

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-EIGHT

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Almost every Yiddishe home has at least one, some even more. I speak of those spaces that contain a collage of family activity pictures. Throughout our lives we share so very much with those we love and pictures are a wondrous way of allowing those times to remain alive in our eyes. Every time one feels a bit down, all he needs to do is to sit down with a cup of tea and gaze at the smiling faces of his loved ones sharing happy moments together. How can all those times and places, given over in snippets of laughter, not remind us of Hashem's gracious love for the Jewish family?

Life throws so much at us, and it is an uphill battle to remain positive minded. Obviously, as Yidden we know that all that Hashem does is for a purpose, and that that purpose is for our own good. However, in the midst of the whirlwind, it is only human to lose focus. The "Smiling Corner," that place where your pictures reside, is a tonic, a pick me up, at such times.

I accept that even in families there are areas that can turn bitter and become tinged with anger. The family is the microcosm of our reality, and misfortune sometimes visits in this most delicate place. Nowhere are we more vulnerable than in the dynamic world that is our family. Much of what we become was born and nurtured in the hot house of the family unit; therefore it is there that fissures of our inner awareness are seen first.

As a Rav I am often called upon to resolve serious family rifts, with brothers fighting each other, and worse, children turning against their own parents. Such tragedy is not easy to negotiate because the inner feelings that create family battles are the deepest one can possess. I sometimes find myself saying, "Families, you can't live without them, and you can't live within them." On the surface one would think that such situations would be impossible in a Torah oriented community, however there is no counting the passions ignited by deep felt hurts, real or imagined, which suddenly find those who should no better becoming ensconced in bitterness. This is another reason to have a "Smiling Corner," a permanent reminder of the good times shared. When you allow those times to marinate into your heart, you can perhaps let go of some of the anger. You can remember that every face in those pictures has shared with you, and that they too had problems and pain. The family has in it the greatest potential for forgiveness when its members remember that they all come from one source. Yes, family is a sensitive place, and within it we should seek steps that can take us closer to Hashem. Look at this kapitel and see what I mean.

Ashrei Kol Yerei ... "Fortunate is the man who fears Hashem, who walks in His ways."

The Jewish home is built on the understanding that we feel fortunate that we have been chosen to walk in His ways. Sometimes we forget this; we feel somehow that walking in Hashem's ways' is an encumbrance. The world seems such a jolly place, full of tasty treats that the Torah forbids us. This is all a facade, because in truth the world is empty and most of its inhabitants while away their time waiting for their own end. We walk. We ascend to higher positions through our fear of Hashem. This is a fortunate goal in life, one that can bring much satisfaction.

Yegi'ah Kapecha ... "The toil of your hands, when you eat thereof, fortunate are you, good will be yours."

In the family each must accept his responsibility. Much pain begins with a false sense of what one thinks the others should be doing. Family dynamics are difficult. Children are born and parents teach them, then the youngsters grow into adults, and sometimes this transformation is complex to all. The parents find the grown children to be somewhat bewildering, after all they don't necessarily listen to them as they used to. The children see their parents in a diverse light as well; they were once small and helpless now they are adults. They feel hurt when they are not treated as such, or when they think that others are being treated with more respect. The Gemara tells us that giving parents the honor they deserve is so difficult that in most cases only orphans fulfill their obligations! This all calls for much toil, hands on work, with understanding and humility.

Eshtecha Kegefen Poria ... "Your wife is a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your home; your children are like olive plants around your table."

Look at those pictures on the wall. The mother of our families is the regal focal point of the Jewish home. I always laugh when I hear the grandchildren tell me how they are going to Bubby's house for Shabbos (as if I don't really live there). It is from this center that all else grows. The children are like olive trees, they are always green and fresh no matter what the weather brings. We can remain strong no matter what life throws at us when we stay attached to the roots that our parents have laid down. Sitting around a table as brothers is the true nachas that Yiddishe parents pray for.

Hinei Ki Chein ... "Behold, so is blessed the man who fears Hashem."

David Hamelech tells us that if we have proper yiras Hashem we will be able to work through all the family stuff and remain focused on the good. The Torah tells us to honor our parents, not necessarily loving them. The Torah shows its understanding of human nature - not every time can love come automatically. There may be insurmountable problems that lay in the way. However, we can all honor our parents, acting in ways that show our respect. When we follow this path, despite all provocations, then we fear Hashem, and this is a huge blessing.

Yevarechecha Hashem ... "May Hashem bless you out of Zion, and may you look upon the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life."

Even in our *galus* we can create a bit of the holiness of Jerusalem within our homes. If we see the

good, kvell with the moments of shared joy, then we will carry that warmth all the days of our lives.

The Peasnetzna, zy"a, commented on the Torah passage, "It is enough your sitting before this mountain." Sometimes we become immobile because we perceive certain obstacles before us as insurmountable. Here we see the Torah telling us to avoid becoming frozen in our tracks just because we see difficulties as mountains. Even if things seem huge, we should know that with the help of Hashem everything is possible. Strife amongst us is just such an obstacle. We will never grow if we allow such things to stand between us. There is nothing too difficult that we cannot overcome if we but fear Hashem and seek to create light for His sanctity.

Ure'ei Banim Levanecha ... "And may you see children of your children, and peace upon Israel."

So, sit and look at those warm pictures, see the children and hopefully their children, and seek their peace and yours as well.

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