

עדת אש קודש

Adass Aish Kodesh



Embroidered for Whose Shabbos

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

The figure is haunting, enveloped in darkness tinged with a mysterious defused light, he looks out onto the middle distance with wistful eyes. His brow furrowed, his embroidered silk coat touched with a patina of mystery, the bearded man, obviously meant to be frum with permed side curls, seems haunted by shadows yet perfectly attired. We are told that this robe is the 'must have' Shabbos accretion, the crowning highlight of Shabbos Kodesh as lived in today's sparkling world. Welcome to 'Golus America', fasten your seatbelt and get ready for a turbulent spiritual ride. When I say 'Golus America' I mean no disservice to the place I was born and raised. However it is no secret that the influence of America has reached the entire world, where even in far flung China, American burgers are being scoffed down at such a rate that there is a new crisis of obesity, something unknown of a mere twenty-five years ago. America is truly great in so many ways, but it brings with it a mind set that can corrupt. The merchandising of our Yiddishkeit is apparent to all who decide to see, it is only the feeling of despair, that feeling that nothing can be done to staunch the flood which is allowing this situation to slowly thrive.

In Parshas Vayechi we learn:

"Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years, and the years of his life were one hundred and forty-seven." (Bereishis 47:28)

When Yaakov first descended to Egypt, he told Pharaoh that he was one hundred and thirty years old. (47:9) He died at the age of one hundred and forty-seven. The Mevasser Tov asks: Why then must the verse tell us that he lived in Egypt for seventeen years? We could have realised this ourselves by making a simple calculation? The Rebbe answers that Egypt hosted the most lewd and profane culture in the world. For this reason, it was referred to as "ervas ha'aretz-the nakedness of the land." (42:9,12) Nevertheless, for the seventeen years that Yaakov was forced to live there, he remained the same "Yaakov", the same devout, pious and spiritual individual that he had been while he lived in the Holy Land. He lived in Egypt—a meaningful and vibrant existence that can truly be considered "life" thru adhering to Hashem's Torah. Yaakov withstood the corruptive influence of Egypt in the merit of the blessing he received in last week's parsha: "Do not fear descending to Egypt, for there I shall make you into a great nation. I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I will uplift you and ascend together with you." (46:3) This was a blessing not just for him alone, but for all his descendants, wherever they might travel in their exile. In all the trials and temptations they would face,

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Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita
36 Bury Old Road
Prestwich – Manchester
M25 0FT



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Hashem would remain with them and give them the strength to persevere. This is the meaning of the following Gemora: R' Shimon bar Yochai taught: Come and see how much Hashem loves Bnei Yisroel. In every land to which they were exiled, the Shechinah accompanied them. They were exiled to Egypt and the Shechinah accompanied them... They were exiled to Babylon and the Shechinah accompanied them... When they will ultimately be redeemed, the Shechinah will be redeemed together with them. (Megilah 29a)

As the Rebbe Shlita explains:

Each stage of our Golus exposes us to a different foreign culture, posing a new risk to our identity as a nation and to our spiritual ideals. Often, we stumble and allow these influences to draw us down. Nevertheless, the Shechinah continues to rest upon us, as the Gemora states:

A heretic once said to R' Chanina: "You are impure children, as the verse states: Her impurity stains her hem. (Eichah 1:9) Nevertheless, the Shechinah remains with us," he replied, "as the verse states: He dwells with them despite their impurity. (Vayikra 16:16)" (Yuma 56b)

No matter how low a Jew may fall, and no matter what kind of impurity he may face, Hashem remains with him.

The Golus we are in has unique challenges, yet, the Shechinah is with us, and despite all the pressures, we can reach up and touch the merit of our forefather 'Yaakov'.

The main difficulties we face are from the incipient and often outlandish consumer baubles that surround us. I well remember going to purchase my first Bekitsha (Shabbos silk coat) back 'in the day.' I went to the small shop by train, there was a very limited choice all of which were in shiny black. After the salesperson looked me up and down, he slipped a coat on me. As I gazed in the mirror, the proprietor stood behind me and grabbed a bit of slack cloth and exclaimed, 'Look, it's as if it was poured especially for you!' Being a young boy, this was enough of a sales talk, and to be honest I quickly grew into the full potential of the coat by feasting on a diet of Yeshiva food. Today we are more sophisticated. As the "fruma model" gazes out from the glossy advert, we read, "The texture of our cloth is amazingly soft and flows freely while navigating through Shabbos or Yom Tov." Here I was thinking navigating thru Shabbos Kodesh had something to do with davening, hilchos Shabbos, and quality time with the children. Now we have a new direction, set by the ebb and flow of a silky sparkling bekitsha. I wonder how it navigates the large slices of kugel, and the dripping spoons of cholent. I'll stop here, in the hope readers will get where I am coming from. All this gashmiyus is becoming ever more problematic. Our young often lose their direction in life, caught up in illusionary fanciful misdirections.

Can we at least call all this out? Take back our true connection with the Eibishter, and concentrate on what it is to be real?

Hashem's arm is always extended to draw us out of the quagmire and raise us up to the loftiest spiritual heights, in fulfilment of His promise, "I will descend with you to Egypt, and I will uplift you." Furthermore, when a person endures a spiritual decline, but withstands the temptations that meet him at the bottom of his fall, he will be elevated to greater heights than he had ever known before.

Yes today we navigate our Yiddishkiet draped in embroidered silks, but this is not the life Yaakov Avinu 'lived,' and it is his life that should be touching ours.

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