

How Many Candles Do We Light on Chanukah?

“מְהַדְרִין מִן הַמְהַדְרִין”
[שבת כא:]

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 learning session, 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 a major conceptual discussion that began in the twelfth century and continues to the present day.

This shiur will address the following questions:

- **Who is the mitzvah of Chanukah candles fundamentally incumbent on?**
- **What are the Talmudic, and conceptual roots of this mitzvah?**
- **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?**
- **Why is there a unique concept of “enhancing” (מְהַדְרִין) the Chanuka candles?**

1 – Basic Sources: Gemara

We'll begin with some basic background:

Source 1. Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 21b – The Chanukah miracle.

What is Chanukah? On the 25th day of Kislev, the 8-days of Chanuka begin, during which time it is forbidden to eulogize or to fast. For, when the Greeks entered the Holy Sanctuary they defiled all the oil that was there. And when the dynasty of the Hashmoneans grew strong and defeated the Greeks, they searched and found only one flask of oil with the stamp of the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) that had been set aside; and there was only enough oil to burn for one day. A miracle occurred and they lit [the Menorah] from this oil for eight days. The following year the Sages established these days for praise and thanksgiving.

מאי חנוכה בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה
תמניא אינון דלא למספד בהון ודלא
להתענות בהון שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל
טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל וכשגברה
מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום בדקו ולא
מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונה
בחותמו של כהן גדול ולא היה בו אלא
להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו נס והדליקו
ממנו שמונה ימים לשנה אחרת קבעום
ועשאו ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.

The basic story of Chanuka, and the miracle of the oil, as outlined by the Gemara, is well known.

Aside from being days of “praise and thanksgiving”, the Rabbi’s enacted an actual, tangible mitzvah for the Jewish people to perform during these Holy days:

Source 2. Shabbos 21b

<p>The Rabbis taught:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The mitzvah of Chanukah: a candle, for a man and his household. [One candle should be lit every night, and one candle is sufficient for a man and his entire household. Rashi] 2. Those who enhance the mitzvah (<i>ha-mehadrin</i>) light a candle for each and every person. 3. Those who enhance the mitzvah the most: Beis Shamai says that on the first day one lights eight candles, and from then on decreases the number of candles; Beis Hillel says that on the first day one lights one, and from then on adds <p>Ulla said: Two Amoraim in the West (the land of Israel), Rabbi Yossi son of Avin and Rabbi Yossi son of Zevida, had a dispute: One said that the reasoning behind Beis Shamai's approach is that the number of candles should correspond to the number of days yet to come, and the reasoning behind Beis Hillel's approach is that the number of candles should correspond to the number of outgoing days.</p> <p>The other said that the reason behind Beis Shamai's approach is that the daily change in the number of candles should parallel that of the "Oxen (sacrifices) of the Holiday (Sukkos)" [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."¹</p>	<p>תנו רבנן:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו [נר אחד בכל לילה, ואיש וכל בני ביתו סגי להו בנר אחד. רש"י] 2. והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד 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. <p>אמר עולא: פליגי בה תרי אמוראי במערבא – רבי יוסי בר אבין ורבי יוסי בר זבדא.</p> <p>חד אמר טעמא דבית שמאי כנגד ימים הנכנסין וטעמא דבית הלל כנגד ימים היוצאין,</p> <p>וחד אמר טעמא דבית שמאי כנגד פרי הקטן וטעמא דבית הלל דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין.</p>
--	---

Let's summarize the Gemara:

- A) There are 3-levels in the fulfillment of the mitzvah of Chanuka-candles:
 - a. **Basic** – One candle per household
 - b. **Better** (מהדרין) – Each household member lights their own candle
 - c. **Best** (מהדרין מן המהדרין) – Additional candles lit each night: according to Beis Shammai ("BS") decreasing from 8→1; and according to Beis Hillel ("BH") increasing from 1→8
- B) There is a disagreement regarding what the argument of BS and BH is based upon. Accordingly, their respective opinions correspond to either:
 - a. The # of *incoming* days (BS) *vs* *outgoing* days (BH), or;
 - b. Oxen sacrifices of the Holiday of Sukkot (BS) *vs* "We increase in holiness and do not decrease." (BH)

¹ The **Sfas Emes** 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 Beis 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 would be better to light one candle on each of the first seven nights and save his extra candles to light eight on the last night.

