

MEHADRIN' - AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

In # 60, we mentioned that there are three levels on which the Mitzva of lighting the Chanukah candles can be fulfilled. After the basic level, which is one person lighting one light each night, there are two greater levels - the next one is referred to as "Mehadrin" and the greatest level as "Mehadrin min HaMehadrin." I would like to thank Rabbi Eli Shulman (shulman@yu1.yu.edu) for preparing the discussion that follows on the concept of "Mehadrin," and for making it available to the YomTov subscribers.

Mehadrin:

1. The Gemara in Shabbos, 21b, contains the following passage: "Our Rabbis taught [in a Baraisa]: The [basic] mitzvah of Chanuka is [that one should light] one candle for each household; those who [wish to] embellish (mehadrin) [the mitzvah light] one candle for each person; and those who [wish to] especially embellish (mehadrin min hamehadrin) [the mitzvah do as follows:] Beis Shammai say that the first day [i.e. night] he lights eight [candles], and from there on he decreases [the number of candles by one each night], but Beis Hillel say that the first day (i.e. night) he lights one [candle], and from there on he increases [the number of candles by one each night]."
2. A homeless person is not obligated to light Chanuka candles. Someone who does not own his own home, but lodges at the home of another person, is obligated; he can, however, discharge his obligation by becoming a partner in his landlord's candles by paying him some token amount for a share in them. The same applies to a traveller who is away from his own home. The Gemara (ibid, 23a) records the following teaching: "Rav Zeira said: Originally, [before I was married], when I was a lodger [during the time that I studied] at the Academy I would participate with a perutah [a small coin] with my landlord. After I married I said: Now I am certainly not required to do so, since [my wife] lights for me at home.
3. From Rav Zeira's teaching it emerges that someone who is away from home and whose wife lights on his behalf at home has fulfilled his obligation. Now, as we have already seen, those who wish to embellish the mitzvah (mehadrin) are enjoined to have a separate candle for each and every member of the household. The question arises: If someone is away from home and his wife lights for him at home, but he wishes to fulfil the embellishment of the mitzvah of mehadrin, should he light a candle for himself at his place of lodging?

[We assume, for simplicity's sake, that the traveller is only interested in fulfilling mehadrin, but not mehadrin min hamehadrin; thus, at most, he would light a single candle for himself. Obviously, if he wished to fulfil mehadrin min hamehadrin too he would also have to light additional candles for each of the nights of Chanuka that have gone by.]

This question is raised by Resp. Terumas HaDeshen (101, cited by Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim 677), who quotes an anonymous "great man" to the effect that the traveller need not light a candle for himself; indeed, if he does so the candle that he lights does not have the status of a Chanuka candle at all (and he would not be allowed to recite the blessing on it). This authority, writes Terumas HaDeshen, reasoned that mehadrin must be governed by the guidelines set forth in the Gemara; since this form of mehadrin finds no precedent in the Gemara it is not considered a valid expression of mehadrin.

Terumas HaDeshen himself disagrees with this ruling and holds that the husband ought to light his own candle in order to fulfil mehadrin. Beis Yosef sides with the anonymous "great man"; Rema (ibid:3) holds with Terumas HaDeshen.

4. The view of this anonymous authority and of Beis Yosef seems difficult. Were the husband at home presumably he and his wife, if they wish to fulfil mehadrin, would each light their own candle. Why shouldn't they do the same when the husband is away from home? On the contrary, the fact that the husband is away should all the more mandate that he light for himself; in any event, there certainly doesn't seem to be any less reason for him to light. Furthermore, the rationale offered by this authority, that this type of mehadrin finds no precedent in the Gemara, is difficult as well. Surely the Gemara need not enumerate every possible situation in which the members of the household may find themselves; it should suffice that the Gemara says that every member of the household lights.
5. Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav, ibid, 1) suggests that this authority exempted the husband from mehadrin not because he is away from home but because a husband and a wife are deemed a single entity (ishto ke'gufo) and are not reckoned as separate members of the household. According to this interpretation, the husband and wife would share a single candle even when they are both at home. Although this is, indeed, the view of Mahrshal (Resp. 85), it does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation of the view of Terumas HaDeshen's "great man". This authority argued from the fact that this form of mehadrin is not mentioned in the Gemara; but a husband and wife are simply an instance of two members of the household and should not need a special mention in the Gemara.
6. From the language of the Gemara ("one candle for each person") it is not clear whether mehadrin means that each member of the household should light a candle himself or, rather, that whoever is lighting (usually the head of the household) light as many candles as there are

people in the house. For example: If there are five people in the household, does mehadrin require that each person light one candle or that the head of the household light five candles? Rambam's position on this question is quite clear: "One who seeks to embellish the mitzvah lights as many candles as there people in the house" (Hil. Chanuka 4:1). This could not be more explicit; according to Rambam, one person lights all the candles of mehadrin.

However, Rema (Orach Chaim 671:2) writes that every member of the household should light on his/her own. The commentators discuss why Rema differs with Rambam on this point. (See Beis HaLevi, Kuntres Chanuka, 23a; Chidushei HaGriz, Hil. Chanuka; Aruch HaShulchan, ad loc.)

