

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

"Rabbi, how's the Yaknawho?"

So I was joyfully greeted one Yom Tov Pesach morning. The warm welcome sprang forth from Reb Allan, a regular member of our shul with an irregular past.

Every shul has a Reb Allan, and if it doesn't, it should. It's the Allans of this world who bring a new joy to Yiddishkeit, a joy seen through fresh eyes that seem to soak up every nuance of what may sometimes be perceived as old or dull through years of constant usage.

Until a short while ago, our Reb Allan was a complete stranger to all things Yiddish. His was a Jewishness limited to bar mitzva celebrations, weddings and funerals. The passing of his mother is what brought him to the portals of our community. He attended shul regularly that entire year, saying Kaddish and slowly becoming absorbed into the group that attends daily services.

We are blessed to host a large number of university students, and they make up a large percentage of our regulars. Many of these young people are first becoming frum themselves, which makes their questions that much more intriguing and their exuberance that much more alive.

Into this cauldron of experiences, our hero found his niche. He soon became a sort of mascot, asking vexing questions of his own and generally supporting the shul's activities.

The first yahrtzeit of his mother soon arrived, and everyone wondered if Reb Allan would continue to be counted as a regular minyan man. The yahrtzeit was the day before Rosh Hashana, hardly a time to give up one's shul career.

On Yom Tov itself, I came up with what I must humbly describe as a masterstroke. Allan had been using one of those silky scarf-type talleisim, an item long cherished in certain circles of Anglo Jewry but now seen as not quite the real thing. When he arrived on Rosh Hashana, I sidled up to him, took his scarf away, and handed him a huge woolen tallis that would make any rav proud.

"Wear this Allan, it fits you better."

I was astounded by the look of pleasure that crossed his face, and as I helped him with his new attire, his eyes welled up with tears. Since that day, he can be counted not only as a member of the minyan, but as an avid scout for other new attendees.

Allan possesses a great joie d'vivre, a passion to live life with joy, and as his involvement with

Yiddishkeit expanded, that joy expanded as well. He can bring laughter to the faces of students who may be struggling with their own problems, and he certainly has enhanced my own view of life's ups and downs. Those born into a frum lifestyle may fail to see some of its unique quirks, and that's where the Yaknawho greeting comes in.

That year we celebrated the seder night on motzaei Shabbos. I therefore announced a reminder to one and all to recite the formula of Yaknahaz at the seder.

At this, Allan piped up, "Rabbi, what's a yaknawho?"

"Allan, that's an acronym for the steps one takes on this special occasion during the recital of Kiddush at the seder table. It stands for yayin, kiddush, ner, havdala and zman." I then explained the niceties of this special Kiddush and wished him a gut Yom Tov.

Well, this new word struck his sense of humor, and one could hear him asking all and sundry if they would be saying their Yaknawho that evening. It became a sort of buzzword; hence his happy greeting the next morning.

I tell you all this with a purpose: It would serve us well to learn from Allan to enjoy our Yiddishkeit with freshness. When faced with the positive outlook of such folk as Allan, many cringe and feel somewhat discomfited. We can't understand what they see as being new and vibrant, so we place them in some kind of ghetto especially created for those who don't "fit in."

We live in times that carry with them difficulties never before realized. The stress and strain of just getting by is enormous, both financially and emotionally. The more material blessings we gain, the more the strain seems to grow. Yiddishkeit can give us hope and strength. Our Torah is the one place where true joy can be found. The problem is that we often live our Torah life without focusing on this truth. Things become stale, and coldness creeps in.

What can we do? For a start, we can share the newness as seen through the eyes of the Allans of this world. We can reawaken the sense of pride in a new tallis or feel the sense of wonder at newly obtained lessons. The constant call to learn Torah is so we always discover new facets of its all-encompassing wisdom. The heart that stops searching is one that quickly calcifies into stone.

Look for a moment at kapitel 21 of Tehillim. It was offered up at the time David became king, and it speaks of all future redemptions. *Hashem, a king will be glad for Your strength and will be extremely joyous when You come to the rescue!* When we recognize that everything all the strength we can hope for and all our deliverance from the mundane is from Hashem, then we will experience true exultation. Joy found through awareness in G-d has no boundaries, because it springs forth from a place that is not earthbound. Here a newly anointed king speaks out and tells all future generations that real joy can be found only in Hashem.

One who realizes this has but one desire: to come closer to Hashem. His words tend to lead him in this holy direction. *You gave him his deepest desires and have not denied him what he openly asked*

for. When one slowly leaves the world of secular fantasy and becomes imbued with Torah ideals, his desires change, as indicated by the words he utters.

For You have anticipated him with blessings of good. You placed a crown of pure gold on his head. While those entrapped in the secular world seek life's material richness, the Torah-true Jew finds true blessings at every turn. Hashem crowns each of us with the pure gold of His security.

He asked You to give him life. You gave him long life in this world and eternal life in the next. There are so many who seek real life, one that means something beyond the next thrill or contrived experience. It is there waiting for us all the time; it is given as a gift from our loving Father in Heaven, Who so desires to give us this fullness of life if we are just willing to acknowledge it.

How often we come across those who fritter away their days killing time because they can't see beyond the circle of darkness around them. Hashem offers us days full of meaning and ripe with caring. This is eternity, and it has given our people the ability to rise above life's indignities.

His worth is magnified by Your rescue. You have placed on him majesty and splendor. There is no greater glory for man than to accept Hashem's deliverance on a daily basis, deed by deed, large and small. Ours is not only a lifestyle lived for the bold moments of heroic feats; rather, it is underlined by the everyday nudging that brings one closer to Hashem's light. This is our treasured majesty and splendor, something ethereal yet detectable in the faces of those who choose to live with it.

For You will establish him for eternal blessings. You make him overjoyed with Your presence. We have it within us to retrieve all the blessings of Hashem forever. Hashem desires our joy, and we are meant to live this out in a real way.

Dear friends, if we live our Yiddishkeit without a sense of joy, without the thankfulness that King David shared with us, it is as if we are living without hearing the sweet beat of our own hearts. So Reb Allan, thank you for making us all aware once more of this reality. We may well know the intricacies of Yaknahaz, but you have given us the sense of its joy.

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