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Kislev 11, 5780

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Notes by Beverly Kaplinsky

## **Chanukah Drasha 5780**

### **Chanina Ben Dosa and the Arvad**

We are going to be going through the story of Chanukah in a practical and measurable way, but before I begin, I would like to dedicate this class to the refuah shleimah and shalom bayis of an anonymous participant.

I will start our drasha by saying how much I like when all of our chaburas come on the line together. I look forward to enjoying this Chanukah experience with you all.

We will begin with a story about R' Chanina Ben Dosa. He was a Tanna in the time of the gemara, and was an other-worldly character to say the least. In the gemara in Berachos, it talks about a time when there was a poisonous snake, in the neighborhood of Chanina Ben Dosa. It was killing people. The people of the community came to Rav Chanina Ben Dosa and asked what they should do. He said, "Bring me to the snake's hole." So they did, and he put his heel over the hole and the snake came out and bit him, and the snake died.

Chanina Ben Dosa then took the dead snake, called an *arvad*, on his shoulders and carries it to the beis medrash. He says to the students learning there "My sons now you see that an *arvad* doesn't kill, sin kills." The students said in reply "Woe to the man that meets an *arvad*, and woe to the *arvad* that meets Rav Chanina Ben Dosa." It is a very strange way of describing what is happening.

What was their reply saying? In a very nice way they are saying something that needs to be said. What is it? They are saying that poisonous snakes do kill people on their level, but on Chanina ben Dosa's level they don't.

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Behind the scenes here is a behind the scenes idea. Chanina Ben Dosa was on a level where he really saw and believed that. On his level there is no such thing as a poisonous snake. It is just a mashal for the material world. He knew something deeper. It is only sin that causes death. That is 100% true for him. But what about people who are not on his level?

The moral of the story is that Chanina Ben Dosa knew that everything in the world is from Hashem. Once you know that – everything is given over into your hands.

What is the message that he is trying to tell us and this is connected to Chanukah?

Now we will take a 15 minute tangent. This is the introduction.

### **The Opportunity of Chanukah**

There is a concept of “three strikes and you are out” regarding the judgment for the year. The first time, on Yom Kippur we are judged at Neilah. The second judgement is on Hoshana Raba and the third is on Chanukah.

After Yom Kippur there is a din of judgement, there is a paper with our sentence given on Yom Kippur. It is taken now from the Judge to the messenger to be delivered to your house. So if you do teshuva before it gets to the messenger, the din gets torn up. That is Hoshana Raba.

If not, the messenger rides off, and he arrives to your precinct right before Chanukah.

So he is holding the sentence in his hands. If you do teshuva before Chanukah, it will get torn up instead of being handed over to the executioner. So the whole first quarter of the year all comes down to Chanukah. All of the chagim are coming to Chanukah.

There is something so powerful about Chanukah. It can correct the whole first quarter of the year!

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There is an opportunity to make it right, to do teshuva in a profound way, you can turn around the whole year. Even if you didn't do the work of Elul, or Tishrei, or any work in the first quarter, for whatever justified or unjustified reasons, you can turn it all around now.

Here we are 2 weeks before Chanukah. Let's see all the different categories of people who have been doing their Elul work until now.

CAVEAT: When we talk about the Elul Plan this is when people make resolutions and do teshuva, for those who are not in the regular chaburas this is how we describe it, it is mainly resolutions and a plan for the year started in Elul.

There are 7 categories of people who do their Elul plans:

**1:** The highest level are people who made a yearly direction and are working on it and are empowered and moving forward. They have practical measurables and standards for their goals for verbally introspecting daily. But that doesn't mean everything is succeeding. As a matter of fact you can be working very hard, it is very common to have set-backs and failures. The point is you're trying hard and moving forward.

It doesn't mean you are succeeding, but you really feel you are moving forward and making the year a reality.

**2.** On the opposite extreme there are those who didn't make any plans or resolutions and may be feeling a little aimless at this time. Maybe they had reasons they couldn't continue with their Elul plan for reasons out of their control, like a big family move, or a baby or the like. Others may have gotten overwhelmed, or their kids being home in Elul kept them from doing the deep work of Elul. Whatever it was.

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3. The third group made a yearly direction, maybe more intuitive people, but it is all fuzzy and foggy, they aren't totally plugged into it and it isn't empowering them.

