

עדת אש קודש

Adass Aish Kodesh



A DAY OUT IN VIENNA

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

I write these words in a haze of tiredness. Yesterday I took part in a meeting of the Rabbinical Council of Europe. I truly enjoy these gatherings, the Council's membership reads like an encyclopedia of leading Hiemisha Rabbonim throughout the whole of Europe. My fatigue comes because the meeting was in Vienna, and getting there meant taking two planes each way. Seems Vienna isn't just around the corner, and I am not the greatest of flyers. However, it was well worth the cramped airplane seating and the boring waits between flights. Listening, sharing with these heroes who serve tirelessly at the coal face of Torah activism is in truth humbling.

As a huge extra bonus, I had the honour to sit next to Dayan Yakov David Schmahl of Antwerp. The Dayan is renown not only for his genius, but his understanding and compassion for all areas of Jewish life. As we spoke I asked him about a letter he recently published that was addressed to the Jewish Tribune's editor. He wrote concerning the educational crises we in Britain are facing. One salient point he made was that in many circles our boys are "not being offered a basic chol education which would assist them later in finding a parnosah other than having to collect and survive on benefits." The Dayan asks, "Surely, those who decide to 'stay in learning' and those who become klei kodesh should be able to do so out of choice, not because they have no rudimentary chol education and have no other choice?"

His words took me to another time and place. As a young student in Yeshiva, chol was actually seen as being extremely important. Hiemisha chadorim wanted their youngsters to know how to get on in the new world Hashem had placed them in. I can tell my readers, or perhaps whisper, that one of today's greatest Chasidisha Rebbe's used to read the secular newspapers regularly. I know because I saw it, and I understood that as a young kollel member, he still felt it important to know the language he was surrounded with, plus what was going on in the wider world.

Another point the Dayan mentions is how Gedolim of the not long past era felt it important that youngsters should play and have free time.

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Allow me to share a sweet episode I experienced when I was a chosson.

I was engaged in Eretz Yesroil where my kallah lived. After the vort I traveled back to America to prepare for the chasanah which was going to be in Bnai Brak. Whilst in New York, I had the zchus to accompany the Bobover Rebbe Rav Shlomo Ztl on a visit to the West Side to be mevakah cholah one of the first supporters of the Rebbe's rebuilding of Bobov. The Rov sat down across from host and in the midst of their shmooz the Rov pointed to me and told the benefactor that I am the one who teaches the children to play Baseball. Baseball, what? I felt myself sliding off the chair. The Rov explained that some summers before the Rov had come to visit the Bobover Camp in the Catskills. The camp was obviously in a Yom Tov spirit as the Rov spent a few days with us. The campers were on their best behaviour, but as children they needed to play. So Ruben took the kids out to the playing field, and started batting a softball about with the kids running around catching and throwing. Unbeknownst to me, the Rov was witnessing the whole pantomime from the window of his apartment. Now, after several years, the Rov was extolling my sportsmanship, and even going thru a motion of throwing a ball. The Rov's tone was one of support and admiration, he was pleased that his campers were learning to play in a positive atmosphere.

I know, it was a long time ago, things have changed, but are they any better? Kids don't play, they have little time, and we make them into old men even before they become bar mitzvah.

The Peasetzna Reb Ztl writes in the Chovos Hatalmidim clearly that children must be able to play and be, well, children, and that he wants them to be youngsters, not old men.

I know that much of what I am sharing now has been written before, just as the words of the chosheve Dayan aren't anything we haven't seen. It just hurts so much to experience the pain all this is causing. I sat with worthy Rabbonim, Dayanim, and serious Yiden who deal with Klall Yisroel's challenges daily. We sat and thought of ways to make a difference, and personally that was well worth a long days travel. Our kids need understanding now, their world is spinning with change rapidly, and it is our responsibility to give them a wholesome preparation for that world.

So, yes I write what is obvious, the Dayan sends open letters to the editor, all this and more is coming with an awareness that we are not doing enough.

The Rebbe Zt"l brought new life into the world of chasidous that was becoming stalled in the doldrums. He reached out to youngsters who were leaving our ranks. He gave them stature and pride. Today much of what we see in the world of the Hiemisha community is threatening to become that same state of stagnation. The Rebbe asked that his sforim be printed and that in that zchus He would stand by us in Shomayim. Let us all write a new chapter to his brilliance with deeds of compassion for our young. Our kids deserve better, they should have the tools to have a positive future.

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