2 – ZONING-IN ON THE CANDLES

There are many questions & observations that one could pose on this Gemara. For example:

- *Why is there an emphasis on the ‘house’? (“נר איש וביתו”)*
- *Why is there a unique element of “מהדרין מן המהדרין”, that which we don’t find by any other mitzvohs?*
- *Why are there 3 levels, and not just 2?*
- *What is the underpinning of the disagreement between BS & BH; whether to correspond to incoming days or outgoing days?*
- *What do sacrificial-bulls of the Holiday of Sukkos have to do with Chanuka?*
- *How would BS respond to the halachic-principle of “We increase in holiness and do not decrease”? Do they disagree entirely with this?*
- *What should one do if they have a limited number of candles? On which night(s) should they light them?*

Truth be told, there is a *very* rich literature of commentaries, spanning the past 800+ years, who discuss *all* of these topics – and many, many more! – at length.

For the sake of this learning session, though, we’re going to focus our attention on one central issue: the essential nature of the mitzvah of Chanuka candles.

As a spring-board for this topic, let’s have a look at a subtle, but important, practical-halacha disagreement between the Rambam and the Rama regarding the parameters of "מהדרין מן המהדרין":

Who Lights the Candles?

Source 3. Rambam, Laws of Megillah and Chanukah 4:1-2

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.

א כִּמָּה גְרוֹת הוּא מְדַלֵּק בַּחֲנֻכָּה--מִצְוֹתָהּ שְׂיִהְיֶה כָּל בַּיִת וּבֵית מְדַלֵּק גַּר אֶחָד, בֵּין שָׂהוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת מֵרַבִּין, בֵּין שְׂלֹא הָיָה בּוֹ אֶלָּא אָדָם אֶחָד. וְהַמְהַדֵּר אֶת הַמִּצְוָה, מְדַלֵּק גְרוֹת כַּמִּנְהוּג אֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת, גַּר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד, בֵּין אֲנָשִׁים בֵּין גְּבוּרִים. וְהַמְהַדֵּר יוֹתֵר עַל זֶה וְעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה מִן הַמְּבַחֵר, מְדַלֵּק גַּר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּלִילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן, וּמוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל לַיְלָה וְלַיְלָה, אֶחָד.

ב כִּיצַד: הָרִי שְׂהוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת עֲשָׂרָה-- בְּלִילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן, מְדַלֵּק עֲשָׂרָה גְרוֹת; וּבְלִיל שֵׁנִי, עֲשָׂרִים; וּבְלִיל שְׁלִישִׁי, שְׁלוֹשִׁים; עַד שְׁנַמְצָא מְדַלֵּק בְּלִיל שְׁמִינִי, שְׁמוֹנִים.

According to the simple reading of the Rambam, **one** person lights all the candles, on everyone else's behalf: “**He** finally lights 80 on the eighth night.” In halachos 1 and 2, the Rambam always uses the third person **singular** – “**he** lights.”

As we read the next source, the final ruling of the Rema (Rabbi Moshe Isserles) in the Shulchan Aruch, compare his approach with that of the Rambam.

Source 4. Rema, Orach Chaim 671:2 – The final halachic ruling

<p>(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.²</p> <p>Note (Rema): Some say that <u>each one of the people</u> 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.</p>	<p>שלחן ערוך: כמה נרות מדליק? בלילה הראשון מדליק אחד, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך אחד בכל לילה עד שבלייל האחרון יהיו שמונה, ואפילו אם רבים בני הבית לא ידליקו יותר.</p> <p>הגה: ויש אומרים דכל אחד מבני הבית ידליק (הרמב"ם), וכן המנהג פשוט; ויזכרו לתן כל אחד ואחד נרותיו במקום מיוחד, כדי שיהא היקר כמה נרות מדליקין (מהר"א מפראג).</p>
---	--

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.

The Rambam holds that **one person**, (preferably the head of the household), lights all the candles, whereas the Rema maintains that **each individual** lights their own candles.

