

כ"ח כסלו תשע"ט
אור לנר ד' בחנוכה

LEARNING WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT יבימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול

As we celebrate the חג of חנוכה, the first words we say that distinguish these days from

all other days of the year are these very words. I get why we talk about מתתיהו, as the miracle was done through him. It would seem, however, that saying that he was יוחנן's son is irrelevant information. What role did יוחנן have in the חנוכה story? While discussing יוחנן, who was he, anyways?

The very nature of who יוחנן was is a matter of debate in the גמרא.² There is a מחלוקת between רבא and אבבי, in which אבבי states that יוחנן כהן גדול was actually המלך ינאי, who killed out the חכמים. The history doesn't work out according to אבבי, so we say his opinion is really talking about the ideology of יוחנן, which was equal to that of המלך ינאי. However, רבא says while ינאי was evil from the beginning, יוחנן was a צדיק, and then turned to a life of evil. This גמרא starts off with a quote from the משנה³ of "אל תאמין בעצמך עד יום מותך", "do not believe in yourself until the day you die." This doesn't mean to not "believe in yourself" in terms of when your parents are trying to give you encouragement, but the משנה is warning us not to rest on our laurels, as the יצר הרע is always ready to attack. No matter what stage we are at in our lives, the יצר הרע knows exactly when and how to get us, and we can't let our guard down. Even if we don't think it's possible to sink so low, it's possible.⁴ רבינו יונה, bringing down the paradigmatic case of someone who was a צדיק and went off the דרך, chose our גמרא, which brings down that before יוחנן became a צידוקי, he served as the כהן גדול for 80 years.

If this was so, why was יוחנן worthy of being the father of מתתיהו, who would save the Jewish People in the חשמונאי revolt? After the revolt was over and the חנוכה story played out, the חשמונאים remained kings until the Romans took control. However, the חשמונאי dynasty was corrupt. One of the famous חשמונאי kings was ינאי himself, the great-grandson of מתתיהו. The תפילה specifically tells us מתתיהו was the son of יוחנן to show that even though his father rebelled against Judaism, מתתיהו was not influenced at all, as יוחנן was a צדיק when he was raising מתתיהו. Because he was a צדיק, even though he later turned to a life of evil, he was זוכה to his son redeeming the Jewish People.⁵ This teaches us that at times, although we may slip up, we should also never forget the good we did, as יוחנן will always make sure we get rewarded for it, just as He made sure to repay יוחנן.⁶

The גמרא⁷ brings down that the story of חנוכה is אינה ניתנה לכתוב, not meant to be written down. This is because תורה שבעל פה is that which the צידוקים deny. Because יוחנן went off the דרך, the nature of the miracle of חנוכה had to be that which combatted the צידוקי belief. Why is that? יוחנן was the כהן גדול for 80 years. There was a little slip-up which occurred, and he leaned towards those who denied the legitimacy of תורה שבעל פה. To counteract and rectify this mistake, the product of יוחנן, being מתתיהו and the חשמונאים, had to show that the תורה שבעל פה has the power to change all future generations. In the זכות of Jews celebrating חנוכה every year, eventually the sin of יוחנן will be forgotten.⁸

¹ תפילת על הניסים לחנוכה

² ברכות כט.

³ אבות ב.ד.

⁴ רבינו יונה על אבות שם

⁵ דברי שאול מגילה יא.

⁶ חשוקי חמד (הרב יצחק זילברשטיין) יבמות כד. בשם הרה"ג רב חיים קנייבסקי

⁷ יומא כט.

⁸ בני יששכר, מאמר הלל והודאה, כה

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LEARNING WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT

To explain the בני יששכר, we have to look at the unique aspects of the הלכות of חנוכה. We know that when lighting the מנורה, the basic custom is נר איש וביתו, where one candle is lit in the house every night. Above that, we have מהדרין, and then we have the ultimate level of performance, מהדרין מן המהדרין. The רבנן were מתקן on everyone who is financially able to perform the level of מהדרין מן המהדרין, which we still do to this very day. The צידוקי belief is to go against the rulings of the רבנן, and straight out of the תורה שבכתב. By having and requiring extra levels, we show the חביבות of מצוות דרבנן; how we go out of our way to fulfill that which wasn't even required by הקב"ה, because we love His תורה so much.⁹

The מצוות דרבנן are so important, because even the תורה tells us to keep them.¹⁰ We have חנוכה to teach us that even though we may forget it sometimes, the רבנן are just making sure we keep the תורה to the utmost degree possible. That's why they enact so many "annoying" חומרות. As the days of חנוכה are drawing to a close, let us take this message to heart, and keep the הלכה as best as we can, whether דאורייתא or דרבנן. This past ערב חנוכה marked the first יארצייט of הרב אהרן מרן הגאון הרב אהרן of יארצייט. לייב שטיינמן. Oftentimes, people only recognize the impact someone has made on this world when they're no longer here. We shouldn't take what we have for granted, rather we should appreciate it before it's all gone. It's a shame that sometimes we need צידוקים to teach us that, but that's what the משנה¹¹ means when it says we must be able to learn from everybody. We should all be זוכה to achieve this מדרגה, which will develop into a love for every person we learn from. This love of everyone should be a catalyst to rectifying the sin of חינוך, and should be a זכות for the בימיו במהרה.

⁹ מועדים וזמנים (הרה"ג רב משה שטרנבוך), ב.קלז

¹⁰ דברים יז.א

¹¹ אבות ד.א