



The World Needs a Righteous Man

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The relationship between a father and son can create a lifetime of memories and numerous valuable life lessons. No matter the color of your skin, having a father figure to instill in a young child a passion for success and a yearning for intelligence is immeasurable by any standards. For a young man like Danny Saunders, who had such an influential, historically relevant father, the knowledge that he gains by observing his practices within the Jewish faith creates a sense of pride for his identity as an orthodox Jew. However, throughout the film *The Chosen*, Danny finds himself continually battling his succession as a Rabbi, the creative endeavors concerning the field of psychology, and the perplexity of the human mind that entralls him. The film details his constant personal difficulties in deciding whether he should follow his father's wishes or pursue a life in academia. Another storyline is between Danny and his secular

friend Reuven and their struggle to keep their friendship despite their religious differences. Therefore, it is my intention to show how Danny fights to discover his cultural identity and eventually comes to a comforting conclusion about his personal cultural identity, preparing him for life-long success.

During the entire film, Danny is in a continuous process of attempting to discover his own personal cultural identity. Raised in a very strict household, Daniel was always in mind to capture his father's position as a Rabbi and a man of great knowledge. Over many years of memorization and study, he mastered the scriptures, successfully following his family's guidelines for success. There were two major influences on his early life that seem to affect him the most: a household of silence with his father and the constant presence of his family's history. His father, a very important man who saved

his people and removed them from Russia to America, is larger-than-life among the rest of his followers. This set a high standard for Danny to hold himself to, probably leading to his eventual deviation of thought on being a Rabbi. Also, values like tradition and conformity are highly preached among their religion, and values like stimulation and self-direction are shunned upon, especially in the instances when Danny tells Reuven that he has never seen a picture movie before and when Danny says his succession to his father's throne is like a family dynasty.

Now that we have touched upon the background of Danny and his family, it is important to identify when and why Danny deviates from the original, religious plan and goes on his path to find cultural identity. It all starts in the scene when Danny tells Reuven (as he had not done prior) that he goes to the library on a regular basis to read different books written by writers like Freud. Reading in Danny's family is only sanctioned if it is concerning the scriptures and texts involved with such; if Danny wants to read anything else, he needs approval from Reb Saunders, his father. Since Danny has never done anything like this before, he starts to feel exposed by his father's repeated subordination. Plus, it does not help that he is getting guidance on readings and book choices from Reuven's father, who is in fundamental opposition to Reb's thought on the status of the creation of a Jewish State. This creates even more tension between Danny and his father, and to go along with that, Danny makes the decision that he does not want to go to Hebrew higher education (like most Jewish students did); rather, he wants to go to college to study psychology to learn about the beauty and complexity of the hu-

man mind, in which he finds particular interest. His mother seems to really encourage this idea, but his father seems to passively oppose the decision; during the kitchen scene where his mother gave him the briefcase for his books, viewers can tell his father is having trouble letting his son--his rightful heir--stray from the religion. For these Jewish people, self-realization is highly stressed, and Danny has discovered his.

Reuven's father provides a large problem for Danny, and his relationship to his father, along with adding to the complications of his friendship with Reuven and finding his cultural identity. Their families' beliefs clash on many terms involving the Messiah, and Reuven's father writes scholarly articles passionately opposing everything that Reb Saunders stands for as a religious man. Therefore, on the surface, when they meet at the prayer session, Reb is not fond of Reuven, mainly because of his father's career and journalistic choices. In the U.N. meetings, when they approve a Jewish State without the presence of the Messiah to create it, Danny is no longer permitted to speak to Reuven. When Danny takes Reuven aside and tells him the news, this causes each of the two young men extreme turmoil during classes when they have to be in the same room, because Reuven cannot stand not speaking to Danny because of such trivial differences in religious thought. Even before that, Reuven provides even more complications to Danny's cultural identity search because Reuven finds a particular interest in Danny's sister, Shaindel. He seems to be flirting with her on the couch in the Saunders' household and admiring her at the marriage ceremony. In Danny's family, marriages are arranged from an early age, a practice very

old-fashioned and unfamiliar to Reuven. Danny's religious beliefs and his friendship with Reuven continue to clash, which is a very important point: his friendship with Reuven facilitates more of the thought that Reb Saunders will conceive of as being unnecessary for his son's upbringing.

