



**In the Footsteps of our Fathers  
Perek five Mishna twenty-five  
A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE  
Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita**

We live in a world which in many ways grows smaller with each spin on its axis. Historically families usually lived within a few miles of one another, seldom venturing beyond the borders of their "homeland". Yieden generally followed suit, unless the tides of history forced us to flee places we had called home for centuries.

Today borders are virtually meaningless, our Hiemisha world is spread all over, and parents speak of children living thousands of miles away. Boruch Hashem, with these new circumstances comes the ability to communicate instantaneously and given the time, even travel the far reaches of the globe. With the Eibishter's blessing, as we march through life, we are gifted with an ever-growing circle of loved ones, many living far away. It is no longer strange to the ear to hear that an elderly Yied has gone to a simcha thousands of miles away, and returned with a suitcase stuffed with fresh memories of the wondrous smiles of kinderluch that are seldom seen in the flesh. I have recently returned from such a trip and of course want to share some of my kvelling with you my loyal readers.

The occasion was the Bar Mitzvah of a great grandson, this took place in the center of Hiemisha life, Boro Park Brooklyn. I'm still breathless from all the joyous moments of sheer kvelling I experienced and am only saddened by the fact that my late Rebbetzin A'H wasn't there to kiss each one of them. All grandchildren are uniquely wonderful, any proper card-carrying Grandparent will tell you that, but great grandchildren, well that's a whole other realm of sweetness that lifts you to heights rarely tasted before. We are a blessed generation, people are

בס"ד



**Adass Aish Kodesh**

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



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כ"ק מרן אדמו"ר מפיאסצנה  
הרב קלונימוס קלמן שפירא  
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חיה שרה בת הרב שלמה  
יחיאל רובין ז"ל



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living longer, and we have been saved from most pestilence and early death. As a child, most of my friends had never seen a grandparent, and great grandparents were just some sort of academic possibility that no one really experienced. So I packed my bags and endured the eight hour experience of being scrunched onto a plane that within reason should only be holding half its numbers, arriving in New York City brimming with anticipation. I wasn't disappointed, the kids are gorgeous, their smiles filled my heart and the ability to share in their everyday banter was illuminating. I'm talking about kids who are being brought up in Boro Park, Staten Island, and Lakewood, yet their Yiddishkeit is on fire, and their sense of following our mesorah heartwarming.

Now allow me to fill in a bit of my personal history. I am a New Yorker born and raised, the same is true of my parents. For most of my youth New York was the center of the universe. However, Hashem has plans for each one of us, and mine brought me to Manchester UK where I have already lived longer than I did in NY. In all this time I have only visited 'the old country' for short periods of time. On this occasion I stayed for a longer period and got to see people and places I hadn't seen in over forty years. New York's Hiemisha community is breath taking. The numbers K'H are astounding, mosdos seem to be blooming on every street. Yellow school buses abound with our next generation being shepherded to Torah centers we only dreamt about. Lakewood is truly astounding. Don't forget, I left America forty years ago, Lakewood was a community that revolved around the Yeshiva. It was a Kollel town that didn't seem to have any pretensions of becoming THE hiemisha center that it has evolved into. They tell me it is larger than Boro Park, and having visited it for several hours I can believe it. Shtieblach have sprung up all over, with chasidisha mosdos thriving in these lovely green surroundings. Space doesn't allow me to share more about my Lakewood visit, but allow me to just mention that the Rebbetzin A'H spent her first years in Lakewood, her father Rav Shlomo Yechiel Grodzinsky Z'l being the shochet for the whole town. She often spoke of the small tight community of ardent Kollel families, and how her father was the only Polisha Chossid at the time.

I was staying in Staten Island by my granddaughter and fell in love with the stillness of the place with its charming houses and friendliness. The Bais Medrash where I davened with its esteemed Rav Harav Pollack Shlita have created a vibrant Torah atmosphere alive with generations of hiemisha Yidden from all quarters yet bonded into one kehillah.

So, NYC has grown and all seems well, and yet, I felt a gnawing sense of disquiet. Whilst I was there, the great Tzadik the Biala Rebbe Ztl was nifter. His passing shook me to the core, as for years I have been giving weekly shiurim based on the Rebbe's Sefer Mevaser Tov on Chumash. His understanding of today's world never failed to amaze me, and his tender care spoke to one's heart on each page. He gave the present generation a unique name, 'Golus America', this was not about land borders, or country laws, it was about mentality and spiritual outlook. The tentacles of Golus America smother the whole world, its intoxication with gashmiyous, its need for more and better, the need to follow trends and celebrity all creates a toxic mix of superficiality. Unfortunately, as has been the experience in all our travels in golus, much of what the dominant culture lives by impacts on our own. The yetzer horah of excessiveness growls at our feet, and anyone with an open mind and heart will see these dangers for what they are.

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I had the zechus of speaking with several Gedolim whilst on my trip and heard of their valiant struggles in keeping our community focused on what is the true path for a Torah Yied. Amidst all the growth, all the striving for kedushah there is a part of the nefesh that draws us down towards the gashmiyous, this is called the nefesh behamious and it is part and parcel of each neshomah. Our goal in life is to fight these challenges and draw away from the material towards the holy. This, hopefully the last Golus, strives for just the opposite, it wants us to dive into the pool of gashmiyous and allows us to pretend that once something has a hechsher its ok.

I saw an advert in a magazine published for the frum community that wraps a lot of this up. It was a full-page picture of a luxurious new sparkling clean kitchen. Something out of a decorators dream book. Across the middle was a simple message "You are cooking, your neighbour is looking!" This sums it all up, many are living for what the neighbour sees, and those neighbours are looking to see what they may be missing. This is the sadness of Golus America, a golus built of shiny trinkets of the baubles of materialism.

This week's Mishnah describes the different levels of life we experience. It tells us that at twenty we must focus on a pursuit of a livelihood, at thirty we are at our peak of strength, at forty wisdom, at fifty we are able to give council. The Mishnah continues that at sixty we reach old age, at seventy fullness of years, and at eighty "the age of Strength". As one who is tip toeing to that "age of strength" I have wondered what the Mishna's meaning is. Obviously, we aren't talking about physical prowess, that is a long-forgotten goal, rather perhaps it means that at this age one has seen a lot and experienced life with its many distractions. The strength we speak of is the ability to give over to those who are in the thick of the battle what it means to stay true to our goals. Hopefully through our many stages of life we each have learned the importance of staying connected to the Eibishter. We have seen it, done it, and now through the strength we have been gifted, we can guide others through our own lessons learnt.

I write these words as first impressions from a wonderful time spent with my loving family. Their joy for Yiddishkeit speaks of how much their parents are striving to remain true to who we are. Their smiles still glimmer as my eyes glisten with tears of thanks for Hashem's chessed.

I hope to share some more as the jet lag settles and my thoughts are clearer. Meanwhile, may we all share in Yiddisha simchas and Kol Tov Sela wherever we are.

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