4. There are those who made a yearly direction and it wasn't fuzzy. But they got swept away by the tides, maybe they got lost in chagim and the catching up after chagim, and they never got back on track.

5. There are some who made a yearly direction and they are very serious about it, but they never made it practical and brought it down. Their yearly direction really hits the spot, but they never made measurables for it or scheduled it and so they can't move forward in a clear way.

6. There are some who made a yearly direction and really worked on making it a reality but they realized it wasn't authentic for them. It isn't the real them. This happens a lot in marriage. People will ignore their needs to take care of their children and spouse, but it doesn't work for them. They committed to spending more time with their family but then they find they are over-committed and struggling with value or direction conflicts.

7. There are those who made a yearly direction and are working to bring it into reality, but they are overcommitted. There are very ambitious people who take on too much and they are very well-meaning but haven't learned the skill of living in time and space. They have a blind spot in this area because they are very spiritual and ambitious.

All of these above categories are correctable now. (The first needs no correction). It is all correctable.

We are two weeks before Chanukah. We have an opportunity for a mini Elul review. Ask ourselves, 'Where are we on this Elul spectrum?' Let's block out some time between now and Chanukah to ask ourselves how we can make this work more real. How can we be

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focused on our yearly direction? What is my next step? What are my goals for the year? Do I have the things to make my yearly direction a reality?

Now is the time in the next two weeks to schedule some quality time to do corrective work and reengage now to make the rest of the year happen.

G-d is giving us a tremendous third chance. We have the opportunity to create miracles in our lives. This is the time of year to create miracles.

There is a tremendous opportunity to grab something right now.

It says that bracha is not found except in something that is hidden from the eye. These next 2 weeks are allegorically hidden, it is the darkest time of the year. There is a special opportunity before the light cycle turns around to make miraculous things happen to you.

We are going to learn how to create miracles in our lives. The whole first quarter of the year depends on what we are doing in these next two weeks!

If we do the right things now we can turn around the whole year!

### **Creating Above Nature Reality**

We will be learning some Jewish history with a tint of the primal battle for reality, things above nature and within nature. The behind-the-scenes story of Chanukah.

There is a man called Shimon HaTzaddik. He was a kohen gadol in the second Beis HaMikdash. He lived in the generation before the story of Chanukah. This was a time period of open miracles. He was an above time and space character. One of the miracles of the lifetime of Shimon HaTzaddik was that the menorah in the Beis HaMikdash remained lit at all times, his whole life. At this time period, this whole generation lived above time and space. They were living in a miraculous world, in the world of the impossible in a way that was almost normal. I want you to keep your eyes on this symbol – what happened here.

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What are the ups and downs of the story? There is a primal, behind the scenes, underground battle.

In this generation, a new man comes on the scene. His name is Alexander the Macedonian. In English we call him Alexander the Great – but our rabbis do not call him this. He is 32 years old. The whole civilized world. He conquers the Persian Empire, and now he is on the way to Eretz Yisroel.

Shimon HaTzaddik was the leader of the Jewish people and now Alexander is coming to Jerusalem. In those days when a nation came to conquer you, they rape and pillage first and then they ask questions later. Shimon HaTzaddik knew if Alexander the Macedonian came to Eretz Yisroel it would be horrible for the Jewish people. So he goes out to meet Alexander on the way to Eretz Yisroel and an incredible thing happened. I am not going into the details of the story but basically Shimon HaTzaddik tells Alexander the Macedonian that he was looking for a peaceful conquest of Eretz Yisroel and Alexander agreed. In honor of the peaceful conquest every male born that year was named Alexander and it becomes a Jewish name.

This is the generation before Chanukah.

So the Greeks came in and conquered the land in a peaceful way. Something interesting happened. The Jews had never met a thinking nation before, and they were astounded by this.

The Jews discuss philosophy with the Greeks, with the kevana of mekareving them. Those who went out to mekarev the Greeks, they were not 100% *l'shma* – meaning, they were not doing it entirely for the right reasons. They ended up being mekareved to Greek philosophy. It is very important that when you are trying to influence others that your intentions are pure. Since at this time their intentions were not pure, the negativity of the Greeks overcame them and many Jews became Hellenized.

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Rav Dessler has a whole article on what is purity and how it is that this happened. On a more primal level we are seeing a battle going on. The battle for the soul of the world. What is going on?