7. Rambam's view seems somewhat difficult. If mehadrin means that every person lights his own candle, then one can easily understand why this is deemed an embellishment of the mitzvah; the very fact that the mitzvah is not delegated to one person but is performed by each and every person on his/her own is an embellishment of the fulfilment of the mitzvah. But if the head of the household lights all the candles anyway, as Rambam holds, then what embellishment is there in having the same number of candles as there are people in the house; why is this something desirable?

The obvious answer would seem to be that the element of embellishment here lies in the multitude of candles; there is a greater "pirsumei nisa" (publication of the miracle) in having many candles than in having only one. But then why stop at the number of people in the house? Why not simply light as many candles as one can afford? What reason is there to peg the number of candles at the number of people in the house?

8. Apparently Rambam holds that while it is desirable to have many candles, it is necessary that all the candles have standing as Chanuka candles; otherwise the additional candles are mere decoration and have no halachic significance. In order to have standing as a Chanuka candle, a candle must serve to discharge a halachic obligation. The maximum number of candles that can be said to do this is the number of people in the household.

The logic of this limit is as follows: Each member of the household is by himself sufficient to obligate the house in one chanuka candle. Thus, if there are five persons living in the house, there are five obligations, each one for one chanuka candle. Of course, all these five obligations can be discharged with a single candle; indeed, that is the basic mitzvah: "One candle for each household". Still, the fact remains that the house carries five obligations. Therefore, up to five candles can have standing as chanuka candles; each candle then discharges one obligation. Any candles beyond that number are halachicly meaningless.

The logic of Rambam's position is thus apparent. Mehadrin consists of having as many candles as possible. But the maximum possible number of candles is the number of people in the household, since that is the maximum number of candles that have can have standing as chanuka candles.

(The careful reader may object that the Gemara allows for more candles than there are people in the house, in the fulfilment of mehadrin min hamehadrin, in which one adds a candle for each night that has gone by. How do these additional candles have standing as Chanuka candles? The answer is that these candles publicize the fact that the miracle grew greater each night; thus, each additional candle serves as a "pirsumei nisa" (a publication of the miracle) in its own right. Since "pirsumei nisa" is the very essence of the obligation to light Chanuka candles these additional candles automatically have the status of Chanuka candles.)

9. We are now in a position to understand the view of the "great man" of the Terumas HaDeshen. From our analysis of Rambam's view it emerges that the idea of mehadrin is not that each person should light on his own but, rather, that there should be as many candles as possible; a blaze of light, rather than a single gleam. Therefore, reasons this authority, mehadrin is only fulfilled when all of the candles are lit in a single home, forming one pageant. But if a traveller's wife lights for him at home and he lights again for himself at his place of lodging, each candle stands alone; this, in his view, is not mehadrin at all.
10. There remains one problem to be addressed. Granted that, according to this view, the traveller cannot fulfil mehadrin by lighting a candle in his place of lodging; as we explained, since his candle and his wife's candle are in different houses they cannot form the single pageant that is mehadrin. But let the traveller fulfil mehadrin by having his wife light two candles: one for herself and one for him? After all, Rambam states clearly that all the candles of mehadrin are lit by one person; although this is usually the master of the house, there is no reason that it could not just as well be the mistress of the house or, for that matter, any member of the household.

Furthermore, from the fact that Terumas HaDeshen takes issue with this anonymous authority and rules that the traveller is obligated to light a candle of his own in order to fulfil mehadrin, it seems that he too accepts the premise that it is the traveller who must light the candle of mehadrin for himself; his wife cannot light an extra candle for him.

We must conclude that, in fact, both the Terumas HaDeshen and his "great man" do not follow Rambam; in their view, each of the candles of mehadrin should be lit by the member of the household whom it represents, not by the head of the household. Thus, this responsa of the Terumas HaDeshen is a source for Rema who, as we have seen, also differs with Rambam on this point and rules that, in order to fulfil mehadrin, each member of the household should light his own candle.

This does not contradict our premise that the Terumas HaDeshen's "great man" agrees with Rambam that the idea of mehadrin is to have as many candles as possible. This authority, however, holds that since, in the final analysis, each candle represents the obligation of a different member of the household, as we explained earlier, it is that person's obligation that is being discharged with that candle and he should light it himself, rather than delegate the

lighting to the head of the household, under the general principle that a mitzvah should not be delegated, where possible (see Kidushin, 41a). Rambam apparently holds that the entire household's obligation is discharged collectively with all of the candles.

11. Rema (671:7) rules that, for reasons unrelated to our discussion, it is preferable that each member of the household light in a different place in the house. In the light of the above, this ruling is consistent with the fact that Rema himself (677:3) holds with Terumas HaDeshen that a lodger should light a candle on his own in order to fulfil mehadrin; in this view, mehadrin can be fulfilled with candles that are distant from each other, or even in different houses. But, as we have seen, in the view of Beis Yosef and of Terumas HaDeshen's anonymous great man, all of the candles of mehadrin need to form a single spectacle and cannot be lit in separate houses; it seems logical that, in this view, the candles of mehadrin should lit together.

For questions, comments, and topic requests, please write to [Rabbi Yehudah Prero](#).
