



Footsteps of our Fathers - Pirkei Avos 6.1
**WEEDING THE GARDEN:
THE INSIDE STORY**
Harav Y. Reuven Rubín Shlita

I have just come in from the garden. It needed some tending as gardens always do and I was asked to sort out some particularly thorny problems. Now before you jump to any conclusions allow me to admit that I have no pretensions to horticultural excellence. My involvement in the garden goes as far as dipping my hand into my wallet and handing over the necessary funds. As a rule, for the physical aspects of tending my patch I call in experts who dig, plant and nourish the ground with the nutrients needed to produce some lovely flowers. As we both looked at the final product, and as my friend the hiemisha gardener smiled and said "well, Rabbi, guess I will see you in a couple of weeks." He has every reason to smile because he and I both know that keeping a garden blooming takes constant work.

As he drove off, I mused that gardening is no different from anything else worth cultivating. Keeping something alive and maintained takes constant care, and if you leave it untended it can grow out of control with weeds taking over, choking all the flowers around them.

There is nothing in this life that needs more care than our souls which require tending all the time, sometimes when we are in the midst of weeding and planting our internal landscape we can ask, "Where is it all going, this constant wrangling with our inner self, this drive from within to become better and more worthy?"

The truth is that no one knows the answers; the results can be seen only by Hashem. Yet we must never stop trying to straighten that which we have bent, nor desist from weeding the garden that is our inner being. There are times when we wonder if it's all too late or if what we do serves any purpose;

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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
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yet at just such moments we must close our eyes and remind ourselves that this is the true purpose of our being.

Pirkei Avos is written in six chapters, the first five are from the original Mishna with the sixth coming from additional lessons which are called Baraisos. These lessons are valuable and are introduced to us with an interesting opening:

“The Sages taught the following in the style of the Mishna, Blessed be He who chose them and their teaching.”

We live through life being challenged every day by life's hurdles. We stretch ourselves in a hundred directions praying that somehow, we will get it right. So many weeds in the garden of our soul each sapping away our spiritual strength, but we have guidance, words spoken from Sages that have been blessed by thousands of years filled with dedication. Hashem chose these teachings and blessed the efforts of those who taught them. This chapter speaks of what the Torah personality can aspire to. The Sages were not just imparting information, they were living that which they taught and in this way we have been able to see their teachings as a living example for every generation.

In my garden there is a tall old tree that must have been a mere acorn long before any of us were born. That old tree has deeply gnarled roots and through them its branches remain alive and vibrant. I know life is a challenge, after all that's why Hashem created us. However, the deep roots of our blessed sages feed us, guide us, and allow us to grow if we but listen to their words. Every soul has moments when it is lost; we all have those stomach-churning times when we wonder if it will ever make sense. After five chapters of telling us how to create a Torah personality the Sages bring us this extra chapter that extolls the world that awaits those who stay the course. True, tending a garden is no simple matter, but the path is clear if we just have faith.

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