



GROWTH

At The

YOM TOV TABLE

ROSH HASHANAH

**Special Holiday Double-
Sided Edition!**

Embracing Imperfection

R' YY Jacobson recounted a touching story experienced by his brother, R' Simon Jacobson.

R' Simon would give a weekly class in a Manhattan shul to a crowd of mostly secular Jews. On one particular Wednesday night, a new face showed up – a young man who was clearly challenged with physical disabilities. It was hard for him to walk or carry himself, and his motor skills were compromised. He attended the lecture, and continued to come for months without saying a word. After a few months, he felt comfortable enough to approach R' Simon, and in the midst of the conversation, the young, handicapped man shared his story:

Around three decades earlier, the doctors immediately observed that he was born with a serious neurological defect. They informed his parents, explaining that there would be no hope for full recovery, and that he would need constant help to develop his verbal and motor skills, as well as a few other skills, in order to be able to function well. His parents were Jews living in Manhattan, very wealthy and high-profile people. They were party-goers, and, as such, felt that this would seriously impede their lifestyle. They never took him home from the hospital, but put him in an institution that would care for him. He was around 30 years old, and had never met his father or mother.

"Where do they live?" R' Simon asked. The young man replied, "They live around here, in Manhattan. I have the same last name as them, I know who they are. They're prestigious people..." "Have you ever wanted to meet them?" the rabbi inquired. "It looks like they don't want to," he sadly explained. "They never came to visit. But every month, they send me a nice check, so I have what I need. I can even get jobs, according to my capacity..."

R' Simon was moved by this young man's sincerity; he saw that he was extremely intelligent, very sensitive, and possessed an incredible spiritual depth. He researched and found the phone number of the young man's father, and made the call. As the phone rang, he mustered up the courage, until he finally heard someone pick up on the other end. He introduced himself, and explained, "There is somebody who has been coming to my classes for a long time now, and he's an incredible person. He happens to be your son; I think you would enjoy meeting him –" Suddenly, he was interrupted by an abrupt BOOM; the call was terminated on the other end. Believing it was a mistake (or at least hoping so), R' Simon dialed the number again, and this time the man exclaimed, "Didn't I make it clear that I don't want to talk to you? Don't mix into my life!"

Sometime later, he phoned again, upon which the man reiterated that he wasn't interested in talking to him. "Please, don't you feel

that it's right for the boy to meet his parents, and for you to meet your son?" The boy's father responded sternly: "It's none of your business; stop meddling into our lives." Despite the tough response, he waited some more time, and eventually called the mother, figuring that the heart of a Jewish mother would melt. The mother answered the phone, and after R' Simon explained who he was and why he was calling, the mother immediately started crying. She tried getting ahold of herself, and finally admitted: "Listen, we made a decision thirty years ago; we're not about to rethink it now. Sorry." And with that, she hung up.

He still wasn't getting anywhere, but at least she was nicer and easier to work with. He called her back, and said: "Please, I want you to think about something. There are kids who are orphans, who have lost their parents when they were very young, and wherever in the world you may meet one of these orphans, if you mention anything about their parents, their faces shine up, coming to life. They're always looking for information, begging people to tell them about their mother and father. All their life, they feel a void; they don't know where they come from. Here, you ironically have a child who is alive, and whose mother and father are both alive, only residing a few blocks away! He isn't asking anything of you; he's not requesting to move in with you, to take care of him, or change your schedule... all he wants is to meet you. Is that too much to ask?" The mother was silent, and after a few moments replied, "You have to bring this up with my husband..."

A year later, R' Simon worked on contacting the father, and finally was successful in convincing him to meet his son. There was just one condition: R' Simon had to be there, too, to serve as a "buffer zone." The meeting was set for a Sunday afternoon in a suite of a building overlooking Central Park, which was where the couple lived. R' Simon came with the handicapped young man, and took the elevator to the top floor – a beautiful, huge suite with a breathtaking view. They were greeted in by the couple and seated on the couch, with various refreshments on the coffee table. They started conversing about Sunday football, the weather... almost everything besides anything. After 10 minutes, there was nothing left to make small talk about, and the heavy awkwardness expanded throughout the room as no one was even looking at each other anymore, desperately trying to avoid each other's gaze. R' Simon, realizing that this was his moment to take initiative, looked at the father, the mother, and the son, and began speaking. "I know it's very nice to converse about football and the weather, but let's get to the chase. We're here for a reason.

(Cont. on next side)

This young man started coming to my classes, and I got to know him. I was incredibly moved by his intelligence, depth, spirituality, kindness, sensitivity, and sense of refinement. And I felt that you would be fortunate to see what type of soul your son is and what a noble person he grew to be, despite all his limitations and disabilities. That's why I'm here; I just wanted that you should get to meet each other."

