

עדת אש קודש Adass Aish Kodesh

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS
Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Avos Perek 2 Mishna 6

The little boy is driving with his father through the countryside in upstate New York. We are speaking of the 1950's, and the fact that he is being driven in a car so far from home is an adventure in itself. The car passes a mansion and a huge swimming pool can be seen from the roadside. The little child sighs; "Wow, those people must be really rich!"

"Yes," says his father, "Rich in money and in *tzaros*. You see that pool? They have built it because they have a kid just about your age who has Polio." This one word caused the child to shudder, for in those long-forgotten days this disease was a killer andcrippler of young children. There were no neighborhoods that didn't have one or two victims and everyone lived in fear of it.

The lesson was learned and learned well; you don't envy folk because you don't know what their lives are about. How do I know the lesson was learned well? Because I still shudder whenever that long ago memory flits through my mind.

It may be that I was sensitized at a young age through this occurrence, but I am only human and need reminding all the same. Don't tell me it doesn't get you down sometimes. You see that fellow from across the way and you cannot understand why he has everything you feel should be yours. His house is better, his kids behave like angels, and his household seems to work like clockwork. You know he is not the *mench*, the gentleman, you are, and in fact he seems to be a bit of a shifty sort. So where is the justice? Why do you have to work so hard

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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
הרבנית הצדקנית
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when he gets everything served on a silver platter?

Obviously, such thinking is immature; we have all learned in Yeshiva that such an understanding is fatuitous. We have heard lots of talks from our mentors and yes, every *mussar shmooze* has told us that jealousy is a wasted enterprise, and that we can never measure someone else's wealth. However, we are human and we wonder. After all the *shmoozen* it still hurts. Why him, why not me?

Actualizing Torah truths into our daily lives is the hardest thing we will ever have to do. It is hard because it is why we were created. Your whole being is here just for this purpose and the harder it is, the more important it is to succeed. In these times of spiritual plenty, where you can find a new *chumra*, a new halachic stringency, at every corner, we tend to forget that it is the little anguishes that are the most telling. You are very likely to be keeping standards of kashrus that our *bubbes* never dreamed of, and sending your kids to *kollel* when you never thought such a thing was possible. But where you really live, in that place in your heart, are you really growing?

In this Mishna we find Hillel standing by a stream and musing to himself. "He saw a skull floating on the surface of the water. He said to it; 'They have drowned you because you drowned others, and those who drowned you will themselves be drowned.'" This is a sharp insight. He has no apparent proof of how this skull came to be where it is, nor from whence those involved will see their end. Perhaps what Hillel is saying is something much deeper. There is a *din vechesbon*, a time of reckoning, in this world! But it is never as clear as you would want it to be, nor should it be. Part of our battle that we must wage within is the one that stops us from judging such matters.

The Riminover Rebbe explained that the Aramaic word for "drowned" is similar to a Hebrew word meaning "look." The Mishna can thus be rendered: If you are looking at others, look at yourself. That is, before you contemplate things far beyond you, examine your deeds and improve your character.

How often are we guilty of judging things at a superficial level? Our days are often filled with toil and we think others are having an easy time. This is so absurd, yet it gnaws at our innards and turns our own good into bitterness. The Mishna is telling you that Hashem has a plan that is beyond all human knowledge; things happen with no seemingly possible connection, but there is a Heavenly plan, one that is not ours to understand because we are limited in our perceptions.

Instead of wistfully gazing across to the other one's garden, we should look within our own. There is a story told about the Rebbe Reb Zisha that comes to mind. He had a chassid who was quite successful in the timber business. Each year this simple but charitable soul would come to the Rebbe for a blessing, leaving him with a considerable

amount for the needs of the Rebbe's household. One year he came only to find that the Rebbe had gone to visit his own Rebbe, the Maggid of Mezeritch. When he heard this, he figured, "Why bother with the student when I can go to the master?" With this he started to visit the Maggid of Mezeritch regularly and never went back to the Rebbe Reb Zisha. Low and behold, as time went by his fortunes changed. He lost all his assets and was soon poor. He finally decided to make a return visit to the Rebbe Reb Zisha. Upon entering the holy man's room, he cried out his tale of woe. "Why have I become unsuccessful ever since I began to visit the Maggid of Mezeritch, whom you yourself acknowledge as your superior?" Reb Zisha answered: "As long as you gave your support to any good man without calculating the degree of his goodness, Hashem likewise granted you a portion out of His abundance without calculating your true worthiness. But since you began to look about for a better man to whom you might offer your charity, Hashem in His turn also looked for a man better than yourself upon whom to shower with His bounty."

There are accountings that are not ours to make. The one and only *cheshbon* we will be held accountable for is what we did with that which Hashem gave us. Skulls may float past us, yet nothing is without reason. The only thing that is for certain is that who and what you are is unique to your soul, and it is there that you should look.

Yidden, we live in stressful times where even the best of homes are often caught up in the rush to keep up with others. The world around us is meant to entice us into wanting more and more. We are slowly being programmed into feeling incomplete with the material gains we have. You are not meant to think you have enough; rather, you are being pushed to want more. This constant need for what others have can lead to disaster. We become insensitive, judgmental, callous, all this because of the edginess that lays within our hearts. Putting this aside is difficult, but the alternative is a loss of our own skull.