

## Chanukah

# The Unity of the Chanukah Lights

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One of the most well-known issues of Chanukah is the debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel as to the nightly progression of the Chanukah lights. Beit Shammai maintain that one begins with eight lights and reduces one each night, ending with one. They base this on the bulls offered on Succot, which began with thirteen and were reduced each day to end with seven. Beit Hillel, on the other hand, maintain that one should begin with one light, and add each night, ending with eight lights. Their rationale is that we ascend in sanctity, and do not reduce. While the logic of Beit Hillel is intuitive, what is the connection that Beit Shammai draw between Chanukah lights and the bulls of Succot? Furthermore, what is the deeper meaning of this dispute?

Many explain that this dispute reflects a fundamental difference in approach between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel how to achieve perfection. Beit Shammai focus on the need to eliminate evil, thereby leaving the person pure and free of any taint of sin. Chazal teach us that the bulls of Succot represent the seventy nations of the world, and for this reason we reduce their number daily, to represent the weakening of the non-Jewish nations in their opposition to Israel. The Chanukah lights, as well, are **flames** to burn away evil in the goal of reaching perfection. Thus, on the first night, we need many flames to begin the process of perfection, and as we rise in spiritual perfection, we need less and less flames to continue our advance.

Beit Hillel, however, focus on the need to add holiness, and through this the evil will either be left behind or even be turned into holiness. The Chanukah lights represent the **light** of holiness that illuminates the darkness. Thus, we begin with one light on the first night and add holiness each day, elevating in holiness. The halacha, which is in accordance with Beit Hillel, emphasizes the positive approach of adding light.

The addition of more light has a compound, exponential effect. Two lights add much more holiness than twice one light, and three lights even more so. The same is true regarding many people involved together in the lighting, as Chazal say: "You cannot compare a few who are learning Torah to many who are doing so."

There is a beautiful Chanukah children's song, which highlights these ideas. It goes:

באנו חושך לגרש,  
בידינו אור ואש.

כל אחד הוא אור קטן,  
כולם אור איתן.

סורה חושך הלאה שחור,  
סורה מפני האור.

We have come to chase away darkness;  
In our hands are light and fire.

**Each one is a small light;  
But together, we are a mighty light.**

Go away darkness, move aside black;  
Go away because of the light.

Thus, when we gather together on Chanukah, in a display of worldwide unity – "together, we are a mighty light," and we have the power to chase away the darkness and bring the light of Jewish spirituality to the world!