

עדת אש קודש Adass Aish Kodesh

In The Footsteps Of Our Fathers WHAT WE CAN ALL LEARN FROM SAM GREENSPAN

Avos Perek 4 Mishna 9
Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

The young boy looks around him and senses that the way is clear. He crosses the busy street and wends his way to the local Shul where the Shabbos Tefilah is about to begin. The various members of the community smile at the youngster and watch as he takes a siddur in hand. "Who would have believed that Jack Greenspan's kid would turn frum?"

The year was 1959 and it was a rare occurrence when a young boy turned away from the secular world of material gain and sought out his Torah heritage. This child was definitely not of his times; his parents were well known high-society figures who had no connection with the pathways of our Torah. Somehow this soul realised the hunger in his heart was for Torah and not the latest gizmos of the time. On his voyage to truth, he had already fought many battles. He was called Sam by his family, although at his bris he was given the name Shmuel, and when his parents heard that Shmuel was the name he preferred to use, they realised that this Jewish "thing" was more than a passing fad. They tried everything to coax him out of his "madness": money, exotic trips, even threats. Yet the lad stood firm. His father threatened the rabbis, sought the help of doctors and lawyers, all to no avail; Sam was going to be Shmuel no matter what. At one point the parents had little Sam pursued by private detectives, to find out to which "cult" the boy was embracing, hence the wariness as Shmuel went to shul. He had already had the experience of being stopped by someone in a black hat asking him directions to the shtiebel nearby. In his naiveté our hero told the kindly questioner that he was going there himself and would gladly show the way. Later it transpired that the black-hatted fellow was a detective and soon that shtiebel was added to the list of no-go areas for the child. Shmuel was after all only 14 at the time, and parents in those days had a big say in all such matters.

Where and why Shmuel wanted to become different than his entire environment is a long story, one I don't believe he can even relate. The point is he had a will to persevere and was willing to march forward, no matter what kind of obstacle was laid in his path. At that time, he was just beginning to learn and treasured every Jewish book he could lay his hands on. Late at night he would study Kitzur

בס"ד



Adass Aish Kodesh

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



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Shulchan Aruch in the dim light of a small torch, making certain no one found out. You may think that the little Shmuel would grow up to be at best a worthy householder, religious but perhaps not all that well learned, and that perhaps Torah knowledge would be granted to his children in the merit of all he had gone through. Truth be said, all these years later and Shmuel is now a Rav who decides difficult halachic matters for a multitude of petitioners.

This sweet story is not a one off, there were others like Shmuel who defied the zeitgeist of those times and struck out on a unique and sometimes perilous path to the Torah.

The Mishna tells us:

Rabbi Yonasan said: Whoever fulfils the Torah despite poverty will ultimately fulfil it in wealth."

Perhaps this can mean that when one begins Torah life with little understanding, a dearth of knowledge, if he stays the course and is totally focused, then in time he will come to practise its teachings in a richness of knowledge.

In our day we see many who are coming closer to Torah and its ideals; tragically there are others who are born to a Torah home rich in spirituality, but are slipping away. It could be that in this wealth of Torah and mitzvos a degree of apathy has set in. It all comes so easy, and sometimes the young don't become engaged spiritually. We all enjoy elaborate holidays, materialistic comforts and glatt kosher hechsherim, attend "Chasidic" music concerts; all this and more. We feel that with so much Torah nothing will go amiss. This is a huge assumption to make, because if the soul is not set ablaze with all these treasures, then we atrophy. The mind wanders, and, despite the heights of Torah accomplishment all around, some are destined for poverty-stricken spirituality.

Our Mishna continues:

"Whoever neglects the Torah because of wealth will ultimately neglect it in poverty."

Torah must be lived, it must be felt in the marrow of ones being, if not we are guilty of its neglect.

The pressures that today's society imposes on us are immense, and in the mosaic of our very Heimishe lifestyle much can be lost. Therefore, as part of our personal cheshbon we must closely evaluate our Torah inventory; how much of it is active and chas vesholom how much lies dormant because the flame has been extinguished.

Our young learn from us, and we must reignite that flame speedily.

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