



STILLNESS IN THE STORM

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Has anyone else noticed that things are getting ever more complicated of late? Our young seem pulled and pushed in all directions, whilst parents feel as if they are floundering in an ocean of unknown waters. There was a time when the clock of our lives ticked in tune to our ability to cope. Then technology came calling stealthily embedding itself into our lives, and what was once a “decade” now feels like a mere moment. Everything runs at a feverish rate, messages ping into our space with a ferocity that depletes our mental and emotional focus. We seem so tired, and Covid certainly hasn’t helped. Despite all the trinkets of the modern world we all feel a bit beleaguered. For some, simple meals become a frozen tableau of individuals each fixated on their own screens, barely looking up to even pass the salt. The reasons of all our stress and disquiet could fill whole volumes (in fact scholars of all stripes are publishing just such books at a rapid pace), and this column definitely isn’t the place for such a monumental task. I only speak as one Yiddel who observes and shares with many sweet neshomos. There is an atmosphere of unease on the part of many, a creeping disquiet born from a media that is created with no care for values beyond profit. I don’t want to join in the rough and tumble of the pros and cons of all that technology has wrought. - I just want to share some ideas on how to dial down the noise that rumbles in our hearts and minds.

Parshas Vayigash starts with “Vayigash eilov Yehuda”, “Then Yehuda approached him.....” Rav Dovid of Kotzk Zt”l explains that this means that Yehuda first turned “eilov” to his own self. Before he could speak convincingly to the Egyptian Viceroy, he first had to look within his inner neshoma. To speak to others, one must first know from whence one’s words come. We as parents and grandparents, must look within ourselves, so that when we seek to inspire our loved ones we are speaking from the heart. Dialing down the emotional noise that has become the default position of many of us, should start with positive resolve on our part. We can’t ban playing games on screen during meals if we are busy checking emails at the same time. We are out there in this world of swirling messages and mixed obligations. In this soup swims toxicity as well as what many find extremely helpful and positive. Two-minute

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clips can invariably poison our souls, all the while being served up on tools that seem to be necessities in a world that worships WWW.com.

How do we get through the mire? We develop a fear and love for the Eibishter, built and nourished with a sense of responsibility and warmth. Ours is a world wherein minds are shaped and changed with kindness and concern, not dictates and harsh threats. Our Tzadikim have always touched the inner precincts of Reb Klall Yisroel's soul by recognising their fears and feeling their bewilderment. In our current climate, there are tens of thousands of words being spewed out with every passing moment. People feel clobbered by all this information, desperate for Torah illumination. We are blessed with Giants of the Spirit, leaders who reach into the tzoros Yisroel on a daily basis. These are the pathfinders that have guided our people throughout this long golus, and have done so with bravery born from humble hearts that care.

Let me share something I personally saw from just such a giant.

The Bobover Rebbe, Rav Naftali, Zt"l, was a Gadol in Torah and in living its message simply. He had no ambition other than to create Kiddush Hashem in this world and in his every word; every action was a sefer full of living mussar. I was blessed to be in his holy presence for many years as a young student and soaked up his gentle teachings through the allurements of his sweet manner.

He never needed to speak; his was a life lived by holy example. Want to learn about Shabbos preparations? Watch as the future Rebbe of thousands helps set his Shabbos table, humming a Shabbos tune. Asking for the right way to observe the practice of true humility? See the tzaddik as he lives his life, hiding all signs of his specialness.

The Rebbe's every word was spoken with a caring smile, and when he was faced with another's pain, you could see that he was taking on the others' misfortune. All this occurred without any fanfare. It just happened, naturally and without force or coercion. This slight-figured soul carried the enormous burdens of Klall Yisroel with every step, yet he gave the sense of calm joy to others.

There were times when I was faced with challenging difficulties, and I would visit him under some pretense and feel the weight of my problems being lifted just by the tone of his voice. My son once asked me why I didn't tell Reb Naftulcha (as he was lovingly referred to before he accepted the role of Rebbe after his holy Father Rav Shlomo Zt"l was niftar) what particular problem I was facing. I really didn't have an answer until recently. It came to me as such insights often do, without any indication, simply sliding into my heart ... I never told him because just seeing him resolved the turmoil that was in my mind. I just knew he cared, that I would find a place in his tefillos, and that he would carry my fears with grace and love.

No, I don't have an answer to the challenges of technology, or any other vexing societal conundrum. All I have is the experience bestowed from being in the proximity of caring Shepherds of Bnei Yisroel. We each need mentors, people who have no agenda other than bringing those they come across some strength and compassion. It will be this caring resolution of awareness that will bring us all closer to our long-awaited Redemption. The answers to our woes lay within, we just need caring understanding to find them. Yes, the challenges are enormous, but so is the deep reservoir of love we all share.

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