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תשפ״ו

Hiddur Mitzvah, the Brisker Rav, and the Light We Choose to Add

Dovid Kopel

People often speak about הידור מצוה as "making mitzvos nicer." That is true on a surface level, but it can also blur an important boundary. In the Brisker derech—particularly as the בריסקער רב (הגרי״ז) frames it in his חנוכה הלכות—הידור is not just aesthetics. It is a halachic category with a formal definition: where it applies, when it applies, and what it means to "beautify" a mitzvah in a way that counts as part of the *kiyuma shel mitzvah*.

The starting point is the Rambam's ruling in הלכות מילה. The Gemara distinguishes between two stages of the milah:

1. כל זמן שהוא עוסק במילה: the mohel may remove even ציצין שאינן מעכבין (*pieces that do not invalidate the milah*).
2. Once he has פורש (*separated or stopped*): he returns only for ציצין המעכבין.

What is striking is the boundary it draws. If the "extra" were simply a general ideal of making things nicer, why should it end the moment the mohel stops? The Rambam's formulation indicates a deeper *yesod*: the so-called "extra" has meaning only בעידנא דעסיק, while the *ma'aseh hamitzvah* is still in the process of being performed.

This is the Brisker point: הידור מצוה is not a separate mitzvah you attach after the fact. It is a refinement within the מעשה המצוה itself. Once the act is complete—once the mitzvah has left the realm of "doing" and entered the realm of "done"—then adding "beauty" is no longer called הידור מצוה in the strict halachic sense. It may still be admirable, but it would be לפנים משורת הדין, not הידור מצוה.

From here emerges a clean definition:

- בתוך זמן קיום המצוה / נוי בתוך עשיית המצוה: Beauty that takes place within the performance of the mitzvah, or within its continuing fulfillment—is הידור מצוה.
- נוי מסביב: Beauty that is merely associated, attached from the outside, or added after the mitzvah is completed—may be כבוד המצוה or תשמישי מצוה, but it is not automatically the halachic *kiyum* of הידור מצוה.

This framework explains why certain cases feel different. Take the example of a beautiful תיק טלית (*tallis bag*). A tallis bag can be elegant and respectful, but when is the mitzvah of ציצית actually being fulfilled? The *kiyum* is in the מעשה ההתעטפות and the state of wearing the tallis. The bag is not part of that act; it is off to the side.

According to the Brisker definition, a beautiful bag is כבוד המצוה (honoring the *cheftza*), but it isn't הידור מצוה (enhancing the *ma'aseh*). Contrast that with מזוזה. Mezuzah is not merely a one-time hammering in of a case. The mitzvah is the enduring reality of מזוזה קבועה on the doorway. In other words, mezuzah has a continuing קיום.

So, while the true *hiddur* of a mezuzah is the כתב (*the calligraphy*), a dignified, attractive covering is more than just "packaging." It is present and functioning throughout the mitzvah's ongoing *kiyum* as without you cannot hold the mezuzah in place. In Brisker terms, it is closer to being נוי בתוך זמן קיום המצוה. It is a *tashmish* that participates in the mitzvah's living reality, rather than something added after the mitzvah has already ended.

The Brisker Rav brings this *yesod* in his understanding of the Rambam's הלכות חנוכה because Chanukah is the mitzvah where "extra" is the very structure of the mitzvah. We have a baseline: נר איש וביתו. Then comes the graded world of מהדרין and מהדרין מן המהדרין.

In the Brisker framework, these aren't enhancements *around* the mitzvah; they shape the mitzvah's very צורה. They are a higher mode of doing the mitzvah itself—precisely the definition of הידור מצוה as something *inside* the act.

Now add the בית הלוי dimension. The Jewish people technically could have managed with impure oil under the rule of טומאה הותרה בציבור. But the נס that became the heart of Chanukah happened because they insisted on שלימות ונוי—not emergency minimalism, but fulfillment with beauty. That's why Chanukah is uniquely suited to a system of *hiddur*. The very identity of the yuntif is the revelation that "light" is not only survival, it is הידור—it is fullness and clarity.

Chanukah is not only a mitzvah of an instant. The הדלקה is the beginning, but the essence is that the נר דולק and thereby creates פרסומי ניסא. This is why the halacha allows a passerby in the street to say the brachah of שעשה נסים upon seeing the lights. It proves the *kiyum* is happening throughout the burn.

