



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS

Pirkei Avos – Perek 6 Mishna 7

IT'S ALL IN THE TELLING

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Stories are the stuff of soul food. Trying to explain why this is so, is difficult, because stories go to a place where no other message wanders. I think it has something to do with our own inner spirit. The good storyteller connects with each of his listeners at a juncture that is unique to each individual. It is all about humans being different than any other creature. We have a spirituality that cannot be seen nor touched, it is just there, and stories ignite it.

I have long been an advocate of all good storytellers, and have had the merit to have learned by a few. Probably the one who was the greatest of all was the Bobover Rebbe Rav Shlomo zy" a. He would tell stories for hours and every listener would be totally immersed in each and every word. The Rav had the power to live every word as he spoke them, and in your mind's eyes you could be part of any world the story was set in.

The Rav's tales would often be repeated; no matter, with each telling they gained new power. I would like to share one of these stories here, and beg forgiveness because I could never really do it full justice. This is because the written word is never as artful as the spoken one, and I do not come near to having the special gift of a truly good storyteller.

It seems that when Reb Moshe Leib visited the Rebbe, Reb Elimelech, for the first time, his host honoured him at the Shabbos tisch to say the dvar Torah. On that particular week the Torah reading dealt with Hashem's killing the Egyptian first born, whilst passing over the houses of the Yidden. Reb Moshe Leib said, "This cannot possibly mean that Hashem passed over a certain place, because there is no place where Hashem is not found. However, when Hashem passed

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through the Egyptian's houses and saw the corruption of their souls and then He came to a house full of piety and goodness, He was overjoyed and cried, A Yid voynt du! 'A Jew lives here!'"

When the Rebbe, Reb Elimelech, heard this explanation he jumped onto the table and started to dance, singing, A Yid voynt du! A Yid voynt du! "A Jew lives here, A Jew lives here!!!"

This is a powerful story. "A Jew lives here." Hashem passes over the darkness and sings out, "A Jew lives here." Heard from the Rav the story gave the listener a charge that struck directly into his inner self. "A Jew lives here" ... sweet, full of life and light, "a Jew lives here" gevaldig ... it is all worthwhile, all the trials and tribulations. The world may think us mad, or hate us for naught, no matter, Hashem dances over our homes and sings, "A Jew lives here" ...

Our Mishna starts by telling us, "Great is Torah, for it gives life in this world and in the World to Come, to those who fulfil it as it is said: "For they, the words of Torah, are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh." The Sfas Emes explains this to mean that one who fulfils the Torah, merits that even his life in this world is by virtue of the Torah. Such a person becomes a piece of living Torah.

It is always interesting to see that those who live a life devoid of all Torah sensitivity are actually very jealous of the Torah community. They have no safety in the lifestyle they find themselves in; they see how Torah Yidden have a sense of purpose and borders that keeps them sound.

The Mishna continues to say, "It [the Torah] is a tree of life to those who take hold of it." The Sfas Emes comments on this, "The Torah sustains the Jewish people but only to the extent that the Jews 'take hold of it' and recognizes its life-giving property. I speak regularly to communities that are not yet all that Torah observant, and their appetite to hear Torah truths is palatable. They are so thirsty for the truth, for that which is what we are as a people.

We live in times where children brought up with no idea of Torah truths are seeking out places of Torah teaching to learn what they so desperately need. Their hearts want to be part of what Hashem dances about, 'Du voynt a Yid!'"

At the same time the Jewish people are facing great darkness. In America half the Jewish young are marrying out. In Eretz Yisrael we see many of our brethren hating Torah with no idea what it means, this in a time when new yeshivos are opening and thriving. What brand of chaos are we living in?

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz points out that in Parshas Shoftim the Torah instructs us to go to the Judge "who will be in those days", Rashi tells us that 'even if he is not equal to the Judges of previous days, you must obey him.' The Eibischer doesn't leave us rudderless, He provides us with leaders who are suited to the needs of each time and place. Today we have had to create new ways to teach our brethren. Our Tzadikim are directing us to learn to tell the stories anew, to articulate the joys found in a Torah life. Now we can explain with our own deeds that the Torah is "Great, for it gives life ..." True life, wholesome life, a life that throbs with vitality. There will soon come a time when our final redemption will be at hand. Hashem will again see our homes, and His Essence will dance and give voice once more, "A Yid voynt du!!!!"

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