The room was filled with tension, and before the parents could say anything, the son looked them in the eyes and spoke up. Since he couldn't pronounce the vowels to say "Mommy" or "Tatty," he said: "Mumma... Puppa... you know I was born imperfect. I'm not perfect... but neither are you, Mumma or Puppa. I have forgiven you for being imperfect; I hope that one day, you can forgive me for being imperfect." His mother burst out into tears, and she stood up to give him a hug – a long hug, the first one she ever gave her son. The father was pensive and quiet, but after his wife finished, he got up and hugged his son for a long time, as well. R' Simon, feeling like

a shadchan after the chuppah, excused himself, and slipped out of the apartment. Finally, after around 3 decades, the family was reunited.

The young man's question was a powerful query that each and every one of us must be asking ourselves every day. Have we forgiven our children for being imperfect? Have you forgiven your parents for being imperfect? And perhaps the hardest: *have you forgiven yourself for being imperfect?* On Rosh Hashanah, we look forward to a new year with untold potential. When making "resolutions," it is crucial to keep in mind that we are not striving for perfection. Only G-d is perfect. We must hope and try to improve gradually, but without being overly hard on ourselves, for doing so will only impede long-term growth. Only after first forgiving ourselves for being imperfect and acknowledging that we are "works-in-progress" do we open the door for true introspection and real growth. *Wishing you and your family an amazing year and many more ahead!*

Game-Changer

Why do read about Chana in the Haftara of Rosh Hashanah?

R' Rephael Briller shared a profound answer in the name of R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach that is worthwhile to internalize throughout the holiday. Chana was childless for a long time, but she didn't just pray to have children. She prayed for "zera anashim," which, as the Gemara explains, was a prayer to have a son like two of the greatest men to live – Moshe and Aharon. According to Chazal, the day that Chana's prayer was answered was on Rosh Hashanah. And indeed, she gave birth to Shmuel HaNavi, who is equated to both Moshe and Aharon (see Berachot 31b).

We therefore read Chana's story on Rosh Hashanah to inspire *chizuk* on the holy day. *Tefillah* is incredibly powerful on Rosh Hashanah, and the potential is unlimited. Utilize the *tefillot* and don't waste the golden opportunity. Dream big; ask big! Shoot for the stars! Learn from Chana, who didn't just ask for a child, but had the courage and wisdom to pray for a son on the level of two of the greatest men to ever walk the earth. These few days have the potential to turn things around. In fact, the day that Yosef HaTzaddik was released from the Egyptian prison happened to be Rosh Hashanah.

Aside from the standard texts to read in *shul*, try finding time to converse privately with your Creator in your own words. Don't just ask to get through another year; ask to LIVE each second of the coming year and make it the best and most productive year yet, with personal and national salvations.

"Rosh Hashanah reminds us that we have first-class tickets clutched in our hands, handed down from Avraham Avinu. The Shofar challenges us: are we behaving like first-class passengers?" (R' Avraham Chaim Sanzer)

Potent Pomegranates

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, there is a Jewish custom to eat different symbolic foods as *simanim* (signs) for the new year. Although many of the *simanim* variate among different sects of Judaism, one that is universal is the pomegranate. The common understanding, as we ask in the text of the "*Yehi Ratzon*," is that just as a pomegranate has 613 seeds (at least in the times of the *tanna'im*), so should we always be occupied with the 613 Mitzvot.

While the aforementioned concept is definitely among our wishes for the new year, the pomegranate (along with every other symbolic food) carries a more insightful message as well. Like all Jewish customs, there is always significance embedded beyond the surface.

The only time the Torah references a pomegranate (besides by the 7 fruits of Israel) is by the clothing of the Kohen Gadol. The Torah commands that sewn on his garment should be a pattern: a bell, a pomegranate-shaped-object, a bell, another "pomegranate," and so on.

What is the figurative contrast between the bell and the pomegranate?

As the garment moves along, the bells produce noise, whereas the pomegranates sit silently. The bells can shake and grow increasingly loud and chaotic, but the pomegranates remain quiet and undeterred.

It is no secret that we live in a crazy world, and the madness of society seems to amplify uncontrollably. With so many different distractions "making noise" all around us, it becomes harder to remain focused on *avodat Hashem*. Whether it be external stimuli or distracting thoughts, the Satan is fully invested in diverting us from our ultimate mission. But if we can overcome the distractions and focus on what's important, we can transcend the obstacles and act as Divine channels on this earth. On *Leil Rosh Hashanah*, we are asking Hashem to bless us to be like the metaphoric "pomegranates." No matter how intense or insane the bells become, we beseech Boreh Olam to give us the strength and resilience to remain steadfast in His service – in Torah, *tefillah*, *chesed*, etc. – and hold onto our *emuna*.

May Hashem indeed bless us to be like the pomegranate and remain loyal, kind, dedicated, and connected even in a world full of loud bells and distractions.

(Based on a *d'var Torah* from R' Yaakov Yagen)