Question: What are they arguing about, exactly? What lies at the root of this disagreement between these two great Talmudic-giants??

What do you think?

² The opinion of the Shulchan Aruch follows that of Tosafos, Shabbos 21b, who argues with the Rambam, and maintains that the halacha of “מהדרין מן המהדרין” only qualifies “נר איש וביתו”, and not “נר לכל אחד ואחד”. The roots of this disagreement, between the Rambam and Tosafos, is, unfortunately, outside of the scope of this particular learning session ☺

3 – A CLASSIC “CHAKIRA”

Let's *carefully* consider the following famous inquiry:

יש לחקור:

What is the essential nature of the mitzvah of Chanuka candles: is it fundamentally incumbent on the individual ("חובת היחיד"), or on the house ("חובת הבית")?

In other words:

- There are some mitzvohs which are not specifically associated with any particular individual, but are, rather, associated with an object (חפצא). For example, a *mezuzah*: **you** don't need a mezuzah, **your house** needs a mezuzah! Therefore, if you move in to a dwelling where the mezuzah is already up, you don't need to do anything, since the house has fulfilled "its" obligation, so to speak.
- On the other hand, many mitzvohs are indeed associated with the individual (גברא). For example, *t'fillin*: **you** have an mitzvah to put on *t'fillin*, and just because everyone else in your household has already fulfilled their mitzvah of *t'fillin* for the day, that has in no way absolved you of **your** own personal obligation.

In which category does the mitzvah of Chanuka candles fall?

Is it an obligation on the house ("חובת הבית"), like a mezuzah, or is it an obligation on the individual ("חובת היחיד"), like t'fillin??

Practical Ramifications:

[“נפקא מינה”]

There are a number of practical ramifications which would emerge from this inquiry:

- **Guest:** What is the obligation of a guest regarding Chanuka candles?
 - If the mitzvah of Chanuka candles is fundamentally incumbent on the home, then a guest would not be personally obligated to light.³
 - If, however, the mitzvah of Chanuka candles is fundamentally incumbent on each individual, then a guest would most certainly be obligated to light his own candles.

- **Child:** May a child light on behalf of an adult?⁴
 - If, the mitzvah of Chanuka candles is fundamentally incumbent on each individual, then, since a child’s level of obligation in mitzvohs is less than that of an adult (see note below⁵), then, the general rule that one who is not (or less) obligated cannot absolve another who *is* obligated, in the latter’s fulfillment of the mitzvah⁶. Therefore, if a child had lit the candles, the adults would need to go back and do it themselves.
 - If, however, the mitzvah of Chanuka candles is fundamentally incumbent on the home, then, since the whole mitzvah is basically for the house to have candles – and is not incumbent on any particular person – a child would be able to light the candles and fulfill the mitzvah.

³ In truth, the Gemara [Shabbos 23a] says explicitly that a guest is obligated to light Chanuka candles. The **Sfas Emes**, however, explains that this Gemara is fundamentally extra-curricular, that is to say, simply to encourage the guest to fulfill the mitzvah with his own money, as an enhancement.

⁴ ע"ן שפת אמת שבת כג. ד"ה עיין בר"ן

⁵ Once a child has reached a certain level of intellectual maturity (typically 8-10 years old), he becomes rabbinically obligated in many mitzvohs, although he’s not fully obligated until he becomes ‘Bar Mitzvah’. This earlier stage of mitzvah obligation is called “*chinuch*” (חניך), the function of which is to prepare him for his eventual life as a full-fledged mitzvah machine upon reaching adulthood.

⁶ לשון הר"ן הוא ד"תרי רבנן לא מפיך חד דרבנן"

Bringin' Us Back Home!

Answer: With this “*chakira*” now well established, we can easily understand the disagreement between the Rambam and the Rema. Rabbi Asher Weiss *shlita*, a leading contemporary halachic authority, explains:

Source 5. Minchas Asher, Bereishis, 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”. Is this an obligation on the household (as opposed to other mitzvos 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 mitzvahs where one person fulfills a personal obligation through another who acts as an agent (*shaliach*). [This is the Rema’s opinion.]

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.”

