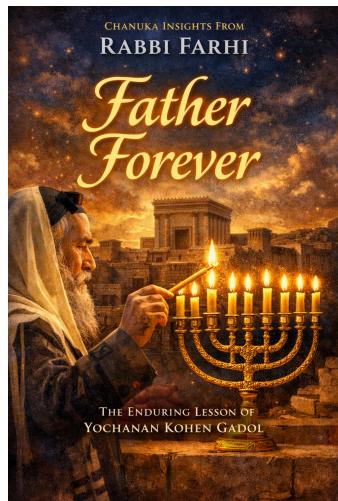


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SPREADING LIGHT AND
TORAH TO OUR AMAZING
BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN
AM YISRAEL



CHANUKA — FATHER FOREVER

You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Begin

I want to start with a name.

Not a miracle.

Not a battle.

Not a story of light.

Just a name.

A name we say every year — and usually don't stop to think about.

When we say *Al Hanissim* on Chanuka, we say the words:

“בַּיּוֹם מִתְהִיאוּ בֶן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהן גָּדוֹל, חַשְׁמֹנָא וּבְנוֹיו.”

In the days of Matityahu, son of Yohanan the Kohen Gadol, the Chashmonaim and his sons.

Read that slowly.

Who was the Kohen Gadol?

Was it Matityahu?
Or was it Yohanan?

The wording is strange.

If Matityahu was the Kohen Gadol, why emphasize “ben Yohanan Kohen Gadol”? And if Yohanan was the Kohen Gadol, why is the story centered on the son?

The Torah doesn't waste words.
Our tefillot don't waste words.

So why phrase it this way?

Chazal tell us something unsettling.

There was a Kohen Gadol named Yohanan who served in the Beit HaMikdash for eighty years.

Eighty years.

Think about that.

Eighty years entering the Mikdash.
Eighty years wearing the Bigdei Kehunah.
Eighty years standing before Hashem in the holiest service imaginable.

And then Chazal say something shocking.

“גַּעַשְׁתָּה צְדָקָה.”

At the end of his life, he became a Tzeduki.

A Sadducee.

Someone who rejected Torah Sheba'al Peh.

This should make us deeply uncomfortable.

Because we like to believe that spiritual greatness, once achieved, is secure.
We like to believe that longevity equals immunity.
We like to believe that after a lifetime of doing things right, a person is safe.

Chazal destroy that illusion.

And they add one of the most frightening warnings in all of Torah:

“אֲלֵ תָּמִין בְּעַצְמָךְ עַד יוֹם מוֹתֶךָ”

Do not trust yourself spiritually until the day you die.

Not because you are evil.
Not because you are weak.

But because spiritual confidence can be more dangerous than failure.

Now let's pause.

We are not talking about a random person.

We are talking about a Kohen Gadol.
Someone who entered the Kodesh HaKodashim.
Someone who stood where no one else was allowed to stand.

And still — he fell.

Not into immorality.
Not into corruption.

But into a mistake of understanding.

The Tzedukim believed in the Written Torah but rejected the Oral Torah.

And people still say this today.

“Rabbi, how do we know the rabbis didn't make this up?”

“How do we know Torah Sheba'al Peh is really from Hashem?”

It sounds intellectual.
It sounds sophisticated.

But it collapses the moment you open a Chumash.

The Torah says, “זָבַחַת כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּתִיךְ” — you shall slaughter as I commanded you.

Where does it explain how?

The Torah commands us to put on tefillin.

Where does it explain what tefillin are?

The Written Torah constantly refers to instructions that are never written down.

Torah Shebichtav without Torah Sheba'al Peh is not incomplete.

It is impossible.

And yet Yohanan Kohen Gadol, after eighty years, lost his footing.

Why?

Because the danger was never ignorance.

The danger was confidence.

Now we need to understand where this confidence turned fatal.

And for that, we must go to the most sacred moment of the year.

Yom Kippur.

Specifically, to the Ketoret.

The Torah commands the Kohen Gadol to enter the Kodesh HaKodashim with the incense, and it says:

“כִּי בָעֵן אָרָה עַל הַכְּפָרָה.”

I will appear in the cloud upon the Ark cover.