The Jewish people represent the above nature reality. Greeks represent nature. What you see is what you get. Shimon HaTzaddik represents above nature reality, and there is a nisayon/challenge with Alexander the Macedonian coming and conquering the land. It ends up the Jewish people were not able to succeed in this nisayon. They were not able to withstand the test and got infected with Greek philosophy.

Alexander the Macedonian dies, and his four generals fight and divide his empire into four parts. Eretz Yisroel is mostly in the Syrian-Greek Empire and this is bad news. It is getting worse. Most of the Jewish people became Hellenized but the traditional sect refused to yield. So the king Antiochus levels on the Jewish people one decree after another, and this is the story of Chanukah that we know.

The traditional Jews run into caves and learn Torah, the Greeks are hunting them out, and they are all playing dreidel outside which is where we get the history of dreidel. Basically in the beginning of the Chanukah story there is tremendous despair and hopelessness. The spiritual level of the Jewish people is decimated. One decree after another, there is no hope! That is the theme of Chanukah. Darkness, decimation, hopelessness, no way out.

The Greeks come to the city of Modi'in and they want the Jews to sacrifice a pig on the alter. And the Hellenized Jews do it. Matisyahu and his sons begin a guerilla war. How is this possible? The Greek army has hundreds of thousands of well-armed men, and the Jewish army had 10,000. These are Torah Jews living in caves. What are the odds that 10,000 poorly armed and poorly trained rebels are going to beat the greatest army in the world? No chance!

But there is a secret. This is a secret that Matisyahu knows. It is seemingly a suicide mission he took on, but he wasn't scared at all. Matisyahu knew that the Greeks had no power- all power is from Hashem!

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Matisyahu understood that the material world is a grand illusion. There is nothing intrinsic in the material world. There is nothing other than the power given to it by Hashem. So in his mind, 10,000 poorly armed and trained Jewish soldiers could of course beat the Greek army! He knew *ain od milvado*. Everything is from Hashem! G-d can give power to the Greek army and G-d can give power to the Jewish army.

Matisyahu knew with 100% experiential clarity *ain od milvado*, there is nothing other than Hashem.

And that is how it was. The Jewish people conquer the Greeks, they conquer Yerushalayim, they rededicate the Temple. The Jewish people are restored, except for one thing. They need to light the menorah. As we all know they only had enough oil for one day. They light the menorah and we know what happened. The flames lasted for 8 days – a great miracle occurred.

Something doesn't make sense. Going back to the beginning of the story we ask the question – what is the big deal that the oil lasted for 8 days? In the days of Shimon HaTzaddik it lasted a whole lifetime. What is the big deal?

The answer is it wasn't about the miracle of the 8 days. There is an undercurrent of the story. The Jewish people at the time of Shimon HaTzaddik were on the level where they were above time and space. When the Jewish people were conquered by the Greeks they got deluded. An evil energy or force of the Greeks entered into the collective soul of the Jewish people. They lost their above time and space reality. They fell into spiritual impurity.

Hashem orchestrated the whole Chanukah story so that the Jewish people would fall into an impossible situation that couldn't be corrected by natural means. Unless the Jewish people, on a collective level, choose to live in this above time and space reality, they would have assimilated entirely into Greek culture.

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Matisyahu and his sons began this rebellion and this rebellion made a stand for living in the world of the impossible, of living above time and space, with the knowledge that Hashem is the One that gives power to all of the natural world.

The battle is over. The rededication happens. But Matisyahu and his sons don't know if they completed the tikkun. Did they get back to the level of Shimon HaTzaddik? They needed a sign. Then they found the oil. It was hidden away with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. This was a relic from the days of yore. They understood something miraculous may happen with this oil and it did. It lasted for 8 days and they knew they had completed the tikkun.

The number 8 symbolizes above nature reality. The oil burns for 8 days. Hashem makes a sign and they know it was complete.

There is something even deeper going on. There is this thing called the collective Jewish soul which is connected at a certain spot of the neshama. It is called the *p'nim hap'nim*. The inner part of the inner part of the Jewish soul where all Jewish souls are connected. The tikkun of Matisyahu and his sons was on the level of all Jewish souls. Not only did they fix up their generation, but they fixed up the souls of all the generations of all the Jewish souls for all time. This means the level of dedication they achieved, with their level of mesiras nefesh and the power of it fixed up the Jewish soul for all eternity.