וְנִרְאֶה בְּבְאוֹר שִׁטַּת הַרַמְבַּ"ם, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁטָה מִדְּבַר הַרַמְבַּ"ם, עַל פִּי מַה שֶּׁנִּשְׁ לְחַקֹּר בְּגִדְר "נֵר אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ." הָאֵם הַנִּי חוֹבַת הַבַּיִת (וְלֹא כְּשֶׁאֵר הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁהֵם חוֹב עַל הָאָדָם כְּפָרֵט) דִּהְיִינוּ: שְׁכָל בַּיִת וּמִשְׁפָּחָה יִדְלִיק נֵר. וּמִכֵּיּוֹן שֶׁהִדְלִיק בַּבַּיִת נֵר אֶחָד נִפְטְרוּ כּוֹלָם, אַף שֶׁלֹּא הִתְכַּוְּנוּ לְצַאֵת עַל יְדֵי הַמִּדְלִיק וְהוּא לֹא הִתְכַּוְּנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָם. דְּמִכָּל מְקוֹם הוֹדְלִיק נֵר בְּבַיִת זֶה וְנִפְטְרוּ כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַבַּיִת.

אוּ, דִּהְיִי כְּכָל חוֹב הַפְּרָט, אֲלֵא שֶׁאֶחָד מוֹצִיא אֶת כּוֹלָם יְדֵי חוֹבָתָם. וְצָרִיךְ שֶׁיִּכְוְנוּ לְהוֹצִיא וְלְצַאֵת כְּכָל מִצְוָה שֶׁיוֹצֵאִים בָּהּ עַל יְדֵי אַחֵרִים מִדִּין שׁוֹמֵעַ כְּעוֹנֶה אוּ מִדִּין שְׁלִיחוֹת.

וְהִנֵּה הַרַמְבַּ"ם אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁלְחוֹן עָרוֹךְ (תַּרְע"ז:ג) וּבְדַרְכֵי מִשְׁה שֶׁם פָּסֵק כְּמַהְרֵי"ל וּלְשִׁיטַתוֹ אֲזִיל בְּסִימָן תַּרְע"א שֶׁכָּתַב שְׁכָל אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הַבַּיִת יִדְלִיק לְעַצְמוֹ אֲבָל הַרַמְבַּ"ם סוֹבֵר דְּעֵצָם מִצְוֹת הַהִדְלָקָה עַל הַבַּיִת הִיא וּלְשִׁיטַתוֹ נִיחָא דְאֶחָד מִדְלִיק אֶת כָּל הַנְּרוֹת וְהַרַמְבַּ"ם וְהַרַמְבַּ"ם אֲזִיל לְשִׁיטַתוֹ בִּיסוּד דִּין נֵר אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ וְדו"ק בְּזֶה.

4 – WHY THE HOUSE?

Having clarified what the Rambam and the Rema are arguing about (i.e. whether the mitzvah of Chanuka candles is an obligation on the individual or on the house), we can now try to understand why they hold the way they do.

Seemingly, the Rema is easier to understand: *most* mitzvahs are incumbent on the individual, and, therefore, Chanuka candles should be no different.

The Rambam, however, requires elaboration: why would *Chazal*, the sages of the Talmud, who established the mitzvah of Chanuka candles, set it up as a “חובת הבית”?

1) Publicizing the Miracle

The Pnei Yehoshua (Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, Poland and Germany 1680-1756) suggests the following:

Source 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.

אָלֵא, דְּשֵׂאנֵי הֶכָּא שְׂאִין הֶכָּא עֶקֶר
הַמְצֻנָּה אֶלֵא בְּסֻמוֹת לְרֵשׁוֹת הָרַבִּים
נֶשֶׂהוּא מְשׁוּם פְּרִסוּמֵי גִיטָא. מְשׁוּם
כִּד הִטִּילוּ חֻבַּת מְצֻנָּה זֹו כְּאִילוּ
הִיא חֻבַּת הַבַּיִת. וְעַדִּין צָרִיד עֵיוֹן:

The mitzvah of Chanuka candles 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.

2) Emphasizing the Jewish-home

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.

