

GLORY DAYS & GOLDEN YEARS

by Jon Erlbaum

- This Week's **RRR** (Relevant Religious Reference): **"Any love that depends on a specific cause, when that cause is gone, the love is gone - but if it does not depend on a specific cause, it will never cease..."** - *Ethics of the Fathers (Avos), 5:19*
- This Week's **SSC** (Suitable Secular Citation): ? **"And I hope when I get old I don't sit around thinking about it, but I probably will... well time slips away and leaves you with nothing mister, but boring stories of - GLORY DAYS"** ? - From "Glory Days" by "The Boss" Bruce Springsteen

SPRINGSTEEN'S HIGH SCHOOL FRIENDS

In the first verses of his hit song "Glory Days", Bruce Springsteen speaks about two of his friends who are "past their prime", feeling hopelessly compelled to pine away for the old days. The 1st is a guy who had been a **"big baseball player back in high school"**, and the 2nd is a woman who **"could turn all the boys' heads"** back in her heyday. I'm pretty sure Bruce is on to something big here! Think about it: in illustrating the "has-been" characters that are fated to pine away for the past, look at the examples he chooses. He specifically references people who had been highly regarded in their youth for their PHYSICAL prowess.

A STOCK THAT IS DESTINED TO GO DOWN

So what makes Bruce's friends - and others who are highly regarded for the PHYSICAL prowess of their youth - especially vulnerable to latter-life letdown? Our Sages provide a hint in their following Talmudic statement (as per the **RRR** above): "Any love that depends on a specific cause - when that cause is gone, the love is gone...." True, on one level the Sages are speaking about interpersonal love & romantic relationships (e.g. if a man marries a woman that he "loves" PRIMARILY for her looks, as her youthful charm vanishes, the "love" gradually vanishes along with it). But we can also apply the Sages' quote to **LOVE OF SELF**, or even to **LOVE OF LIFE**. Let's speculate into the early life of **Bruce's baseball friend - called "Superjock Studmuffinstein" below** - to demonstrate this

phenomenon:

1. Young Superjock Studmuffinstein has some serious baseball skills, for which he attracts much recognition & admiration
2. The thrill of being admired causes Superjock to base more and more of his esteem and identity - his "LOVE OF SELF" and even "LOVE OF LIFE" - around his baseball skills
3. **DANGER AHEAD:** any love - whether of others, of self, or of life - that depends on a specific cause (like baseball skills or looks), when that cause is gone, the love is gone
4. **CRISIS:** Despite the fact that some stars like Roger Clemens & Jamie Moyer play well into their 40's, Mr. Studmuffinstein's skills go the way of all physical greatness and fade away with time. He had become known as "Mr. Baseball", which he proudly adopted as his self-defining label. Now what? **What happens to a "Mr. Baseball" that can no longer play the game? What happens to a "Miss Head-Turner" that can no longer turn the heads?**

THE GENERAL PROBLEM: PHYSICALITY DETERIORATES WITH TIME - physical matter, physical strength, physical beauty, and so on! Therefore, basing our identity and esteem around our physical greatness, much like marrying mostly for looks, is like heavily investing in a stock that we know will go down! So now we can plug in all the variables to our new equation: any "self-love" that depends on the physical greatness of our youth, when that physical greatness is inevitably gone, the "self-love" is gone.

100 IS THE NEW 20

You've heard that 60 is the new 40? Well in this week's portion, we learn how 100 can be the new 20! We are told that our Matriarch Sarah lived her life in such a way that when she was 100, it was as though she was 20. 100-year old Sarah didn't need to look back at her glory days - **her "Golden Years" WERE her "Glory days"!** How did she do it? Perhaps because when she was 20, she invested more in the rising stock of spiritual pursuits than in the plummeting stock of superficial preoccupations. And while we said above that physicality deteriorates with time, SPIRITUALITY flows in the opposite direction and CAN ACTUALLY GET BETTER WITH TIME! [Incidentally, this is one reason we use wine to sanctify experiences like Shabbat, which represents the elevation of our physical world for a spiritual purpose. **Wine and "Spirits"** (aptly named) are perfect choices to symbolize this triumph. Since they are famous for **improving over time**, they are prime examples of physical substances that are influenced by spiritual properties].

OLD-AGE & BEYOND

Two final points that stem from these principles are important to consider. First of all, the value that we place on physicality vs. spirituality will also likely determine the appreciation we have for elderly people. On a societal level, those cultures that place the highest premiums on physical

accomplishments seem to be the same cultures that place the lowest premiums on their senior citizens. And finally, one more crucial concept comes out of the "love of life" analysis: we have established that the more occupied and obsessed we become with our fleeting physicality, the more we can expect a later life of frustration, disappointment, and meaninglessness. But this conclusion also holds true for our afterlife experience, for the very same reasons: **the more our "love of life" is wrapped up in our physical preoccupations, the more difficult our transition to an afterlife where that physicality is no longer accessible.** The more our souls would be fated to grasp for a gratification that is no longer available!

Of course, spirituality from a Jewish perspective is not synonymous with deprivation or full-time mountaintop meditation! Spirituality involves engaging in the physical world and harnessing its resources to fulfill the meaningful missions for which we were created. With that in mind, we can thank our Sages. They may not have been seasoned stock market analysts, but their hot tip on spiritual awareness provides us with a top investment strategy: one that can perpetually take us from strength to strength - ever looking ahead to greater Glory Days!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos! Love, Jon & The Chevra

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