

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SEVEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Bringing up kids is a lot like training horses; trust me on this, I know. You see I have a friend, and he has many horses, and you should hear him *kvetch*. Now to most *Yiddalach* the closest they ever get to horses is when they see one carrying a policeman. The last time we "knew from horses" was probably in the *shtetlach* in "the *heim*," and even then, they usually belonged to someone named Ivan. No, for the most part Yidden were smart enough to wait until someone invented the car. My friend was no different. He is a professional, well-balanced sort of guy, and the furthest thing in his mind was to own a string of four legged, carrot chomping creatures.

That is until one day he got a call. There are those strange moments in every life when with one small twist you find yourself on an altogether different path. Well, that's what happened to my friend. It turns out that someone owed him money, and in leu of payment he gave him the ownership of a prize-winning racehorse.

Now owning such an animal is no small matter. First of all you have to house him, then feed him, and most importantly, train him. Real champions in the horse world come with a great *yichus*. There are special *shadchanim* that bring together the stars of the horse world.

But that is just the beginning; everything about the raising of a racehorse must be supervised from what he eats, to when he gets up, to how he is treated. The main figure in all of this is the trainer. He has full responsibility for the horse's upbringing. The success of the trainer is based on the number of races the horse will win, and if the horse does not do all that well, then his efforts have been in vain.

My friend has regaled me with all kinds of stories about his horses, (that's right, the first horse had little horses, hence the plural - five in fact.) The trainer must teach the horse to focus on the task at hand, i.e. running around a huge circle rather fast with a howling, slapping human being sitting precariously on its back. They use many different tricks to get the horse to do as he should - blinders that don't allow the horse's sight to stray beyond its stated course, different signals by the rider giving the horse unique directions - all this and much more. That's right, being a "*ferd*" owner is no simple business.

Obviously the owning of racehorses has some redeeming features, if not it wouldn't be such an enormous industry; and although the wonder of having one's own racehorse has yet to entice me, I can see some very pertinent lessons that we can all learn.

Firstly, you need good stock. For one to hope to aspire to greatness one needs to try hard to make certain that the original ingredients are the best. Secondly, despite the best yichus you still have to nurture a youngster slowly and be ever mindful of how difficult the task of growing up can be. The horse trainer knows just about everything there is to know when it comes to his *ferdelach*.

Parents and teachers must all do the same. Blinders must be used sometimes, diets watched over, because everything the child does is part of what he will become in the future. Every racehorse trainer knows how powerful these huge creatures are. They are big, full of energy, and sometimes they seem as if they want to explode in a burst to run. So it is with young people, they too are full of energy, not always understood, and there are times when this energy seems to seethe and strive to get loose. The trainer understands this and tries to cultivate this power in a positive fashion. Every child is a unique being. Each one has energy that needs understanding, or it will just run away with itself with no positive outcome.

Finally, there is the one huge resource that must never be forgotten - my friend prays to Hashem that his "ferd" should come in first. Well I guess it's not anything worse than someone asking for a blessing that his business venture should prosper, his stocks should rise or for that matter that he wins the lottery. Without Hashem's blessing nothing happens, nothing at all. So it is with our children. We can send them to the best *mosdos*, and watch over them like the apple of our eye, but without Hashem's loving blessing, we will not share in true *nachas*.

I know children are nothing like horses; the truth is nothing is as holy as a Yiddishe child. In fact their holiness is so great that one could never really touch those heights. So, I'll talk of horses, and allow you, my trusted reader, to understand what we allude to.

This *kapitel* speaks of the powerful responsibilities we take on when we raise our young.

Im Hashem Lo Yivneh ... "If Hashem will not build a house, then in vain have its builders toiled upon it; If Hashem will not preserve the city, in vain does the watchman keep vigil."

We start with basics; without Hashem nothing stands. There can be no success unless Hashem wills it. The house of Torah, the city that is holy, all this stands by the grace of Hashem's will.

Hinei Nachalas Hashem ... "Behold, a heritage of Hashem, are children, a reward from Him is the fruit of the womb."

The most sacred of gifts from Hashem are our children. It is in them that our future lays.

Kechitzim Beyad Gibor ... "As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of one's youth."

The arrow shot from a strong bow will fly true. Its energy starts with the pull of the string by one with strength. The nucleus of power energizes the arrow's continuous flight. Children given training by devoted parents are much the same. Their later flight is a continuation of the strong influences they received when young.

Ashrei Hagever ... "Fortunate is the man who has filled his quiver with them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate." The quiver of the Jewish people is the *beis medrash*. When we fill its halls with the learning of our children, our arrows, then we will never be shamed by those who seek us ill. Training our young is no simple task, but it is the only hope we have for tomorrow.

And so, we raise the next generation with ardent focus and heartfelt prayers to Hashem. In this way we look towards a time when they will pass the "winning line" of life in first position, and thereby bring light and glory to the name of Hashem.

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