



SWIMMING SAFELY

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

I'm a good swimmer, really, I am. At age sixteen I passed my advanced swimmer test and received a certificate allowing me to be a life guard. So yes, I know a bit about swimming and how to save others from getting into dangerous situations. Now that was back then and although you won't find me standing at a local pool with a whistle watching over others, I guess you could say I'm still doing the same job, however this time on dry land. Our world is being deluged by constant storms of hubris that are creating extremely dangerous safety concerns. The difference from way back when, is that then I needed to just blow that whistle, and the swimmers would respond. On the rare occasion where one of the swimmers found himself getting into trouble, I could gallantly dive in, and with my special training help the swimmer to safety. Sadly, I can't do that today, yes, I can blow on my whistle (you're reading it now) and perhaps dive in at times, but truthfully, the poisonous waters we face today, need more than any one 'lifeguard'.

Recently a report was published by Dr. Jean Twenge a psychologist at San Diego State University who studies generational changes, highlighting some of the difficulties facing society today.

'Kids these days seem different. It's not just that we, the older generations, are worried about them, but that they're desperately worried about themselves, and we're right to worry. Almost 30 per cent of American girls have clinical depression and it's the same across the Anglo-sphere. The suicide rate for ten- to 24-year-olds has tripled.

The Doctor blames smartphones for much of all this, 'The more hours a day a teen spends on social media, the more likely it is that he or she is depressed. Some of the best data on that comes from a cohort study in the UK,' says Twenge.

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Adass Aish Kodesh

Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita
36 Bury Old Road
Prestwich – Manchester
M25 0FT



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info@aishkodesh.co.uk



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Now, certainly we can allow ourselves a self-satisfied shrug of the shoulders, after all we are not involved with all this chaos, we are frum and safe from all the vagaries of the outside. However, before I pack away my whistle, can I just make a note or two. In Yiddish there is an old saying, Azoy vi se goyishzuch azoy yiddishzoch... roughly translated, this pithy saying is telling us that what is happening in the outside world, has a direct impact on how we in the Torah community act. The world is swimming in a tidal wave of empty hubris. This harsh atmosphere certainly trickles into our own homes, and the problems of our young can be traced to some extent to what the society of our present golus experiences. Smartphones are indicative of all this, and given all the filters in the world we still can't eliminate their entire incipient encroachment into our lives. Sadly, the golus we find ourselves in is awash with hordes of empty words that have no real meaning. No longer is there any sense of a Higher Power, nor any belief in morals that are set beyond the remit of those with the loudest voices or lowest expectations.

So, what does an ageing life guard do whilst standing at the edge of all this chaos? Well, I for one will still peck on the keys of my computer, scratching my head, wondering what clarion call I can offer. Many are doing so much. Daf HaYomi shiurim are expanding with adherents in the thousands. Short yet obtainable messages about Shmiras Einiyim drop into email accounts throughout the world. Gatherings of thousands of Torah true Yidden take place in large stadiums, seats filled with exuberant attendees.

My thoughts are simple. We must take all this Torahdik energy down to the basic everyday aspects of our homes and schools. It is wonderful when the Tatty opens his gemorah daily and learns. However, the shrillness of the world outside seems to obscure so much of the good. We must take our young by the hand, tell them of the wonders of being a Yied, share personal challenges fought and met, and bring your love for Hashem into the broad daylight of our reality. I have counselled parents to take on what may seem to be minor stringencies, perhaps saying Asher Yotzar from a written page or making brochos a bit more aloud, these actions may not seem all that important but they can set one off as a conscientious Yied that wants to be part of a more vibrant Torah lifestyle. This helps set standards that speak to ourselves and our families and declare that we choose to be in the torah world, not chas vesholom in the world of apps and emptiness. These so to speak minor points, often mere minhogim long fallen into disuse, will bring life back to the daily rote of our lives, and awaken the inner fire that is eternal.

I'm sure we will revisit all this on a regular bases, but a Life Guard doesn't hang up his whistle lanyard without a fight. Be gebentched dear friends... and let us all see nachas and kol tov sela.

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