



PERFECTING THE CHICKEN SALAD IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS

Pirkei Avos - Perek 4 Mishan 6
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It never ceases to amaze me that it's the small things that make all the difference. Take chicken salad, for example, go on, take some. This hardy dish is very much part of Jewish homes throughout the world. Every Sunday thousands of households are blessed to be given this special delicacy. It's obvious why, what else can one do with the Shabbos leftovers? Now to the less imaginative, this supper could be put together with some mayonnaise, chicken and perhaps the odd onion and tomato. However, the more ambitious will find extra ingredients, thus creating a whole new gourmet experience.

I have seen chicken salad with pineapple chunks, apples, walnuts and all sorts of ingredients that seemingly have no connection with chicken, either dead or alive. What possessed the chef to imagine that such a concoction would be so appetizing?

Another question: have you noticed that true cooks never ever measure what they are tossing together. It's a pinch of this, a dab of that, and a little more of the other. You have to admit that all this is seemingly magical, and you wonder which university the cook has attended. However, as Jewish husbands have known for centuries, the only schooling necessary for a true yiddisher cook is the one built around the needs of a loving family. Women create the words of Aishes Chayil with a dash of seasoning given with a special "bren".

This degree of sensitivity should be found in every aspect of Torah life, and each generation must absorb such understanding from those who came before. Obviously, I don't mean only in the eating of chicken salad, although that is definitely vital to one's happiness. No, I mean deeper things, matters of real substance.

"Rabbi Yose says: Whoever honours the Torah is himself honoured by people; and whoever disgraces the Torah is himself disgraced by people."

בס"ד



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A Torah scholar is a sensitive soul who is able in every act to satisfy the appetite of those who are spiritually starving. He takes the ingredients of everyday life, and although they don't seem to be related, in his hands they become a creation of splendour.

How does this happen? Well, to the insightful soul such alchemy becomes natural. People see in the Torah scholar a manner that brings so much light and warmth that others simply come to feel closer to him. Seeking souls smile, and feel happy just to have been in his proximity.

As an old hand in "Rabbi watching" I can attest to this. I have had the merit to see some of our greatest Sages and have seen the sheer joy others have just to be in their space. Stand at the door of a Tzaddik, watch the weary-eyed Jews waiting for their turn to enter the Rebbe's private study. They go in for a few moments, and then watch their eyes when they depart. They are alive with new hope, new love for life, new promise.

This is the special way of a Holy Torah sage, and giving such souls honour is indeed an honour for oneself. The honour you gain is in the new "taste" that is savoured. It is no wonder that when some of our oldest leaders, giants of spirit, come to visit different places, huge crowds will assemble just to catch a glimpse or to hear a word.

On a lesser, but no less important, level we should accept that every Jew is a diplomat for Hashem's Torah and we are all looked upon by others as responsible for the entire heritage of the Jewish nation.

Therefore, if we act in such a manner that brings disgrace to that heritage; not only do we lose our own personal connection with our holiness, we also bring disgrace on ourselves from others.

Every ingredient that makes up our daily lives has the ability to be blended into a spiritual gift. Shamefully, we sometimes forget that we are the creators of our own spirituality, and we sully ourselves and lose the respect of others. In the hands of the arrogant the same ingredients that can create a delicious dish becomes a powerful plate of poisonous Chilul Hashem. There can be no greater "disgracing of the Torah" than not actualising the Torah's ingredients in a proper way.

When we prepare a tasty salad we speak of actual ingredients, so, perhaps we should be clear when speaking of what makes for honouring Torah and bringing that upon oneself. When we go out in the street looking disheveled, when we push into the queue, when we act as if others don't exist, well, that surely doesn't bring much honour. If frumkeit doesn't bring with it a pleasant air of goodness, then we must ask if we are not dishonouring the ingredients of the Torah. What excuse can we have for not being totally scrupulous in our dealings with others? Is there any question that this is an example of bringing disgrace to our Torah and ourselves? Taking the sweet and special ingredients that make us a "light unto the nations", and mixing them with arrogance will only create a dish of unpleasantness. The Torah is meant to lead us out of darkness and towards the sweet waters that nourish our souls. We are duty-bound to mix the ingredients with care, following the recipe of our holy Sages.

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