YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**The Dual Nature of Chanuka**

**Based on a sicha by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein**

Adapted by Dov Karoll

There are two miraculous events commemorated by Chanuka: ner, the miracle of the oil, and milchama, the military victory. What characterizes each of these miracles?

The miracle of the ner was defined and limited in its scope. It took place in the inner sanctum of the Temple, and was visible to a very limited group of people, namely, the Kohanim performing the Temple service.

The military victory, on the other hand, was very broad in its scope, both in terms of the nation and the land. Their victory stretched out across the entire country. Everyone was involved in and affected by the victory.

These two elements reflect different foci for the miracle: the ner focused on the Temple, while the milchama was relevant to the nation as a whole. Despite the apparent disparity between these two elements, there is a strong bond between them.

In one sense, the Temple is the focal point of the nation. This idea is reflected in Shlomo's prayer upon the completion of the first Temple (I Melakhim 8:12-53). This notion is also reflected in the prophecies of Yeshayahu and Mikha that speak of everyone's eyes being turned to the Temple. The Gemara (Shabbat 22b and Torat Kohanim, Emor 13, cited by Rashi, Vayikra 24:3) speaks of the menora, the candelabrum of the Temple, as providing testimony to the world that the Divine Presence resides amongst the Jewish people.

In another sense, "light" emerges and spreads from the Temple. That is, the Temple serves as source of inspiration and instruction for the Jewish people. Correspondingly, the nation is gathered and centered around the Temple. The nation's existence is dependent on its loyalty to the principles of the Temple, to its absolute purity, represented by the strictly pure olive oil ("shemen zayit zakh").

These elements are meant to coexist, and severing them from each other leads to severe problems. Some people are connected to and involved with the Temple, yet are disconnected from, and uninvolved with, the nation. Those who focus on "strictly pure olive oil" sometimes forget about the rest of the nation. Others have the opposite problem: they are disconnected from the Temple and its "strictly pure olive oil."

To a certain degree, these are practical differences: those who work in the Temple tend to be more in touch with the issues there, while those who live far away will tend to be more involved with the issues that relate in an immediate sense to their own existence. The question is to what extent there is also a deeper chasm, on the existential plane and in the world of values. If these gaps exist on the axiological level, there can be a danger for each camp, Heaven forfend. The Temple cannot exist without a nation; conversely, the nation of Israel cannot exist without identification with the Temple and its related codes.

There is only one Chanuka, during which we relate to both of these themes and to their intertwined nature. We need to relate to the entire Jewish community, and formulate one integrated worldview.

The Chashmonaim were devoted to the Temple and the Kehuna, the priesthood, and succeeded in military and diplomatic terms as well. The Ramban (Bereishit 49:10) criticizes the Chashmonaim for taking political control, violating the warning of Yaakov, "Rule shall not stray from Yehuda." Nonetheless, the Chashmonaim took political power, for they saw the existential dangers that could result from a separation between these two elements.

In our time we can speak of similar issues. Let us focus on the Religious Zionist community in Israel. This community has prided itself on attempting to create a single Chanuka, with the "strictly pure olive oil" along with concern for the larger Jewish community, for its physical and spiritual welfare. That is its manifesto and its goal.

What have been its accomplishments? Over the last generation or two, the progress has been significant. The quantity and quality of Torah study in our community has risen significantly, as has the level of religious observance. The situation in this regard is sparkling, relative to what it used to be.

However, I am concerned by signs of a retreat from these accomplishments, by certain negative trends that have emerged in the last five to ten years. One problem is that many Religious Zionists have ceased to act out of concern for spiritual condition of the community - even of the religious community, and how much more so for that of the non-religious community. Another problem is a weakened sense of loyalty and devotion to traditional learning, to "the disputes of Abbaye and Rava," straying instead in other directions, of unfounded "spirituality" and baseless opinions.

We have a clear responsibility to Chanuka: both to the ner aspect, as well as to the national struggle. We must protect our people against external enemies, as well as against foreign spirits that may not enter through the door, but somehow slip through the window.

We need to exhibit commitment to "strictly pure olive oil" and all that it represents. And we need to strive to contribute to the shaping of the future of the State of Israel, the land of Israel, the nation of Israel, guided by the Torah of Israel, following the spirit of our forefather Israel.

If we succeed at girding our loins for this lofty task, and we are able to care for both the "strictly pure olive oil" and the nation, and achieve their ideal synthesis, then we will create the conditions for tremendous growth.

[This sicha was delivered at the Yeshiva's mesibat Chanuka, on the eighth night of Chanuka, 5762 (2001).]