

Is There a “Right” Way to Light on Chanukah? Source Packet

Notes to Teachers and Students:

- The separations of the texts are for the purpose of clarity and organization of comprehension questions.
- The Sefaria translation includes elucidation from Rabbi Steinzaltz.

1. [Talmud Shabbat 21b](#)

תנו רבנן: מצות חנוכה, גר איש וביתו. והמהדרין, גר לקל אחד ואחד.

והמהדרין מן המהדרין, בית שמאי אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק שמנה, מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך. ובית הלל אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.

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 דמעלין בקדש 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 טעם לדבריו דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין.

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: The basic *mitzvah* of Hanukkah is each day to have a light kindled by a person, the head of the household, for himself and his household. And the *mehadrin*, i.e., those who are meticulous in the performance of mitzvot, kindle a light for each and everyone in the household.

And the *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, who are even more meticulous, adjust the number of lights daily. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree as to the nature of that adjustment. Beit Shammai say: On the first day one kindles eight lights and, from there on, gradually decreases the number of lights until, on the last day of Hanukkah, he kindles one light. And Beit Hillel say: On the first day one kindles one light, and from there on, gradually increases the number of lights until, on the last day, he kindles eight lights.

Ulla said: There were two *amora'im* in the West, Eretz Yisrael, who disagreed with regard to this dispute, Rabbi Yosei bar Avin and Rabbi Yosei bar Zevida. One said that

the reason for Beit Shammai's opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the incoming days, i.e., the future. On the first day, eight days remain in Hanukkah, one kindles eight lights, and on the second day seven days remain, one kindles seven, etc. The reason for Beit Hillel's opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the outgoing days. Each day, the number of lights corresponds to the number of the days of Hanukkah that were already observed. And one said that the reason for Beit Shammai's opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the bulls of the festival of *Sukkot*: Thirteen were sacrificed on the first day and each succeeding day one fewer was sacrificed (*Numbers* 29:12–31). The reason for Beit Hillel's opinion is that the number of lights is based on the principle: One elevates to a higher level in matters of sanctity and one does not downgrade. Therefore, if the objective is to have the number of lights correspond to the number of days, there is no alternative to increasing their number with the passing of each day.

Rabba bar bar Ḥana said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: There were two Elders in Sidon, and one of them acted in accordance with the opinion of Beit Shammai, and one of them acted in accordance with the opinion of Beit Hillel. Each provided a reason for his actions: One gave a reason for his actions: The number of lights corresponds to the bulls of the Festival. And one gave a reason for his actions: The number of lights is based on the principle: One elevates to a higher level in matters of sanctity and one does not downgrade.

2. Talmud Eruvin 13b

אמר רבי אבא אמר שמואל: שלש שנים נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל, הללו אומרים: הלכה כמותנו, והללו אומרים: הלכה כמותנו. יצאה בת קול ואמרה: אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן, והלכה כבית הלל.

Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: For three years Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagreed. These said: The *halakha* is in accordance with our opinion, and these said: The *halakha* is in accordance with our opinion. Ultimately, a Divine Voice emerged and proclaimed: Both these and those are the words of the living God. However, the *halakha* is in accordance with the opinion of Beit Hillel.

וכי מאחר שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים, מפני מה זכו בית הלל לקבוע הלכה כמותן? מפני שנוחין ועלובין היו, ושונין דברי הן ודברי בית שמאי, ולא עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי בית שמאי לדברי הן.

The Gemara asks: Since both these and those are the words of the living God, why were Beit Hillel privileged to have the *halakha* established in accordance with their opinion? The reason is that they were agreeable and forbearing, showing restraint when affronted, and when they taught the *halakha* they would teach both their own statements and the statements of Beit Shammai. Moreover, when they formulated their teachings and cited a dispute, they prioritized the statements of Beit Shammai to their own statements, in deference to Beit Shammai.

3. Mishnah Avot (Pirkei Avot) 5:17

כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, סופה להתקיים. ושאִינה לשם שמים, אין סופה להתקיים. איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי. ושאִינה לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת קרח וכל עדתו:

Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven, will in the end endure; But one that is not for the sake of Heaven, will not endure. Which is the controversy that is for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And which is the controversy that is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Korah and all his congregation.

What was the controversy of Korah and his congregation?

[Bemidbar 16:1-3](#)

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן-יִצְחָר בֶּן-קֹהַת בֶּן-לֵוִי וְדָתָן וְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן-פֶּלֶת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן וַיִּקְמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וְאַנְשִׁים מִבְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֵתִים נְשִׂאֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד אֲנָשֵׁי-שָׁם וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב-לְכֶם כִּי כָל-הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קִדְשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל-קְהַל ה':

Now Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, betook himself, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—descendants of Reuben — to rise up against Moses, together with two hundred and fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute. They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and God is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above God’s congregation?”

Here is an explanation from *Malbim*, a 19th-century commentary:

חז"ל למדונו שמחלוקת שהיא לש"ש, כל כת משני צדדי החולקים מתאחדת בעצמה כי כלם מתכונים לתכלית אחת לש"ש, אולם מחלוקת שאינה לש"ש רק מפני אהבת הכבוד ואהבת עצמו, אז יש מחלוקת ונגוד גם בין האנשים שהתאחדו לעמוד בצד אחד, כי כל אחד מן היחידים מכיין תועלת עצמו ומתנגד לכונת חברו שהוא ג"כ מכיין תועלת עצמו, כענין שהי' מחלוקת גם בין קרח ועדתו, כי כל אחד מהעדה הרעה הזאת התכוין כוונה אחרת מתנגדת לזולתו,

Our Sages taught us that a *makhloket l'sheim shamayim* (debate for the sake of Heaven) is one where each of the two sides of the debate is equally dedicated to the ultimate purpose of “for the sake of Heaven.” However, in a debate that is *lo l'sheim shamayim* (not for the sake of Heaven), members of one or both sides are motivated by

the pursuit of personal honor and status. Therefore, there is division even between the parties that came together to oppose the other side. Each has his own motivations, which may be in opposition to others in his group. (English explanation: Leah Herzog)

4. Talmud Bavli Yevamot 14b

Note to teachers and students: this section of the Talmud deals with who may and may not marry and the implications for the children of these marriages.

לא נמנעו בית שמאי מלישא נשים מבית הלל, ולא בית הלל מבית שמאי. ללמדך שחיבה וריעות נוהגים זה בזה, לקיים מה שנאמר: "האמת והשלום אהבו".

Despite the fact that these *halakhot* entail important ramifications depending on whether or not these women were married or fit for marriage, or whether their offspring were fit for marriage, Beit Shammai did not refrain from marrying women from Beit Hillel, nor did Beit Hillel refrain from marrying women from Beit Shammai. This serves to teach you that they practiced affection and camaraderie between them, to fulfill that which is stated: "Love truth and peace" (*Zechariah* 8:19).