



## THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

*Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

It took three and a half hours by car to get to there, but it had beckoned from afar and I was pleased to be there. After over three years Rabbonim and Dayonim from all corners of Europe and Israel were finally able to gather under the Auspices of the Rabbinical Council of Europe for an intense and informative conference. This gathering of Torah leadership had been put on hold throughout the pandemic, and the many questions vital to Torah life had piled up and needed shared discussions.

The absent years had not been lived in a void, along with the heartache of closed shuls, many of our brethren had suffered greatly both emotionally and physically. Tears had been shed, often alone, and the desperately needed support of our Torah institutions had been hampered with isolations and illness. Loved ones were lost, and mourners were held back from the needed support of others.

The torpor that became embedded in many of our brethren ate away at the ability to see anything with emotional clarity, and this no more so than within our young. Children were left locked out of their schools, holding on to whatever glimmer of light they could find. This gathering was a privilege to attend, the dust of the past two years could be brushed off and we could all gasp a breath of fresh air and work towards healing our people.

בס"ד



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Yet I was sadly let down. Upon arrival I was presented with a full program of shiurim and discussions, that covered a plethora of halachic questions and offered scope for everyone's participation. One glaring item was missing, and after close perusal, I felt even more saddened. Not ONE word was said about our children, not a one. Thousands of our young are drifting away, parents are at breaking point, Shailos abound concerning what halacha guidance should be offered to communities, yet nothing, just nothing. I was stunned, all these wonderful Torah leaders finally being able to meet together after such tumultuous times, all the eyes of Klal Yisroel awaiting some illumination on what should be done, and here we were offering silence.

I sat through shiurim, felt uplifted by the scholarship and insight of the worthy speakers, but inside my heart I felt a sense of disbelief. Our children should be our first concern in any communal discussion, yet here they seemed to have been shunted aside.

I had the zechus to speak at the dinner that night and I would like to share just a few words of what I said then. After pointing out my disquiet over this omission in the program I shared the following story.

The year was 1958 and the place was Kew Garden Hills, New York City, a place with a healthy Jewish community yet very little in the way of Torah observance. (It has subsequently become a very Torah'dika kehillah) In the midst of this post-war middle-class community was a small chassidishe shtieble, led by a holocaust survivor HaRav Yoseph Gelernter Ztl. The Rav was a charismatic Yied, a Gerrer Chossid who had learnt in the famed Warsaw Mesivta before the war. Both the Rav and his Rebbetzin had gone through much of the hell of the Nazi war against the Jews and survived to find themselves in a DP camp like so many others. Somehow providence led this brave couple to America and to opening a shtieble in this particular place. The Rav had suffered much, and one of the aftershocks of the war was that doctors had told the couple that the Rebbetzin would not be able to have any children. For twelve years the Tzadik and Tzadeikes davened ardently to prove that Hashem decides such issues and they were blessed with the birth of a little baby girl. One Erev Pesach the Rav walked over to one of the youngsters who had started to daven in his shtieble to ask of him a favour, would the young boy attend the Rav's Seder so as to ask the four questions. The bar mitzvah boy was honoured to be chosen for such a holy task and soon arrangements were made and he was sitting at the Seder of the Rav. His eyes soaked up the holy tableau, the Rav resplendent in his white Kitten, high Spodik, and glistening black rimmed glasses, The Rebbetzin sitting next to him with a starched white apron and neatly coffered Sheitel. Between the two was an enormous pram, a silver cross model with huge wheels, with frills on the top of the hood. In this wondrous throne lay a sleeping baby, the miracle child Miriam. The Seder began, and in time the young boy did his party piece of the four questions. The Rav then proceeded to start reciting the Hagadah when suddenly a cry could be heard from the pram. Miriam had awakened

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and was calling out for attention. The Rav tenderly lifted his child lovingly and rested her head on his shoulder..." sha, sha mien kind..." rocking her slightly hoping she would slip back asleep. The baby wasn't having any of it, she cried loader and seemed restless. The Rav stood up and announced, "excuse me, I'll be back soon." The Tzadik took his restless child upstairs and started to dance with his miracle child. The young guest could hear the dancing and the melodious voice, "Oy tzu git tzu zien a Yied, tzu git tzu zien a Yied" singing the eternal truth about how good it is to be a Yied... this holy survivor of the worst was telling his sweet child that it was good to be a Jew. The dancing went on a few minutes as the Rav sought to quite his neshomalah, whilst downstairs his words were wakening the neshomah of his young guest. The words entered his heart, opened his soul.

I know, for I was that young boy, and that moment kissed my neshomah with our eternal truth.

Some weeks ago, I was in America to celebrate the Bar Mitzvah of my great grandson. The affair was in Brooklyn and I invited a special guest. The baby Miriam is now a well-respected Rebbetzin who with her husband, a distinguished Rav, lead that Shtieble till this day. I have kept up a phone friendship with them but haven't seen either for about forty-five years. I invited them to come to my simcha and this wonderful lady, the baby from that pram is now a Bubbah of a wonderful Torahdik family. After the meal I approached her and said, "Rebbetzin you see all my grandchildren and great grandchildren? They all go in the derech of the torah. This is all because your father zt"l sang that nigun and gave his warmth to a little boy who couldn't even understand his words of Yiddish. I didn't need to understand, I saw what was truth, that to be a Yied is to find good.

After sharing my story, I looked at my esteemed colleagues.

'We have been through a time unparalleled in its difficulties and pain. Our young need so much Chizuk, and it's up to us, the Rabbonim and Dayonim to lead them into that old dance and teach them that despite everything, and with our love, it is truly good to be a Yied.

Please, let us each kiss these broken souls with the gift of this eternal truth.