

# עדת אש קודש

## Adass Aish Kodesh



### THE MASK TO LOSE

*By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

It was an early spring night in 1961, and we could taste the joy in the very air we breathed. It was Purim, and as part of a small group of Chassidische Bochurim, I was about to set off on a whirlwind tour of the Shtieblech of New York City. We had done something revolutionary, we had rented proper professional costumes from a Broadway theatrical fancy dress company. This was a first, till then most costumes fell into the kitchen tailored category of a Mordecai Hatzadik in bathrobe and cotton wool beard, or perhaps a pirate with an eye patch for the more adventurous. Suddenly Rubin and Co were going to unleash upon the Hiemisha world a whole new understanding of Venohapachi.

We were dressed up as different animals. That's right, lions, tigers, wolves, and yes, one lone gorilla (yours truly). In those days these costumes were extremely heavy and cumbersome. Schleppeing around dressed as a gorilla was no mean feat, especially as the headdress didn't allow for too much air, and my glasses kept getting fogged up. But we were young and filled with the spirit of the Yom Tov, nothing could stop us from our mission of creating as much simcha as humanly possible. We had really no idea what we were doing, but the plan was to go to as many shuls and shtiebles as humanly feasible, wreaking as much listiga mayhem as possible. We had a big car and maps, (New York City is a rather large place and GPS didn't exist). So shortly after Megilah reading, we took off, all dressed up in our furry finery.

Wherever we went joy reigned. Singing on tables, dancing around the bima, it was sheer youthful unbridled mayhem. Rabbonim gave generously, as did the many Baal Habatim. We were collecting for poor families, and I guess our "animal" magnetism loosened up their pockets.

One stop remains embedded in my heart, although we visited so many, still one stop still speaks to me.

It was the Beis Medrash of the Boyoner Rebbe Zt"l which was in the East Side of Manhattan.

The East Side was once the most thriving Jewish community of America. Thousands of Yidden thronged its streets as they arrived

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in the 'new land' seeking answers to their dreams. The streets were not paved with gold, instead they were strewn with debris left over from the pushcarts of peddler's who walked the hard pavement seeking some sort of income. Nestled on these grimy streets could be found Shtieblech, places of tefilah where many of these broken Jews could find some respite. The bren, the colourful yiddisher characters who were the denizens of these small shuls, were the stuff of rich stories that have shaped our present. Into the mix came the Boyoner Rebbe Zt"l, a Kodesh who had room in his heart for everyone.

It was to this humble holy place that our intrepid circus act stumbled in. By now we were well into our shpiel, and without thought we broke into our Purim pantomime. The Rebbe sat at the head of the table, and one glance upon his visage stopped us mid step. The Boyoner Rebbe was a holy prince, his face shown with an other-worldly illumination, and you were just captured with awe at first glance. The Tzadik seemed taken aback, after all, it's not every day you find a gorilla singing 'mishenichnas.' He asked his gabai something, and I could hear the Yied reply, "Zai Zenen Menchen", (they are humans). The Rebbe then spoke in Yiddish which translated as: 'please take off the head, I want to see if you're really a Yied, and I will give you ten dollars for your Tzedaka.' By now everyone was standing about bemused, waiting to see what would happen next. Ten dollars, that was real gelt in those days, and I was more than happy to take that awful thing off my head for a few minutes. I schlepped the gorilla head off, and the Rebbe smiled sweetly and said, 'Dee zeist, on Purim afilu der chayous zenen menschen' (you see, on Purim, even the animals are human). Well, everyone laughed, and I got my ten dollars, plus so much more. The Rebbe had intimated that on Purim, everyone, even those who think themselves as animals, can be a mensch, a proper Yied. How? By being mindful of who we really are, part of klall Yisroel.

We danced further into the night, in fact it was almost light before the tired circus animals fell into their beds. It was a brilliant night, and as a young bochur it remains engraved in my soul till this very day. Of all that I heard and experienced that Purim, the Rebbe's soft words found their way into my neshoma.

We are all so challenged, and it is only in this material world that we can fix ourselves. Sometimes we get dragged down, forgetting that we are members of a holy nation. Wearing our individual costumes as if they are our natural fit.

The Chiddushei Harim used to say that we find in the Torah that the reason we are meant to erase the memory of Amalek is because he was "undeterred by fear of Hashem," he had no Yiras Shomayim, and this was the cause of all his vile behaviour. Says the Rebbe, 'if Amalek's memory must be erased because he had no fear of Hashem, how much more must we Yidden work on this attribute and always be cognisant of how much Yiras Shomayim we must have!

Parshas Zachor comes and reminds us that even when we feel we have fallen to the level of base creatures, we must never stop working on our Yiras Hashem. We may wear our mask but we must never forget that we are all really menschen.

As the Boyoner Rebbe taught a group of bochurim all those years ago, You may be dressed by the golus, but remind yourself that you're a 'mensch' a member of klall Yisroel, and hence a Yiras Shomayim that knows what is real.

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