YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**Chanuka**

**Sicha of rAV amichai Gordin**

**The Secret of the Chanuka Candles**

Summarized by Tzachi Rauch

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

The central mitzvaof Chanuka is the lighting of the Chanuka candles. The lighting of the candles characterizes the days of Chanuka, thus a deeper understanding of the essence of the mitzvawill help us understand the essence of the holiday.

Two miracles are celebrated on Chanuka. The first is the miracle of the war: God delivered “the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few" (*Al Ha-Nissim*). The second is related to the Temple, namely, the miracle of the cruse of oil, in commemoration of which the mitzvaof lighting candles was instituted.

**The Uniqueness of the Chanuka Candles**

On the face of it, the miracle of the cruse of oil is not particularly impressive. The Greeks defiled all the oils, and the miracle was that despite everything, a single cruse of oil was found sealed with the seal of the High Priest, and it lasted for eight days. Greater miracles have certainly been performed for the people of Israel, that we do not commemorate at all!

For instance – the miracles that were performed for Yehoshua bin Nun upon entering the Land of Israel, such as the splitting of the Jordan and the fall of the walls of Yericho, seem greater than the miracle of the cruse of oil, yet we do not commemorate them. And these are just two among the many great miracles God has performed for the people of Israel. What, then, is special about the miracle of the cruse of oil, which we commemorate for all generations through the lighting of the candles?

We can relate this question to a question about the laws of Chanuka. A *beraita* states that the mitzvais to light the candle just outside the door of the house, but then immediately adds that while this is true during normal times, "in a time of danger, he places it on his table and that suffices" (*Shabbat* 21b). The mitzvaof *pikuach nefesh* sets aside all *mitzvot* of the Torah, thus one might have thought the *beraita* would simply establish that in a time of danger, Chanuka lights are not to be lit at all. Instead, the *beraita* explains that it was established *within the framework of the original enactment* that in a time of danger, one fulfills the mitzva by lighting inside the house.

This is surprising: Where do we find such a "concession," stemming from danger, that affects the parameters of the mitzvaitself? Is it possible to build a *sukka* inside the house, and not under the open sky? Is it possible to affix a *mezuza* elsewhere, instead of on a doorpost? Is it possible to blow something other than a *shofar* and still fulfill one's obligation?

**"The Light of Mashiach"**

The answer to both of these questions relates to the essence of the days of Chanuka. First, as for the miracle, indeed the miracle of the cruse of oil sounds less impressive than other miracles – however, we are not celebrating the miracle itself, but rather what it represents. In a somewhat “yeshivish”formulation, we can say that the miracle is not the *reason* for the celebration, but an *indication* that there is something to celebrate, as we shall see below.

Rabbi Hutner, in his book *Pachad Yitzchak* on Chanuka, explains that on every holiday, we celebrate not only what was, but also that which is happening now: On Pesach, we depart to freedom *now*; on Shavuot, we receive the Torah *now*; on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we stand in judgment before God *now*; etc. We are not satisfied with marking a historical event, but also celebrate what is happening now.

So too on Chanuka, we do not only mark the military victory or the miracle of the cruse of oil that happened back then, but also what is happening now. We are supposed to experience something now, and in essence, in a borrowed sense, to light the *menora* of the Temple – in our home. This is the secret of Chanuka: we are lighting the *menora* in our own home.

The accomplishment of the Chashmonaim can be contrasted with that of King Yoshiyahu, the great warrior against idolatry. It would seem that in spiritual terms, Yoshiyahu was the best king the people of Judah ever had, yet he died young. The Sages explain that he indeed brought great improvements, but only externally. The public square was free of idolatry, but inside people's homes, they continued to worship idols. In contrast, the Hasmoneans brought about a repair from within, from the people's homes.

A *midrash* relating to the story of Yehuda and Tamar conveys the importance of focusing on the home: "The brothers were engaged in the sale of Yosef, Yosef was engaged in his sackcloth and his fasting, Reuven was engaged in his sackcloth and his fasting, Yaakov was engaged in his sackcloth and his fasting, Yehuda was engaged in getting married, and the Holy One, blessed be He, was engaged in creating the light of the Messianic king" (*Bereishit Rabba*, *Vayeshev* 85). From whom does God create the light of Mashiach? From Yehuda, who was not busy with fasting but rather with the betterment of the world, through the building of his own home.

Now we can understand the uniqueness of the miracle of the cruse of oil, as well as the *halakha* that the Chanuka candles can be lit inside the house. On Chanuka, we commemorate not only the miracle, but also that which the miracle reflects, the continued building of the light of Mashiach. The light of Mashiach grows first from the construction of the private, personal house, and only later does it break out and light the world.

**Conclusion**

In practice, we rule in accordance with Beit Hillel, and in the most ideal way – *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin –* we first light a single candle, then another candle, and another candle, and in the end, there is a great light. This great light comes not from outside, but from within. We light this light in the private home and in the synagogue.

On Chanuka, we must remind ourselves that in essence, all year long we are busy building the light of Mashiach. It is our duty to light candles at home and in the synagogue. And that small candle will ultimately grow into a great light.

[This *sicha* was delivered by Rav Gordin before the lighting of the Chanuka candles in the *beit midrash* on the 27th of Kislev, 5777.]