There was a dispute.

The Chachamim said the Kohen Gadol must enter first, and only then place the ketoret on the fire, allowing the cloud to form inside.

The Tzedukim said something very different.

They said the cloud must be prepared outside first.

Only once holiness is already complete may the Kohen Gadol enter.

And listen carefully — this sounds respectful.

It sounds careful.

It sounds reverent.

It sounds like fear of Heaven.

But the Torah rejects it completely.

Because the Torah is teaching us something fundamental about closeness.

You do not wait until holiness surrounds you.

You step in before.

You enter while you are still exposed.

While you are still human.

While the cloud has not yet formed.

And Hashem meets you there.

The Tzedukim believed closeness required preparation first.

The Torah teaches that closeness creates preparation after.

That difference is everything.

This is where Yohanah Kohen Gadol's worldview collided with reality.

Someone who believes holiness must be complete before entry will always delay.

“I'm not ready.”

“I need to fix more.”

“I need to become more worthy.”

That delay feels like humility.

But it is fear.

And fear dressed as reverence is one of the most effective tools of the yetzer hara.

Because it doesn't tell you to reject holiness.

It tells you to postpone it.

This is not just about Yom Kippur.

This is about life.

People say, “I'll start learning when I understand more.”

“I'll start davening when I feel connected.”

“I'll start changing when I'm more stable.”

But the Torah says: enter first.

The cloud will come later.

This mistake becomes more dangerous the greater a person becomes.

When a person struggles, they know they need Hashem.

But when a person succeeds for decades, something subtle happens.

They begin to trust their judgment.

They begin to rely on experience.

They begin to say, “I know how this works.”

Yohanah Kohen Gadol didn’t become a Tzeduki in spite of eighty years.

He became a Tzeduki because of eighty years.

At some point, the question stops being “What does Hashem want?”

And becomes “What makes sense to me?”

And now we must reframe the entire picture.

Because the Kohen Gadol is not just a servant.

He is a father.

On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol brings offerings first for himself, then for his household, and then for the nation.

Responsibility flows outward.

And Chazal teach us something very difficult.

Sometimes a father’s atonement does not come through his own perfection.

Sometimes it comes through his children.

A father can stumble.

Even a great father.

Even a Kohen Gadol.

Even someone who entered the Kodesh HaKodashim.

But his story does not end there.

Because his children enter the story.

This is why *Al Hanissim* says “Matityahu ben Yohanah Kohen Gadol.”

The Torah refuses to separate them.

Chanuka is not about erasing a father’s struggle.

It is about repairing it forward.

Matityahu does not deny his father.

He continues him.

He restores dependence, surrender, and trust where understanding failed.

This is atonement through children.

Not denial.

Not rebellion.

Continuation.

A father does not need to be perfect to be eternal.

He needs to remain connected.

Because connection allows the next generation to rise where the previous one faltered.

And now Chanuka makes sense.

Chanuka is not Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur cleanses.

Chanuka continues.

Yom Kippur erases.

Chanuka testifies that the relationship never ended.

The Greeks were not trying to kill Jews.

They were trying to sever continuity.

“Be ethical.”

“Be enlightened.”

“Be cultured.”

Just don’t be children.

Don’t be dependent.

Don't belong to a Father.

Chanuka is Hashem's answer.

"I am still your Father."

This is why falling does not disqualify you.

Leaving does.

Hashem is not counting how many times you fall.

He is watching whether you return.

Judaism is not about arriving.

It is about returning.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Hashem does not say, "Fix yourself and then come."

He says, "Come — and we'll fix this together."

That is not leniency.

That is Father Forever.

5. What would it mean to measure my growth by return instead of consistency?
6. How does seeing Hashem as a Father change how I relate to failure?
7. What is one way I can "enter before the cloud" this week?

Final Thought

Hashem does not need perfect children.

He needs connected ones.

And connection begins the moment we stop waiting
and step forward as we are.

Shabbat Table Discussion Questions

1. Where do I delay growth because I feel I need to be "ready" first?
2. Where do I confuse reverence with distance?
3. Can I identify a place where fear disguises itself as humility?
4. How do I usually respond when I fall — do I return or retreat?