This means the power of being above time and space is within the Jewish soul. It is within us already. It is a collective part of our being. When Matisyahu and his sons did it, they did it for all the Jewish people. They reached the deepest part of the collective Jewish soul so it altered every Jewish soul for all eternity.

We have this above time and space reality in us. This precious gift Matisyahu gave us sometimes gets covered up, sullied. The rabbis want us to reconnect every year. This is the mitzvah of the candle-lighting. Every time we light the candles we are connecting to the inner part of the inner part of the soul. It is our birth right that we are connecting to, this inner reality. Once a year, on the eight nights of Chanukah we light the Chanukah menorah.

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By doing so we clean up the things that block us up. We reconnect to the inner part of the inner part of our soul which is our birthright, which is rising above nature reality.

Every year, every night there is a 30-40 minute time period after lighting to sit and connect to and look at the candles. If you connect to it, to daven or pray. But even just looking at it, this cleans us out and connects us to the heritage of Matisyahu and his sons. This is the time we reconnect to our birthright to live above time and space. This is the time we pray for our children and grandchildren, our life and our Elul plan. To transcend and rise above the vicissitudes of life.

The secret of all this is hidden in the names of Matisyahu ben Yochanan. Mem-tav-tav-yud-key-vav. Matat means a present. Yud-key-vuv are 3 of G-d's letters. This means everything is present from Hashem, Ben, the son of, yud vav (2 letter of Hashem's name) Chanan, bestows.

Matisyahu's full name means, everything is a present from Hashem, the son of the one who bestows, Hashem is the giver. Even if you just believe that the impossible is achievable that is a level in and of itself. The more we know that everything is from Hashem, then proportionally, to that extent we have the ability to rise above to the world of miracles.

The whole concept of Chanukah, right now we are in the period of the great Greek wars, until we arrive at the Temple on Chanukah day. This is our time to take out our allegorical swords and dedicate to this concept of living above time and space. Stretching to the world of the impossible.

The thing we need to know is that it is in us already. It is part of our birthright and inner reality, this is who we are and what we are all about.

### **It is Not All or Nothing. Create Miracles by Stretching**

You may think now, if I cannot reach the level of Matisyahu and his sons by Chanukah I lose out. It is not all or nothing. It is incremental. Whatever level you are on, that is the

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level of miracles you get. If you are on a level 2 of believing Hashem does everything, *ain od milvado*, you get level 2 miracles. If you are on level 5 you get level 5 miracles.

Our goal now is to stretch 15-20% for recreating our Elul plan and help us to rise to the next level. Miracles are available to us, even mini miracles based on our level.

Rav Dessler talks about this matter and he explains that it is not all of these concepts of transcendence and breaking through goes in a leveled way. Rav Dessler is talking about how the great tzaddikim transcend, but it also applies to us on our lowly level.

“There are those people who compared to the tzaddikim are like animals. That like animals all of their thoughts are in the matter of their bodies. How much suffering people suffer for a lack of honor and money. How attached are they to their recreation and games. Someone who rises above this life and gives himself over to a life of Torah nullifies this lack of recreation or suffering from a lack of money. These things don't bother them at all.

Similarly by us, with the small suffering with overcoming the laziness of body and thinking, someone who strengthens himself and rises above them many times and sees the richness that is Torah and avodas Hashem, sees that these sufferings do not bother him and he doesn't feel them at all.”

Every time we break out of the body a little bit and we rise and take our next step in avodas Hashem, and then we look backwards, we see that after you transcended incrementally, those things looking back don't bother you at all.

After you have transcended the body doesn't affect you in that area. “Every point of going out from under the yolk of the body and its seductions, behold, this is an aspect of the revelation of the geula/redemption.” This is what we call Olam Haba Consciousness.

This is all on an incremental level. “When someone sees something that yesterday was hard for him, that they are an illusion and a dream, in this way he redeems himself to spiritual redemption.”

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“This is a way of going up from one level to another. When he was on a lower level what appeared as a barrier was just an illusion, when he attaches himself to spiritual life, it is a life of truth and an eternal life.”

That is what we need to do. We need to look back, and remember being on a lower level where something appeared to be a huge barrier and it was just an illusion. Now on a higher level it doesn't even phase me at all. This is the secret whereby Bnei Torah overcome all of their hardships and learn Torah.

“Those who stand on the outside and say “How is this possible? How do they live the lives they live?” Those people on the outside looking in live a life of illusion. For them it appears that those who learn are suffering, but for him that learns Torah there is no suffering at all.”

