

# BURNT OFFERINGS

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

During the era of the Roman domination of Israel, the Sage Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma fell sick, and Rabbi Chanina ben Tradion went to visit him.

Rebbi Yossi asked Rebbi Chanina, "Chanina, don't you know that this nation was chosen from Above to rule over us, destroy the Beis Hamikdash, burn its sanctuary, kill its righteous ones, and wipe out its good people? So why am I hearing that you are publicly teaching Torah and you keep a sefer Torah with you?"

"From the Heavens they will have mercy on me," responded Rebbi Chanina.

"I'm offering you advice and you tell me that from Heaven they will have mercy on you!" replied Rebbi Yossi. "I wouldn't be surprised if they burn you together with your sefer Torah!"

"If they kill me] will I merit entering the World to Come?" asked Rebbi Chanina.

"Have you done anything to merit a place there?" questioned Rebbi Yossi.

Rebbi Chanina thought for a moment and responded, "Once, money that I had saved for my family's Purim meal got mixed up with tzedaka money I was holding. I gave all the money to poor people and did not take any compensation back from the tzedaka."

"Since you gave up your own money to tzedaka," concluded Rebbi Yossi, "you will receive a place in the World to Come with me."

It was not long before Rebbi Yossi ben Kisma died, and all of the leaders of Rome came to participate in the funeral and eulogize him. On their way home they saw Rebbi Chanina ben Tradion teaching Torah publicly from a sefer Torah. They wrapped the Torah scroll around him and set it on fire. The Romans placed pads of wet wool around his heart so that his death throes would be prolonged. Rebbi Chanina's daughter saw him and said, "Father, I can't see you like this!" He replied, "If I was being burned alone, it would be difficult for me. But since I am being burned together with a sefer Torah, I know that He Who takes vengeance for the disgrace of the Torah will take vengeance for my death."

Kaltzanori, the person appointed by the Romans to guard Rebbi Chanina, asked him, "Rebbi, if I increase the fire and remove the wool from your heart so that you will die quicker, will I get a place in the World to Come?" Rebbi Chanina replied that he would. "Swear to me that this is so," pleaded Kaltzanori. Rebbi Chanina swore, and Kaltzanori brought more firewood and took off the wool. Rebbi

Chanina died instantaneously, and Kaltzanori jumped into the fire.

A voice emanated from Heaven proclaiming, "Rebbi Chanina and Kaltzanori have earned a place in the World to Come!" When Rebbi Yehuda heard this, he cried and said, "Some people earn their portion in the world to come in one moment, while some people need many years" (Avoda Zara 18a).

Let us explore how this story of faith and martyrdom relates to the powerful final blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei.

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