

עדת אש קודש Adass Aish Kodesh



STRANGERS WHO CARE

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

It was a tragic moment for Avrohom Avinu, his partner in life, Sarah Imeinu had passed away, and now he had to make arrangements for her burial. He turns to the local town council and tells them, "I am a stranger and a resident amongst you. Sell me property for a burial place with you so that I can bury my dead."

With these few words, spoken by a bereaved husband freshly bereft, Avrohom was mapping out our future place in Golus. We are strangers, no matter where we find ourselves, and even though we may reside in our present place in comparative comfort, we should always be mindful of this 'stranger' status, for this is our glory and the reason Hashem has put us where we are. Ever since our dispersion we have found ourselves in different places. Golus has never been easy, in fact throughout the millennia we have seen our blood spilled with nary a thought, and our ancestors hounded from one place to another. Yet the Rotzon HaBoreh deems our long sojourn in Golus as a necessary step towards total Redemption, it is from here that we must learn to connect with Hashem.

Since the last Churban, we have been gifted to live in societies of relative safety and comfort. However, with this peace has come very real challenges that our forefathers never would have dreamt of.

Prosperity brings a sense of ease, and many of us have forgotten that every day we spend in Golus is a challenge in one way or another.

It was Avrohom Avinu who taught us this. He lived in various places and with each change of venue, he had to configure specific tools so he could fulfil his tikun.

In his father's land he had to cope with constant baiting and strife. He was constantly called upon to stand tall for the Eibishter, even to the point of death. Coming to Canaan, he had to take a new tack, one of conciliation and Kiruv. It was this new approach that bought thousands to his side, creating a stream of Kiddush Hashem.

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So, how can we face the peculiar Golus we find ourselves in today? Many despair, wondering where the Avrumes of our times will learn to thrive in the paradigm needed for a life as a 'stranger- resident'.

We here in Manchester suffered a great tragedy this past week. A young boy of fifteen was niftar from an illness that struck so suddenly that the greatest doctors were left flummoxed. This bochor was nothing less than a sweet unassuming Tzadik. I know, the title is often misused, or thrown about with abandon, but here I use it with forethought and gravitas. He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in our Shtieble, and despite challenges, he was always smiling and offering to help others. Even in his last moments, laying in an austere hospital as the whole world davened for him, he was only fearful that he was causing a fuss and putting his parents and loved ones out. "Please forgive me," was the expression he used tens of times a day to staff and medics who tended to his care. This was a different sort of patient, he felt bad for those who shared his suffering, and asked them full hearted mechilah. This 'regular' bochor was distraught when in the course of his treatment any part of his body may have been exposed, his sense of tzniyous was part of who he was, and he guarded it as much as could be hoped for.

Manchester lost its breath when word spread of his passing, he had captured the entire community by dint of his gentleness.

His parents Rabbi and Mrs. Benjy Rickman are caring people, a couple which work tirelessly for others. This was the elixir that made their wonderful child strong enough to bear his horrific pain, with strength and fortitude. His name was Naftali Meir, and he truly was a light for us all. This young soul was a magnet for love, his respect for others was astounding. We need to give all our children the wherewithal to grow as such gentle lights, to be the stranger yet resident in the harsh golus we find ourselves in.

His home is a beacon of kindness and kiruv, the perfect mix of ingredients needed in troubled times. Such an atmosphere created this tall, yet humble bochor. The week of his shiva saw a wave of sadness that touched everyone. In the decades of Rabbonus I have had the merit to participate in, I have never seen such a saturated veil of tears shed by so many. This youngster touched a myriad of souls. When he was Niftar, the entire medical staff that had worked so hard to save him, escorted his remains out of the hospital. This was from a child of our time, not some prewar Tzadik. His loss is ours. The energy of his soft kindness fed so many, in a subtle way that never sought a spotlight.

His all too short life was a master class of Avrohom Avinu's template of 'Stranger -Resident.' His loving parents and siblings are left in despair, a community is stunned in its loss. Prestwich and Manchester streets are streaked with our tears.

We need to harvest the wondrous lessons as lived by this unassuming young man. Hashem shares our golus, and Shomayim weeps with us. May we see no further pain nor sorrow. May our time as strangers come to an end with the coming the Moshiach, soon and in our days.

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