Rav Dessler is saying that on our level it also applies. On our level it is also revealed, the secret of transcendence. To rise above them and see that suffering is nothing except a total illusion. Then he gives a *bracha* – “Hashem should help us to reach a level of true attachment to Torah and avodah and see the vanity and illusion in a life of materialism. We should merit the splendor and light of the eternal Torah.”

This process is not an all or nothing thing – to be great and perfect immediately. Go back and say, ‘Last year I thought this was impossible and now I am living it! Amazing! Look at that! I never thought I could do it last year. Here I am doing it. Living this aspect of life, and I am doing it – a miracle!’

Now we can look forward and say next year I can also live the impossible.

### **Taking it Back to the Elul Plan**

Right now there is tremendous opportunity in the next two weeks to create a miracle in your life. They are literally Rosh Hashana all over again. We can recreate our year.

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Even if it is a dark time and feels hopeless, this is precisely the time of miracles. We want to make a step forward, a stretch.

I am coaching someone and can share his story with his permission. This guy has a serious insomnia issue which is messing up his whole days. He didn't know what to do. He read about 10 or 15 ways to work on sleep hygiene. He has a smart phone. He is a very industrious guy. So whenever he can't sleep he does work and gets a lot done. What do the sleep hygiene wisdom all say? Get the smart phone out of the room. He said - what if I wake up at night? He decided he would stretch and put his smart phone on airplane mode and put it out of the room. It was really hard for him but things finally changed for him. He learned all these amazing things about his relationship to his smart phone.

The very fact that it was in his room fired him up, but when it was out of the room he was able to relax. He could go to the next level in his sleep journey. He made a 10% jump by breaking his mini addiction to his smart phone during the night and he had *siyata d'shmaya*, help from G-d.

Now things are really moving for him in the insomnia way.

Why am I sharing this? Because it doesn't have to be all or nothing. It just has to be a meaningful next step, a stretch, to achieve something, a mini miracle that seems impossible.

I have many times in the past where I had a very complex coaching case and we were stuck and then we stretch like 20% and we did it and it enabled us to see the next step.

Choose something in your Elul plan that is a stretch, 10-20%, that is hard for you and make a mental jump to doing what seems impossible, a mini miracle in your life. You don't have to solve the whole thing. There is unique power in this year to have very special things happen.

## **Review**

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Part one of the story is the concept that the final chasima is happening on Chanukah. There is a special tikkun in the air, but all of the amazing and fantastic things that occur in Elul and Tishrei, can be corrected on whatever level before Chanukah, the decree can be annulled.

Right now there is a special energy in the next two weeks, it is a hidden and miraculous thing. The lights have been shut off which has enabled you to do things as if no one can see and get to powerful places.

There are all the 7 types of paradigms for how people are progressing with their Elul plans at this stage. These two weeks offer all of them the opportunity for complete correction, a mini Elul plan miracle.

Then we explored the primal battle of Shimon HaTzaddik and Alexander the Macedonian, and it continued to Matisyahu and Antiochus. How the Jewish people related to their above nature reality. Matisyahu means everything is a gift from G-d. Their mesiras nefesh corrected the soul of the Jewish people for all eternity and brought us back to the level of being above time and space. This is available to us, and candle-lighting every year reconnects us to it.

The miracle was not that the oil lasted but that it signified we returned to the level of Shimon HaTzaddik and the tikkun was complete.

So every year at candle lighting we are able to connect to the world of miracles on our level.

Then we explored Rav Dessler who told us it is not all or nothing guys. It is every one of us, on whatever level we are at. We look back on our year and say, 'What did we create in our lives?' Just like I believed I couldn't do it then I know I can do something miraculous in the future.

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Every time we transcend this world we are connecting ourselves to the light of redemption.  
To Olam Haba consciousness.

This power is available now, let's somehow stretch to do something hard on our level, that we are motivated to do, and somehow take something in our life and move it up a level. Let's see the impossible on our level. It is about taking a meaningful next step and stretching.

Let's understand the power of Chanukah and the opportunity that lies before us, the power of the candle-lighting and may we all merit in this amazing auspicious time to truly rise to a higher reality, and live an above nature life and get our birthright back and get it on our own level in a way that is authentic and meaningful and powerful for us.

Everyone should have a wonderful Chanukah and may we all merit to rise to the level of miracles on our own level.