

Our Vulnerability to Mockery- The Rasha's Question

פרשת מצורע

We live in a world in which negativity towards Judaism is often expressed through mockery, rather than respectful dialogue. There is no shortage of online blogs that engage in scoffing and denigrating the most sacred of religious practices. We tend to think that exposure to such negativity only poses a threat to those who have not experienced the beauty and depth of authentic Judaism. However, those who possess strong faith in Judaism are immune to such cheap jabs. Based on the Vilna Gaon in his commentary on the Hagadah, it is clear that even those of strong faith are vulnerable, and must fortify themselves against these petty attacks.

The Gaon comments on the question and answer of the *בן רשע*. He says that his question of, "What is the service to you?" Is an expression of, "Why are you doing this meaningless activity?" Since his question was asked merely to attack, we don't even consider it credible enough to respond. Therefore, when responding to his attack we don't speak directly to him. Rather, we address the others sitting at the table, while sending him a clear message indirectly that, "had he been there he would not have been redeemed." It is clear from this commentary of the Gaon that the way we deal with the wicked son is by showing no value to his question.

"We see from here the great impact of mere mockery and scoffing on our mitzvah observance. It is so powerful that it can even penetrate a person who has strong faith in Hashem."

However, on the Pasuk of "ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא", in which the Pasuk says you should say over the story of Hashem killing the firstborn Egyptians, while passing over the Jewish firstborns; the Gaon points out in his commentary that the Pasuk does not clarify who we should say this to. He continues to explain that it is not referring to responding to the wicked son, as we already said you are not supposed to respond to him at all. Rather, when the Pasuk says you should say over the story of the first born, it is referring to you saying it over to yourself. You who were ridiculed by the wicked son, must now strengthen your own heart so you don't become lax in your mitzvah performance because of the mockery of the wicked son. Therefore,

you should repeat the miracle of the firstborn, to maintain your passion for Mitzvos.

At first glance, this Gaon seems perplexing! Why would the wicked son's attack weaken our commitment to Torah and Mitzvos? His questions are not rooted in philosophy or deep questioning. He didn't ask anything that should have jarred our belief system or way of life. He is merely mocking what we hold sacred by laughing and scoffing at it, and saying "what you are doing is meaningless." Why would a person who is not even giving enough credence to answer this *בן רשע* be impacted by him? In addition, we are talking about a person who is steeped in Emunah and has been internalizing his Emunah in Hashem at the Pesach Seder for many years. Surely this Gaon requires further clarification.

We see from here the great impact of mere mockery and scoffing on our Mitzvah observance. It is so powerful that it can even penetrate a person who has strong faith in Hashem. However, even though the power of mockery can penetrate someone's strong Emunah, we should not be discouraged, as our weakened Emunah can easily be strengthened by refocusing on the reality of the miracles of *יצאת מצרים*, culminating with *מכת בכורות*. As we approach Pesach we have a tremendous opportunity to strengthen our Mitzvah observance. Through the Seder we can make the miracles of Egypt a reality, thereby removing the damaging effects of any mocking we may have been exposed to in our daily lives.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה
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