

עדת אש קודש Adass Aish Kodesh

TORAH IS ALIVE

Harav Y. R. Rubin

It happens every time. I walk past the picture and it whispers to me. Art is meant to express that which words cannot touch, and this one does, for me, every time.

The image shows two young boys sitting together, learning Torah. They wear old-style head coverings, as if they belong to another time and place. Yet their eyes are alive, their connection unmistakable. They seem to speak to my heart, saying: "Torah is alive and gentle. We seek our connection with Hashem through our togetherness."

This picture has been part of my life for over fifty years. Through all our moves and challenges, those two holy children have become a symbol of what we aspire to bring into our lives. Allow me to share where this treasure came from.

It was a different time and place. I was living in New York and had established a small yeshivah for young boys who needed more personal guidance and mentoring. It was staffed by kind, understanding rebbes who knew what it meant to find the key to each student's heart, offering each one a path in Torah suited to his individuality.

Among the auxiliary staff was a young man who, in today's terms, might be labelled "off the derech", a reflection of our tendency to categorise' neshamos with broad and often limiting definitions. He was hired to work in the office and manage the building. In truth, I took him in at the request of a very special Rav, who saw that this young man was drifting away from the community and causing pain to his devoted parents.

As he worked with us, he often tried to challenge me, acting out against Yiddishkeit and making light of our Torah lifestyle. To his dismay, I never took the bait. Instead, I drew him closer and made him part of our family.



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The Rebbetzin a"h would prepare special meals for him and extend warm hospitality despite his difficult behaviour.

Why? Why did we go the extra mile for this struggling soul?

It is a question I have often reflected upon.

In the many years I have been privileged to serve the community, I have learned that we are all, in some way, broken, and all seeking wholeness. That wholeness comes when we strive to fulfil our individual tikkun in this world. The Eibishter placed us in this physical reality so that we can bring that wholeness into being, and in doing so, draw closer to Him. Anyone involved in communal life encounters neshamos so lost in their pain that they cannot see any light in their lives. What they need is someone who will love and support them without preconditions. In giving that, we create space for a Kiddush Hashem, for by easing another's pain, we open the possibility for them to come closer to Hashem.

Parshas Kedoshim opens with powerful words:

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the entire Jewish people and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your Beshefer, am holy."

The Torah then teaches us many mitzvos, each one a pathway that draws us closer to Hashem, and to one another.

We all walk along this highway called life. Along the way, we meet souls who may be in need of nothing more than a smile or a kind word. When we become aware of this, we can dispel another's loneliness, and, in doing so, bring a deeper sense of fulfilment into our own hearts.

Whenever I pass that picture of the two boys, it makes me pause, even if only for a moment, and ask myself: What can I do today to bring such warmth into my world?

And how did we come to possess such a special picture? That "difficult" young man eventually turned his life around. Today, he is a Rosh Yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael.

When he left, he gave us this picture as a parting gift.

And now, I try to give it to you, my dear readers, as best as mere words can convey.