



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS

Pireki Avos Perek 6 Mishna 5

IT'S NOT CHILDS PLAY

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

“Ladies and gentleman, if you could please take your seats, we would like to begin.” The audience gathered is a small yet select group. We are about to witness an original production by a well-loved group of actors. “Select group” is the operative word here, for the cast is made up of my *einiklach*, who are about to entertain their parents and grandparents.

This has become a Rubin routine at every family gathering. The younger children usually decide to “put on a show” sometime after dinner just as parents are getting ready to leave. These little theatrical engagements are always staged on the couch in Bubby’s living room, and for some few minutes great whispering can be heard from that direction. Then the show begins, where every child is given a part in the telling of the story.

The plot usually is the same, with a king and queen paramount to the storyline. They usually have it in for the Jews, who are always, and I mean always, saved by a long coated Rabbi who seems to be able to overtake all enemies with a Gemara in hand. The appreciative audience *kvells* along at a steady pace as their little sweethearts fight amongst each other about who should be the next to speak.

“Look at Ephroimy, he is wearing Bubby’s straw hat as the king’s crown.” “Watch Pinny, he stands just like a Rav while defending the Jews who are in

בס"ד



Adass Aish Kodesh

Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita

36 Bury Old Road

Prestwich – Manchester

M25 0FT



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danger.” “See how sweet Gittela and Malkie are, and of course the babies are the best.” All this commentary comes from what can only be seen as objective and worthy critics of the arts - the parents.

Usually these productions don't last too long. There is no set script, and soon every one of the actors wants to play someone else's role. Luckily it ends with a sing along of Mordecai ben David's newest jingle and we are spared any major eruptions.

I share this little vignette of “Rubinobelia” for a reason. Not that I am not proud of my brave band of actors, but I share it so as to make a point. From our earliest moments in life we seem to aspire to be someone else. As children we copy those around us, wanting to be characters in our imaginative world that is make-believe. This is how we form and express our future individual mannerisms, how we distill the many influences that come our way. As we mature we separate the chaff from the kernels, and we no longer need to play-act. With maturity comes true individuality; we stop speaking others 'lines and find words that are our own.

Or at least we should. Unfortunately, many of us are afraid to take the step off the stage and into the real. We become so frightened and insecure that we remain play actors. We may grow in years, yet we remain the children who acted in parts of a make-believe theatrical production. The insecurity stems from many different places, and just as each of us are unique, so too are the reasons we are who we are.

Imagine coming to that place of final reckoning after having lived your allotted one hundred and twenty years. The administrating angels take out all the records, and a loud gasp is heard. “Dear sir, you seem to have lived a long life. However, you never were who you should have been. The fact is that we had other expectations for you, other goals that should have been met.”

There is a reason why each of us is here on earth. We have specific goals, unique to our very self. If we remain as childlike actors who seek to fill others 'roles, then we have no chance to discover who we are meant to be. The saddest thing is to live such a life, a life empty of true connection to one's inner needs, shredded by the pain of jealousy. Maturity is not about years lived, but about becoming wise enough to know what those years can be.

A gutte Yid once wrote, “Some people, when visiting a great man look at his outward actions, and believe this displays his greatness. This is false. To know man's greatness one must observe the creative powers of his inner spirit.” The spirit that lies within each of us is huge. We need to have the maturity to accept this and tap into who we can become. The facade of what seems to be this mortal world is just that, a vapor of mist that burns off as soon as the sun rises above it. Look beneath the surface of any great man, and you will discover a source of creative uniqueness that is much deeper than any superficiality.

This mishna articulates these truths: “Do not seek greatness for yourself and do not crave honor. Let your deeds exceed your learning and do not aspire after the table of kings.” We look at others and figure, “If I could be like him, I would be respected and loved.” This just isn't the case! If you would be like him, you would be nothing, because you wouldn't be who you are. You may dream that the next fellow's success should be yours, but things don't work out that way. When you wear someone else's shoes, they pinch. So many of us live desperately unhappy lives because we can't get beyond these simple truths.

A child should aspire to be like his heroes, and an adult must aspire to become the hero he is meant to be. If you seek to realize your own potential, you will act accordingly. This is what our mishna may be saying. Your deeds, your actions, should be greater than your learning, your theoretical thinking. Our actual performance must go beyond hypothetical thought. This will lead to learning that is more deeply implanted, a source that is driven by one's actual needs.

“For your table is greater than theirs and your crown is more illustrious than theirs.” If you sit by your table, one created by your true character, then yours is a worthy table indeed. Someone else's table, even that of a king, can never feel comfortable, for it is not true to your inner being.

There are many great homes in our community, many kingly tables. Those who sit at them are wiser and better off than any royalty. When one works on his own unique identity he lives with a tremendous sense of relief. He no longer feels torn by the insecurities that corrupt one's self-image. He is free to seek his potential without feeling inadequate.

“Your Master is trustworthy to pay the reward for your work.” Yiddelach, Hashem knows who we are, and He is that force that will reward us our true worth. We need not playact - no, in fact we dare not, for our reward lies awaiting that being who we truly are. This is real, and this will be forever.