



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS

Avos - Perek 5 - Mishna 23

LEARNING FROM THE LIONS

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

These are exciting times, Klal Yisroel is witnessing an unprecedented growth in the Torah community. When I was a child the world was small, compact and easy to understand. Shuls were compact, communities intimate; we all knew what was what, and who was who. Our rebbes had a close connection with us, and individuality was seen as something positive. The Torah community was dynamic, allowing- in fact actually seeking- room for everyone. It was against all probability that we would grow into anything greater than a small, even shy remnant, of what was once “back in the day”. Nobly we would try to carry on with our proud heritage but all were uncertain how the future would pan out. Slowly, the first steps were made, leaders arose who were gifted with insight and courage, and it was their bravery that guided the fledgling community towards the Kiddush Hashem we relish today. How did this all come about?

**“Our builders of Klal Yisroel created
what we see now through adversity
and sheer strength of will”**

The Mishnah tells us:

Yehudah ben Teima says: Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer and strong as a lion, to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven.

The Sfas Emes notes that these animals possess a unique characteristic not shared by any others. Moreover, these traits are often in contrast of one another. It is almost impossible to be simultaneously fast as a deer and strong like a lion. However, the true servant of

Hashem, one whose sole concern is to serve Hashem, combines all these attributes into his personality.

Simply put, a Yied has to strive to go beyond what may seem our limitations, and somehow make it work. In those early post-war days, our leaders taught us that nothing was impossible in creating a Torah world. Our only stumbling block was our own trepidation. The positive outlook of my Rebbes made what seemed beyond the realm of possibility happen, and did so with grace and a touching warmth.

We were somewhat ramshackle in those days, with converted old buildings, unpainted homes, rudimentary clothing, yet there was a fire burning. The She'aris Hapleta lived with their nightmares, wept silently for their lost ones, but strove forwards despite all odds. Bold as a leopard, a creature that is not noted for its brute strength, but rather for its boldness and daring.

Being American-born, I was often called upon to act as translator and even representative to an outside world that just didn't understand where we wanted to go. As things progressed I was entrusted with ever more responsibilities. Chosen to become the founding vice president of the Council of Jewish Organizations in Boro Park Brooklyn, I saw first-hand the holy audacity of our Torah leaders. Our role was to represent the heimishe mosdos to the outside world, and nothing was done without first consulting our Gedolim. I was always astounded by the bravery and stamina our leaders showed. Nothing was beyond the realm of possibility. They proceeded with one goal: to help Yieden prosper in their new environment, and create a Torah world that had been so ruthlessly ripped apart by our enemies.

Sitting at the feet of these lions of the spirit one soon learned how fearless they were. Many times I was left simply awestruck when personally witnessing their bravery despite all the obstacles created by the outside world.

Today those seminal moments have become engraved in history. I often read accounts of happenings of which I was a part, and humbly accept that, yes, greatness was the stuff of their everyday leadership.

So what about the current situation? Our times are much more complicated. In the seventy years since then the whole world has changed beyond description. Whole areas of life that we take for granted today didn't even exist back then, like penicillin, polio vaccines, frozen foods, contact lenses, credit cards, mobile phones, home computers, air conditioning, and even dishwashers. No one took planes anywhere, and your car, if you even had one, was black and slow. Today our world is filled with technology that seems to take care of everything until, like last Friday it gets a "virus", and then everything closes

down. Into this brave new world the Torah Yied enters, wondering how one can manage and from whence will we gain much-needed fortitude.

Each of us must take upon ourselves the strengths of which this Mishnah speaks. Our young have to be given the mesorah that has brought us to where we so proudly stand. They too must know that being a Yied means having the strength in overcoming the trials we all face. They need the tools to grow in this very materialistic world, and our task is to give them these. Many of our young are sensitive and need so much more than just a classroom of over thirty students. To escape the temptations of the material world they need to be fleet-footed like the deer, able to escape into the safety of our Torah. But this doesn't come of its own accord. We saw this from our Rebbes, and we as parents must share it with our young. A child won't grow into a lion that roars if Tatty never attends Shacharis on time. If we insist on talking our way through the davening, what chance do we have of our young even turning towards a siddur when feeling lost?

Our builders of Klal Yisroel created what we see now through adversity and sheer strength of will. As their students we owe it to them to carry forward their example. Instead, what some of us are doing is just moseying along in life, hoping things will work out for the best, lost in the miasma of today's mad world. We blame others for our problems but, in truth, we remain too often sat on the fence thinking others will do our job.

Our tzaddikim left us with a clear vision. Let us not allow it to become obscured by the little screens of our phones, and the laziness of sleepy souls.