If *pirsumei nissa* is ongoing, then Chanukah becomes the perfect model of the Brisker definition. Enhancing the lights is not "post-mitzvah aesthetics." It enhances the mitzvah while the mitzvah is actively being fulfilled.

הידור is, by definition, not מעכב. If it were required, it would just be the דין. Hidur exists precisely in the space where a person can honestly say: "I'm already יוצא."

And that is the real test of a Yid. If something is demanded, many will do it. But who are we when nobody is forcing us? Do we still choose to add? Do we still choose to bring more אור?

That is הידור מצוה in its deepest sense: not the beauty of silver and velvet, but the beauty of a heart that goes beyond minimum duty. It is the willingness to act לפנים משורת הדין, to do the extra חסד, the extra patience, the extra דף—because it's אמת.

Chanukah trains a person to ask: Do I add light when I don't have to? One candle is enough to be יוצא. But the Yid is invited to be a מהדר—to choose the extra mile, to choose the higher צורה. Perhaps that is the deepest פרסומי ניסא of all: not only that a candle can burn, but that a person can choose to. May we all be zoche to see light, burn that extra candle, and truly touch the lives of all of כלל ישראל.

Remember, one can be inspired by the הידור without even being the one lighting; just seeing that extra effort is enough to say a brachah.

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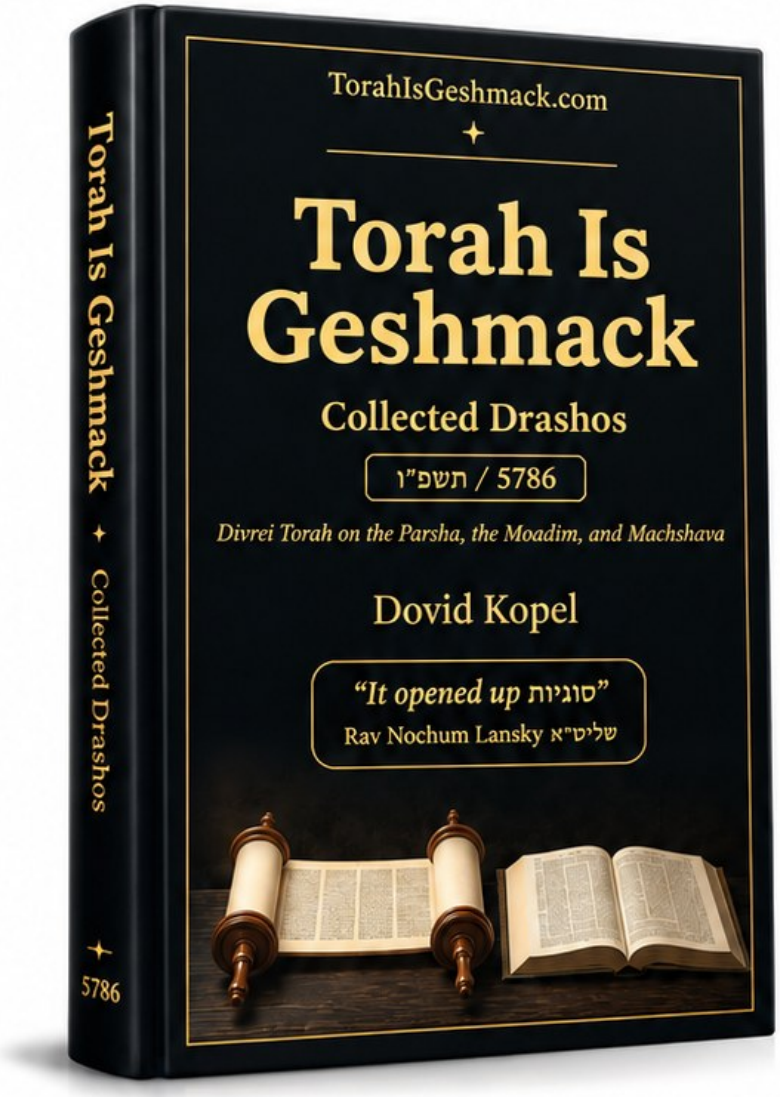
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