle.
- The Rema rules that each individual in the household lights the number of candles corresponding to that night of Chanukah.



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

First, let us review the positions of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai:

#### 19. Shabbat 21b – What are the three levels of lighting Chanukah candles?

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 beautify the mitzvah (ha-mehadrin) light a candle for each and every person.

2. והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד

3. Those who beautify the mitzvah the most: The House of Shammai 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 שמונה מפאן ואילך פוחת והולך, ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת מפאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.

What are the reasons behind Beit Hillel's and Beit Shammai's approaches?

The Gemara continues:

#### 20. Shabbat 21b – What are the reasons behind Beit Shammai's and Beit Hillel's approaches?

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

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 דמזליו בקודש 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

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.

טעם לדבריו דמאלין  
בקודש ואין מורידין.

### Incoming Days vs. Days Yet to Come

We will first present two simple and straightforward approaches to understanding the principle underlying Beit Shamai's and Beit Hillel's approaches. We will then encounter a third approach suggesting that this particular dispute between Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel reflects a much broader difference of world views.

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

Here is an explanation by Rabbi Moshe Sofer, of blessed memory (Austro-Hungary 1835-1883):

#### 21. The Chatam Sofer's commentary on Shabbat 21b – Elevation of Israel or fall of the Syrian-Greeks.

It seems to me that the House of Shamai 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."

ונראה לי, לבית שמאי עשו  
עיקר ממפלת השונאים, על  
כן פוחת והולך כשבעים פרי  
החג שהמה נגד שבעים  
אומות. ולבית הלל קבעו  
נגד עלייתן של ישראל, על כן  
מעלין בקודש:

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

Here is a second approach that appears in the Pnei Yehoshua, by Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk (1680-1756, Poland and Germany).

#### 22. The Pnei Yehoshua's commentary on Shabbat 21b – What are the three levels of lighting Chanukah candles?

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

אלא, דטעמא דמהדרין מן  
המהדרין, דכיון שבכל יום ויום  
נתרבה פרסום הניסא וחיבת המקום  
יותר ביותר, לכך ראוי לעשות הדור  
מצוה לפי ערך פרסום הנס והחבה.  
והינו טעמא דמאן דאמר כנגד  
הימים היוצאים, שהרי בליילה  
הראשונה לא נתפרסם הנס כי אם

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.

על אותה לילה בלבד כמו שכתב  
בבית יוסף [אורח חיים סימן  
תרע"א]. מה שאין בכל לילה  
בהתוסף הימים היה הנס יותר  
שהיה חלק והולך כל אותן הימים  
משום הכי ראוי להרבות בגרות  
כפי מספר אותן הימים.

וטעמא דמאן דאמר פוחת והולך  
בנגד ימים הנכנסין, היינו משום...  
שעקר הנס לא נעשה אלא בפך  
שבליילה ראשונה לא הורק ממנו  
אלא חלק שמניית. ומזה נתמלאו  
כל גרות המנורה... דמשום שהיה  
עיקר הנס בפך והפך בכל יום היה  
מתמעט והולך משום הכי ראוי  
לעשות הדור מצוה גם כן בענין זה  
דפוחת והולך.

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

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin (Belarus 1888-1978, Israel) asserts that many of the disputes between Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel, the House (Academy) of Shamai and the House of Hillel, are tied to one general theme: Beit Shamai tends to focus on a thing's potential and Beit Hillel on what it actually is. Their dispute about Chanukah candles, he suggests, is a classic example of this difference in world view. Beit Shamai focuses on the miraculous **potential** of the jug of oil. In retrospect we know that even on the first day of Chanukah, that which the Jews thought was merely a one-day jug of oil had the potential to burn eight days. But Beit Hillel holds that on every night we focus on how much **actual** miraculous burning took place. In Rabbi Zevin's own words:

**23. "The Approaches of Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai," in *Leor Hahalacha*, p. 304, footnote 2 – Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel represent two approaches to existence; the Chanukah dispute reflects this.**

... 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

... בכחו של השמן לדלוק פי  
שמונה. בפועל היה להיפך:  
ביום הראשון ראו הנס בלילה  
אחד בלבד, ולמחרתו ראו  
עוד בלילה אחד, וכן בכל לילה  
הוסיפו לראות הנס.

ובכך נחלקו בית שמאי ובית

Shamai and the House of Hillel: The House of Shamaï 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.

הלל: בית שמאי לשיטתם  
מחשיבים את הדרך כפי מה  
שהוא בכה, ובית הלל לשיטתם  
מעריכים אותו מנקודת  
הוצאתו לפועל.

The famous historian Rabbi Berel Wein expresses the same idea in his own words.

**24. Rabbi Berel Wein, [www.yeshiva.co/midrash/shiur.asp?id=17660](http://www.yeshiva.co/midrash/shiur.asp?id=17660) –  
Ramifications of reality and potential in practical living.**

Chanukah in its halachic discussions and various applications represents the necessary two components of Jewish life. These are reality and potential... Beit Shamaï 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 Shamaï 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 Shamaï is not to be ignored and completely discarded. The Talmud teaches us that the opinions of Beit Shamaï 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 Shamaï 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 Kaminetzky 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.

### KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- The following are three approaches to understanding the dispute between the House of Shamai and the House of Hillel:
- The Chatam Sofer: According to Beit Shamai we decrease the number of candles daily because the enemy (the Syrio-Greek army) was diminished; but according to Beit Hillel we increase candles just as the Jews were elevated.
- The Pnei Yehoshua: According to Beit Shamai we decrease candles because the miracle was evident in the jug of oil, the amount of oil decreasing each day as the miracle continued. According to Beit Hillel we increase candles, corresponding to increased publicity of the miracle and the Divine love it expresses; each day they saw more and more miraculous burning candles.
- Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin: Beit Shamai focuses on potential; the oil on the first day had eight days of potential burning, and less and less each day. Beit Hillel focuses on actualization; on the first day there was only one day of actual miraculous candles, and it increased daily.
- The Maharsha points out that Beit Shamai does not deny the principle that we must “elevate in matters of holiness.” He suggests that there are simply compelling reasons not to apply it here.\*
- The Sefat Emet suggests a practical difference between the “incoming days” approach and the “elevate in holiness” approach.\*

\* See notes that follow shiur

**CLASS  
SUMMARY****Who is obligated in the mitzvah of Chanukah candles?**

The default position for a mitzvah is that each individual is obligated. One would assume this should also be true for Chanukah candles. This seems to be the position of the Rema. However, the Gemara expressed the basic level of the mitzvah of Chanukah candles as “ner ish uveito.” It is likely that the Rambam sees this as indicating that the mitzvah applies specifically to **households**.

What might have inspired our Sages to decree a mitzvah that focuses on the household? Two suggestions were raised: 1. The goal of the mitzvah is publicizing the miracle, and it was therefore instituted to light on the houses that border the public thoroughfare, applying the mitzvah to the household rather than the individual (the Pnei Yehoshua). 2. The mitzvah mirrors the Greek decrees attempting to destroy the sanctity of Jewish family life.

According to the Rambam and Tosafot, only one person lights for the entire family, indicating that the mitzvah is placed upon the household. According to the Rema, each individual member of the household lights.

**What is the practical difference between how Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews light Chanukah candles?**

Common Sephardic practice, based on the ruling of Rabbi Yosef Karo in the Shulchan Aruch, is to light one set of Chanukah candles per household. In Ashkenazi homes, based on the ruling of the Rema, each member of the household lights one set of candles.

**What are the sources in Talmudic literature for this difference and what are its conceptual roots?**

The Gemara lists three levels of the mitzvah of Chanukah candles. The first is that each household lights one candle. The second (mehadrin) is to light one candle for each person, and the third (mehadrin min ha-mehadrin) is to light one on the first night of Chanukah, two on the second, and so on. The Gemara's text is open to two interpretations. According to the Rambam and Rema, the third level is built on the second, and the number of candles reflects both the number of people and the night of Chanukah; according to Tosafot, the Gemara presents two alternative ways of enhancing the mitzvah. Thus, according to Tosafot each household should light one candle on the first night, and eight on the last; according to the Rambam, the number of days is multiplied by the number of members of the household.

The different opinions can be understood based on the question of how the mitzvah ought to be enhanced: by the lighting representing the days of Chanukah, or by simply increasing candles (the number of the increase is calculated by multiplying the amount of people in the household by the number of the night of Chanukah).

**Why, according to all customs, 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 ending up with one?**

Beit Hillel follows this approach (adding a candle each day), and the Gemara provides two reasons for this practice. One is that we apply here the general principle of “Increase in matters of holiness, do not decrease.” A second reason is that in order to publicize the Chanukah miracle we should light corresponding to the incoming days of Chanukah. But why count the days the candle has already miraculously lit and not (like Beit Shammai does) those still to come? We saw three approaches to this question: one (Chatam Sofer) is that we should reflect Israel’s daily elevation; another (Pnei Yehoshua) that we reflect the increase in Divine love; a third (Rav Zevin) is that this reflects a broader difference in approach between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai: Whereas Beit Shammai emphasizes potential, Beit Hillel focuses on what actually is. Every night of Chanukah we commemorate how much the miraculous candles actually lit.

**Sephardic vs. Ashkenazi practice for lighting Chanukah candles**

Sephardic practice follows the approach of the Shulchan Aruch, who rules like Tosafot, whereas Ashkenazim follow the Rema. The Rema’s position, like the Rambam’s, sees the mehadrin min ha-mehadrin as a double enhancement. However, whereas the Rambam holds that one person lights all the candles for the entire household, the Rema holds that every individual lights their own set of candles.

**Notes:**

1. The Maharsha points out that Beit Shammai agrees that the idea of “elevating in matters of holiness” is a legitimate halachic concept; we do not find that they dispute it elsewhere (see for instance Mishnah, Menachot 11:7). Here, though, because of the need to commemorate the miracle through decreasing candles (because of one of the three reasons above), they justified veering from this principle based on the alternative model of the oxen sacrifices of Sukkot where the sacrifices decrease.
2. The Sfat Emet suggests a practical difference between the two variant approaches for explaining the argument (incoming and outgoing days; sacrificial oxen or increasing holiness). For instance, take somebody who only has twenty candles. According to the approach that the number of candles corresponds to the number of outgoing days of Chanukah, he should light one the first night, two the second, three the third, four the fourth, and five the fifth night. On the last three nights (he only has five remaining candles) he should light one candle and fulfill the basic mitzvah. On the other hand, if Beit Hillel’s reason is “Elevate in holiness and do not descend,” going from five candles on the fifth night to one on the subsequent night is problematic. It is better to light one candle on each of the first seven nights and save his extra candles to light eight on the last night.

**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#](http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/711093/Rabbi_Daniel_Z_Feldman/Mehadrin_Min_Ha-mehadrin#)