



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS
IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED.....
Avos Perek 6 Mishna 8
By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

A new psychological condition has been introduced into the ever-growing number of disturbing states of the minds of us mere humans.

“The end-of-history illusion is a psychological illusion in which individuals of all ages believe that they have experienced significant personal growth and changes in taste up to the present moment, but will not substantially grow or mature in the future. Despite recognizing that their perceptions have evolved, individuals predict that their perceptions will remain roughly the same in the future.”

For a Jew this can never be a reality: a Yied must grow. It is his *raison d’etre*.

“I can't remember as a child ever meeting a great grandfather. It was a concept so very far from our normal experience”

I often hear how Yieden lament that they have reached whatever level they believe they are on, and feel a sense of staleness in their lives. They despair of any future growth. That’s not where they are coming from. It may be possible for the special souls of this world, but not for them. They are pedestrians, just shuffling along with no real “*bren*”. The truth is that in Yiddishkeit there is no such thing as just being pedestrian; we are all alive, and our very being is meant to grow with each day.

The Mishnah tells us:

Rebbi Shimon ben Yehudah says in the name of Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai: Beauty, strength, wealth, honour, wisdom, old age, hoary age, and children- these befit the righteous and befit the world....

This indicates that with every stage in life we are meant to grow and progress. The real glory of the human condition is realized when we recognize the potential that maturity offers. In the early nineteenth hundreds the average life expectancy was just about sixty years, Boruch Hashem today it is roughly eighty. We are living longer. Add to this the hours saved with all the new technology that has come our way. Simple tasks like shopping, cleaning the home, even cooking, take up a fraction of the time they used to. So what have we done with all this added time? Have we utilized all these gifts to learn more, or daven with added meaning? Perhaps we have done more chessed and mitzvos. Or is it that we have tragically frittered away vast amounts of this cherished time staring at our phone screens or having what is called “fun”. Rabbi Dr Avrohom Twersky points out that there is no word for fun in lashon hakodesh, its meaning is “lighthearted pleasure” which indicates a meaningless waste of precious time that can never be retrieved. “Just for the fun of it” has no place in a Torah life. It is told that when pipe smoking was first introduced into European culture a follower of the Tzanzer Rav ztl bought his Rebbe a long pipe. The Rebbe asked him: what does one do with such a contraption? The hapless chap tried to explain the mechanics of setting the tobacco alight and drawing in its smoke into one’s lungs. The Rebbe then asked the logical next question: And why would I do that? The Yied answered “ Tzu triben avec der ziet” - “to kill time.” The Rebbe became animated and called out, “I seek more and more time to serve Hashem and you give me something just to while away that most cherished of gifts!”

The Torah strives to give us positive meaning in life. Throwing it away with mind-numbing pointless foolishness has no place. Hence there is no word which approximates to this activity. I don't mean what we know as simcha, joy, or happiness. Fun is none of these. Our sages tell us to serve Hashem with simcha, but this doesn't mean meaningless giggling. A joie de vivre is a hallmark of Torah life. However, we should never allow such happiness to be mistaken for frivolous folly.

Boruch Hashem we recently celebrated the wedding of a granddaughter. The entire family gathered around from three different continents. Tens of photos were taken of this proud Ziedy holding a lovely assortment of babies on his lap. New generations of sweet kinderlach, living in different countries, yet bonded with our one holy faith. I had great nachas, something rather different from fun. I can't remember as a child ever meeting a great grandfather. It was a concept so very far from our normal experience. Today, Boruch Hashem every other Yied of a certain age *kvels* with this title. It is wondrous, but comes with great responsibility. I now have to be a better Jew not only for myself, but for the generations I have been blessed with. Thousands of years have gone by. Our generation is the first to have the gift of so many years. We dare not squander this gift with days of nothingness.

There is a concept called gezel shainah, meaning stealing another’s sleep. Time is a gift you can never replace. Once gone it's irretrievable. If you wake someone up with no purpose, you have stolen something that can't be restituted. That is a measure of how precious our days are. So we should thank Hashem for them by using them wisely.