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

. . . עָמְדוּ וַגְּזִרוּ: כֹּל בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה לוֹ
בְּרִיחַ אוֹ מִסְגָּר לְפִתְחוֹ יִדְקָר בַּחֶרֶב, וְכֹל כִּד
לְמַה כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּבוֹד וְלֹא
רֵשׁוֹת (צְנִיעוּת), שֶׁכֹּל בַּיִת שֶׁאֵין לוֹ דֶּלֶת אֵין
לוֹ כְּבוֹד וְלֹא צְנִיעוּת וְכֹל הָרוֹצֶה לְכַנֵּס נְכֻנָּס
בַּיּוֹם וּבַיּוֹם וּבַיּוֹם בְּלִילָה. כִּיִּן שָׂרְאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּד
עָמְדוּ וּבִטְלוּ כֹּל דֶּלֶתוֹת בְּתֵיהֶם וְלֹא הָיוּ
יְכוֹלִין לֹא לֶאֱכֹל וְלֹא לְשָׁתוֹת וְלֹא לְשִׁמֵּשׂ
מִטּוֹתֵיהֶם, בְּשִׁבִיל גְּנָבִין וְלִסְטִין וּפְרִיצֵי
יָנִים,

The Greeks also decreed: “Anyone whose wife goes to the mikveh will be executed by the sword!”

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.

עָמְדוּ וְגִזְרוּ: "כָּל מִי שְׂאִשְׁתּוֹ הוֹלְכָת לְטַבִּילָה יִדָּקֵר בְּחֶרֶב."

כִּיִּן שָׂרְאוּ יוֹנִים שְׂאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל מְרִגִּישִׁין בְּגִזְרוֹתֵיהֶם, עָמְדוּ וְגִזְרוּ עֲלֵיהֶם גְּזֵרָה מְרָה וְעֵכוּרָה, שְׁלֹא תִכַּנֵּס כְּלָה בְּלֵילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן מִחֻפָּתָהּ אֶלָּא אֶצֶל הַהֶגְמוֹן שְׁבִמְקוֹם הַהוּא. כִּיִּן שְׂשִׁמְעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּדְ רְפוּ יְדֵיהֶם וְתִשָּׁשׁ כַּחֲסֵם וְנִמְנְעוּ מִלְאָרֶס, וְהָיוּ בְּנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל בּוֹגְרוֹת וּמְזֻקִּינוֹת כְּשֶׁהֵן בְּתוּלוֹת.

The campaign of the Greeks against the Jews was to uproot the Jewish people’s most precious institution: family life – the home.

Therefore, the mitzvah of Chanuka candles, which was established in response to this for all subsequent generations, was constructed in direct correlation: it’s all about the home.

5 – NOTHING LESS THAN THE BEST

We'll close this learning session by re-visiting one of the glaring questions on the aforementioned Gemara: What's with the "מהדרין מן המהדרין"? Why is this unique to the holiday of Chanuka??

The Beis HaLevi explains:

Source 8. Beis Halevi on Chumash Bereishis

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.

הגהה הא דמצינו במצוה זו הדור ויותר הדור, הנראה משום דעיקר הגם תכליתו הנה רק משום הדור מצוה לחודא ולא משום עיקר המצוה. דהרי הנה בפרך שמן להדליק בו לילה אחת, והרי היו יכולים לעשות פתילות דקות ביותר שתהיה הפתילה חלק שמניית מן מה שנה רגיל להיות בכל יום מקודם. והנה מספיק לשמונה ימים, והנה מקיים עיקר המצוה. דהרי אין שיעור לעבי הפתילות. וכל הגם הנה רק משום הדור מצוה שיהיו גרות יפים כמו שיהיו מקודם. ועל כן תקנו חכמים במצוה זו הדורים יותר מבכל מצוה.

The whole Chanukah miracle with the oil was "מהדרין מן המהדרין"! They could have settled for a meek, little, faint flame. That would have been sufficient. We could have 'gotten by' with that.

But the Jewish people are not here to 'get by'. We're not here to be 'sufficient', to be 'mediocre', faint flames...we're here to be great, bright, shining flames!
We are here to be "מהדרין מן המהדרין"!

Happy Chanukah ☺