The last and important aspect of questioning cultural identity that Danny goes through is the night he leaves his room and sees his father singing a Hebrew song to his young son. Not only did Reb do this to Danny when he was a young child, but also the love and tender care given in such an exchange is a product of their religious faith and practice, something Danny is starting to drift from. Reb is a very passionate family man who spends extra time and effort to teach his sons the fundamental beliefs of the Jewish faith and how they should live their lives. Immediately after viewing this, Danny seems to feel a heavy wave of guilt splash upon him; he knows that his father wants him to follow in his footsteps, but his heart is not in it to become a strictly religious man at that stage. Danny wants to pursue the high level of interest he has in the power of dreams, not spend his life trying to measure up to a man like his father, who is so important to his people and his community. Reb is so influential in historical standards for his followers, as he successfully saved many of them from persecution, gaining an immeasurable level of respect from the rest of people. This is an extremely high standard for Danny to follow, and his aspirations for intelligence overshadow any motivation he has to fulfill his father's vision. This is the fundamental reason why he is constantly searching for his cultural identity; his personal intentions do not meet his father's expectations, and he needs to find

a way to qualify his objectives or gain acceptance.

In the scene between Danny, Reuven, and Reb in the study, Reb finally speaks to Danny and voices his concerns, which is a sign of change. For many years, Reb had raised Danny through silence in the same way as his father did, hoping that his young son would learn the values and importance of Hebrew life through self-reflection and an absence of guidance. The silence between Danny and his father represents the loneliness, pain, and suffering that many people have had to go through, and it is Reb's belief that for Danny to really grasp how to live a true Jewish lifestyle, he needs to figure things out on his own, without his father's recommendations. This method is intended to make Danny a powerful, knowledgeable leader in the Jewish community, making Danny the wonderful Jew that he became after all those years. Satisfied with his son's education, Reb finally cuts loose his grip and allows Danny to pursue his dreams of going to Columbia University, giving his son his wishes of good luck and praise, bringing on tears of joy from Danny. Danny knows how tough this is for his father to do, considering how alien it is to his nature. This acceptance, which he so longed for, gives Danny a complete sense of family and cultural identity, making him feel like he truly belongs to the faith, the family, and the community, even though he is going outside of his father's original expectations. It is a very emotional scene that seems to finally resolve Danny's continuous search for his place among his religion and as a member of society. A very important line from Mr. Saunders is when he states that "He's a righteous man, and the world needs a righteous man!" Daniel's cultural identity is sealed

by a hug and a long-awaited conversation with his father.

The last scene of the film, although it may seem miniscule in importance compared to the previous scene in the study, ties in most of the themes of the movie. First, Danny says how he and his father talk all the time now. Then shares a handshake with Reuven, unconsciously saying thanks for everything that he was for Daniel: a friend, a role model, and a helpful hand along the way on his path to finding his cultural identity. In the last moments, Reuven speaks about a story in the Bible of how the son of a king strayed away from his father; the son was told to return to his father and the son said he could not. The father sent a messenger to tell him "to return as far as you can and I will come to you the rest of the way." This is analogous to Daniel's journey to finding cultural identity because he strays from the expectations of his father and cannot return to his father's ways. His father talks to Reuven (who is his messenger) and makes sure that Danny is aware of his concerns, and the two meet in a middle ground to resolve their personal afflictions. Also, the myth also ties in with Danny's discussion earlier in the film on the human mind and the heart, representing his unrelenting ambition for knowledge, a symbol of his transition. This seems very ironic to me and a perfect way to end the movie.

Achieving identification of cultural identity requires people to successfully devote themselves to identifying just exactly what they stand for as a person and where they stand in their culture (the "I" and "Me" concept of the self that George Herbert Mead developed). It is truly honorable to be conscious of and have pride in your cultural identity, as most are oblivious, complacent, and

downright lazy in trying to find theirs. For Danny Saunders, his personal journey to cultural identity goes on for years, as he finds avenues that seem to be more appealing to him outside of his religion. He struggles to find a common ground between his faith, his father, and his ambitions, constantly battling himself on what is the right thing to do. It is not until Reb begins to understand how intelligent his son really is that he realizes his son's aspiration to be a psychologist is something that he would never be able to control. Granted, Reb knows that he has successfully instilled in Daniel the beliefs, values, and practices of their religion. No matter where his son goes (although it may not be where he particularly wants him to be), Reb knows that Danny is prepared to take on the world in a righteous fashion. Danny's recognition of his cultural identity will undoubtedly allow him to succeed in psychology, making his father proud every step of the way.

**Title art by Jordan Hollander*