



FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS PEREK 1 MISHNA 7

In the Quiet of My Heart

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

In the quiet moments of the morning, when all are still and asleep, you sit immersed in thought. You worry, even torment yourself; are you doing the right thing? Will this next step be a positive one? There are so many different paths that we can take in life; at each decision we face new cross roads. To face challenges is to be alive, it is after all

in this arena wherefrom our personal tikun flows. Our world is fast moving, and sadly we just don't always have time to figure out which way is the best. You hope your instincts will guide you correctly despite the hectic tempo of today's rapid-fire atmosphere. Given the maelstrom of our daily lifestyle, we all must create times when we can stop and take inventory of where we are going. There is a need in every soul for private discussion of one's own direction - quiet, gentle times, within which you can take stock of how you are proceeding through life.

For me, it often takes an early morning moment for such concentration. So, I sit with a mug of freshly brewed coffee and think, allowing my inner voice to hear something besides its own tension bearing whine.

As a Rav, I get to hear many a troubled soul that is grappling with the direction of their challenges. Wherever I go, and to whomever I speak, the same worries rise to the surface. Basically, they are thoughts about how to deal with the tensions of the modern world. Our current golus is a complicated one, and recent events haven't seen things get any easier. The costs of Covid, with all the cumulative worry and pain is taking its toll, and makes it harder to focus on where we stand spiritually.

This is most apparent when it comes to our children. A chill runs through the heart just at the thought of "what can happen" to our own sweet neshamos. We have all heard the stories, the rumours, the tragedies and we wonder how best to save ourselves from such disasters. We want to create a loving ambience in our home, yet need to draw borders so that our young can remain safe. The hardships of a child's world today, and the many tests of faith to which they are constantly exposed, can be a torture more painful than anything we have ever experienced. They live in an impure world, where distractions and temptations are flaunted before their eyes.

בס"ד



Adass Aish Kodesh

Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita

36 Bury Old Road

Prestwich – Manchester

M25 0FT



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The Biala Rebbe of Tzfas Shlita writes extensively about the difficulties our young face and speaks to us their parents, with love and concern. The Rebbe writes:

“In our times, Hashem’s presence is hidden like never before. Children don’t see the same holiness that previous generations saw. When I was a child, people were aware of spirituality. They saw it all around them. Today, the holiness is hidden. The verse states, ‘I will surely hide My face on that day,’ (Devarim 31:18) implying a double layer of hiddenness. Not only will Hashem’s presence be known but hidden, we will not even realise that it is there at all. The Baal Shem Tov said that he could endure having Hashem’s presence hidden from him, as long as he would know that Hashem was still there, hidden behind a veil.

However, the second level of hiddenness, in which one does not even know Hashem is there at all, is truly unbearable. This is the state of our generation. Every child and teenager must struggle with a challenge that even the Baal Shem Tov feared.”

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the educator to give them the self-esteem and strength to withstand these tests, which they can only do if they feel good about themselves.

In Avos 1:7 we learn:

“Nittai of Arbel says: Distance yourself from a bad neighbour; do not associate with a wicked person; and do not despair of retribution.”

The Rambam warns that a person is drawn after the ways of his neighbours. Not only does he learn to emulate them, he is influenced by their very presence. The Rambam advises one to even live alone in the desert if necessary to escape the influence of bad neighbors. Even holy and righteous people are influenced by the deeds of those around them.

Let me share some more of the Biala Rebbe’s holy words:

“The darkness of our times and the hester panim (concealment of Hashem’s presence) have a negative influence on us and on our children. It is harder today than ever before to find meaning and joy in Torah observance. Therefore, it is more important than ever to speak words of mussar most softly and kindly, to help children recognise their own importance, and never to break their hearts with harsh rebuke.”

The Rebbe goes on to relate a Torah from the Rebbe Rav Shlomo Leib of Lentshna Zt”l who asked how the Jews in the desert were able to fulfill the mitzvah of giving charity, since they all received manna from Heaven and had no need for charity.

He explained that the manna could taste like anything a person wanted, but the poor Jews who had never tasted anything better than bread, could taste only bread in their manna. The rich Jews who had enjoyed succulent dishes in the past described their taste to the poor Jews, allowing them to enjoy those same tastes themselves. This was also a form of charity. In a figurative sense, this is also part of the mitzvah of chinuch.

The Rebbe continues:

We must help the child enjoy the good tastes and good qualities that he has in himself, but was unaware of. This is a charity of wisdom, which is the greatest charity of all. Children are unaware of their greatness, how important they are, how important their smallest mitzvah is to Hashem in these hard times, and how much they can accomplish if they just try their best.

When a child receives this message from his teacher, he will be more prone to respect and obey him. Children are willing to submit to teachers who uplift them and show them their greatness. The child will not want to lose the positive relationship that the teacher formed with him. He will want to find favour in his teacher’s eyes.”

We are now entering the period of the Three Weeks, a time where we all should try to create a positive atmosphere in our homes and communities. Sit down, pour yourself a coffee (or tea) and think in the quiet moments, what can I be doing to create a world where my loved ones feel supported and cherished, where the outside storms are ignored because of their love for Hashem.

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