

Hannukah's Insight into Abuse, by Rabbi Andrew Rosenblatt

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Various *Midrashim* offer descriptions of the spark that ignited the Hasmonean rebellion. Some speak of the violation to the sanctity of the Temple. There is one Midrashic account that has particular resonance this year. The Midrash is quoted in compendiums of minor *Midrashim* such as *Otzar haMidrashim* by R. Judah David Eisenstein (N. Y., 1915) and the *Yotzer* (additional prayer recited before *Shema*) for the first Shabbat of Chanukah written by Yosef ben Shlomo (1033):

The [Kingdom of Yavan (Seleucid)] further decreed that when one is to be married, the overlord should enjoy the marital bed first and then the bride would be returned to her husband. This carried on for three years and eight months until the daughter of Rabbi Yochanan Kohen Gadol was to be married. When they were about to take her to the overlord, she uncovered her hair and ripped her clothing in a revealing fashion in front of all. Immediately, Yehudah and his brothers were filled with rage and said to her take her out and burn her, "so that such a scandal not be revealed to our governors for fear of our lives for she was unclothed before all." She then said to them, "How am I to be disgraced before kith and kin and not so before the eyes of the uncircumcised and impure that you would have trespass against me and violate me?" When Judah and his brothers heard her words they concluded together that they would assassinate the overlord. They dressed her in royal clothing, made a Chuppah for her and took her from the house of the Hasmoneans to the house of the overlord accompanied by lyre and flutes and musicians and they danced until they reached the house of the overlord . . . Yehudah and his brothers entered the house and severed the head of the overlord . . .the Heavenly Voice spoke saying, "a young girl succeeded in waging war on the mighty Antiochus."

The *Midrash* tells a story all too familiar to us in 2017. The story is of how power directly leads to abuse of the worst nature. Furthermore, the *Midrash* emphasizes the failure of bystanders, particularly the future warriors, to properly provide safety against such abuse. The *Midrash* clearly draws from the story of Judah and Tamar with the words, "take her out to be burnt." The *Midrash* thus invokes both the biblical Judah's inaction and leaves the reader to fill in the words, *she is more righteous than I*. The story trumpets the bravery of the abused woman beyond that of the military heroes, it even credits her with the victory. Furthermore, the *Midrash* shows how the culture of *Yavan* (Seleucid) had infected the home itself. The heroic fulcrum of the story is accomplished when the young woman turns perceived indiscretion into collective outrage against the oppressor. Her willingness to standup against abuse, to call it out in so dramatic a fashion is in fact an act championing the sanctity of the home. One could see the march of the *Chuppah* to the door of the oppressor as literally the use of the home as the phalanx of attack. The great purifying groundswell of the Hasmonean movement can be understood as an uprising to protect the sanctity of the home *and* of the women at the same time. Lastly, there is a straight line between this event and the lighting of the candles. The Talmud instructs that the mitzvah of Channukah is *Ner Ish u'Veto*—a candle for a person and his home. Men and women

alike are commanded specifically in their home, for both were party to the miracle and both are charged to protect the sanctity of the home and project that very *kedusha* from their home into the public space.

Rabbi Andrew Rosenblatt graduated from Columbia University with a Bachelors degree in Chemistry and English Literature and a Masters in Science in Bio-Organic Chemistry. Having finished secular studies, Rabbi Rosenblatt spent two years in Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel which ultimately led him to receiving semicha from Yeshiva University in New York. Rabbi Rosenblatt was the assistant rabbi in Congregation Ahavath Torah in Englewood, New Jersey and has been the Senior Rabbi of Scharei Tzedek for the past 14 years. Rabbi Rosenblatt and his wife Dr. Cirelle Rosenblatt keep busy with their 5 children.