



IT'S ABOUT THE SMALL STUFF

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

We live in "difficult times". I know, you have heard this from so many and it has most likely lost its potency and frisson. "Difficult times", when didn't we have difficult times, it's the human condition to feel a bit on edge and challenges have always been the default position of life, especially for Yidden. My point is this: All "difficult times" are tailor made for the generation experiencing them, one generations difficulty won't seem all that hard for the next. Each epoch has its own unique tikkun and hence its own challenges, and seeing this reality is vital if we want to grow and conquer the challenges we are presented with.

Ours is a fast-moving era where the innovations of technology are regularly creating powerful tools that can be used for good, or tragically for extreme evil. We of the Torah world are especially vulnerable to such manipulations; we are small, different, and in today's G-dless society we stand alone in the swamp riven ocean of meaningless drivel that passes for morality.

The English language is a fluid one, with new words and expressions being born daily as a result of all the information that technology spews forth. One such newly minted word has begun to crop up more and more, and in some ways, it underlines our own communal challenge. "Gaslighting" is a new catch phrase so firstly please allow me to clarify what it means:

'Gaslighting' is an informal word that is defined as making someone question their own reality. The term is also used to describe someone (a "gaslighter") who persistently puts forth a false narrative which leads another person (or a group of people) to doubt their own perceptions to the extent that they become disoriented and distressed. This dynamic is generally only possible when the audience is vulnerable such as in unequal power relationships or when the audience is fearful of the losses associated with

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challenging the false narrative. Gaslighting is not necessarily malicious or intentional, although in some cases it is.'

To the Heimisha Yied this may all sound a bit too familiar. It seems that much of the country has turned its collective back on religious thinking and that being observant of anything beyond the latest blog on social media, is worthy of derisory comment and more.

From our very beginnings we have been "strangers" despite residing in every corner of the earth. Yieden have taken on this roll with a sense of pride and honour, but this time it's different. Technology has developed tools for haters, and can drive misconceptions of what is true and false to extremes that twist all reality totally out of shape. Events that were once of some interest, of a small geographic area have become common knowledge to millions within seconds. So, yes, we may be victims of being gaslighted by some, misrepresented by those who don't stop to wonder who this people are nor what they represent. However, as children of Avraham and Sorah, we are gifted with the holy resilience to carry our mesorah with a sense of spiritual strength.

In parshas Chaya Sorah we witness Avrohom Avinu making arrangements to purchase a burial place for his dear wife Sorah. He stands in front of the town elders and says, "I am a stranger and a resident among you." I remember the late Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits ZL explaining in a public interview what it means to be an anti-Semite. He quoted Avrohom Avinu and explained that yes, we are strangers wherever we go at some level, yet we are fully residents and want to offer all our talents for the betterment of wherever we find ourselves. The Rabbi added that antisemitism starts when some become obsessed with our otherness and overlook our positive efforts.

In the same parsha we find Eliezer on his quest to find the perfect marriage partner for Yitzchok Avinu. The Torah tells us:

"She said, "Drink, my lord, and she hastened and let down her pitcher upon her hand and gave him a drink." (Braishis 24:18)

Harav Abraham Twersky ZTL picks up on this moment and notes, 'a young girl gives a thirsty man a drink, then helps water his camels. This is hardly an earth-shaking event, but it determined the course of Rifka's life and made her a Matriarch of Klall Yisroel.'

As we try to negotiate the waters of this golus, it would be helpful if we remember this vital point. In the tapestry that is our lives, it is the small things that often have the greatest of impacts. The smile, the helpful offer of help, just the good morning, all this creates the ambiance of kindnesses that were the bedrocks of who we are. I have long made it my personal practice that whenever I have any interaction with those not of our community I will smile, say thank you for any small service offered, (for example a check out operative) and then say, "Be Blessed". I could write a whole chapter on the quite smiles and warm thanks these two words have brought me. People want to be blessed, they want to feel worthy of such thought, even if their lifestyle speaks otherwise. A Yied blesses a stranger, small act of including a stranger into your realm, who knows, that just may act as a deterrent next time the gaslighting is shined on us.