

Eternal not Ephemeral

KJ Hannah Greenberg

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Preface: Since Ostensibly Forever

Since ostensibly forever, yampy grands have been mindful that fashioning fiction endures as a means of providing future generations with knowledge, no matter young storytellers' habits. Consider that when new steamship captains, fresh fried rice entrepreneurs, or untested students of veterinary medicine seek insights within contemporary society's lexis, given our culture's complications, weak men will cry, strong women will jump from undersized buildings, and imaginary hedgehogs will shelter with unicorns.

Granted, many daughters write beautiful prose, many sons are prolific raconteurs, and large numbers of grandchildren have keen imaginations. Nonetheless, it continues to be up to grannies and grandpas to use words to complete the difficult parts of consciousness-raising because stuck positions, stifling strictures, and infighting are laughable to persons who care nothing for external validation.

It's not so much that youngsters quell the number and kinds of questions that they proffer, as much as it is that until people age, they are uncomfortable holding, let alone articulating, "ghastly" sentiments. More exactly, hoary individuals, unlike fresh faces, are prepared to cleave to robust beliefs *and* to distribute them as congregations of words. Ancients, not adolescents, overall, are responsible for intrepidly crafting chronicles that focus on society's "overwhelming" issues.

Even in cases in which barflies, Komodo dragons, or British dragoons feel constrained by dogma, silver-haired folks continue to utilize tall tales and short ones to laser through goings-on; OAPs have lived too long to allow any miasma of misunderstanding to shroud their rhetoric. Notwithstanding specific misdirection issued by toxic wildebeests, magniloquent politicians, and other gabbling revolutionaries, elders' narratives, built from small portions of phlogiston and larger measures of heart, uniquely promote critical and creative thinking.

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Then

Pretty Little Miss

Jedidah pulled at the cuticle that was half on and half off her right index finger. The skin gave way and suddenly she was sucking at a small laceration.

Basmat lifted an eyebrow at his wife and then returned to studying the book before him. The twins had gone to sleep only minutes ago, and, for a short span, the house was quiet.

That span got truncated. With the delicacy of a capybara, Basmat's beloved began to complain. Both Anat and Nava, Basmat's sisters, were taking their families to a hotel in Jerusalem for Shavuot. Jedidah, it seemed, was more than annoyed that her family was not also going away for the holiday.

"Cherished wife," I bought you the kitchen appliances you asked for before Pesach. I also bought you and our five daughters two new outfits, apiece, for that holiday. So, presently, we don't have any extra money."

Jedidah's bottom lip began to quiver. Her high-tech job covered all their expenses since Basmat, who learned Torah full-time, earned just a pittance of a stipend. On balance, when she had been seeking a mate, Jedidah had specified to all the matchmakers that she wanted a "learner," not an "earner." Moreover, her college degree in computer science more than equipped her to fund a family. The problem was that she liked "nice" things.

Twelve years earlier, the honor of supporting a man who would devote his life to learning was more important than a new car, a large apartment, or boutique clothing. Besides, her parents had gifted them an apartment as well as had given them an allowance for the first ten years of their marriage. Those parents had likewise bought Basmat and Jedidah's daughters everything that those girls claimed that they "needed."

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However, when Malka, a late bloomer and Jedidah's only sibling, had at last stood under the chuppah, the familial subsidies had stopped. "Gotta be fair to both of our girls" was what Jedidah's parents had said.

Going forward, Jedidah and Basmat used Jedidah's salary. No longer were her earnings split between savings and indulgences. There was no more patronizing of posh steakhouses or biannual restockings of clothing closets. Rather, there was ground meat that had to be manually transformed into patties and Malka's hand-me-downs.

Large tears fell from Jedidah's eyes. Although she was a high-tech wonder, she was, concurrently, at forty, poor!

Sighing, Basmat closed the book from which he was learning and wiped a tear from his wife's cheek. "Fine, I'll arrange something," he grunted as he left their apartment for evening prayers.

Lag B'Omer came and went. Jedidah accompanied their girls to their beit kneset's campfire. The little ones roasted potatoes and then marshmallows. Thereafter, the good wife awaited her husband's return from learning.

Basmat came home flushed. His night had been filled with a great deal of dancing and singing, plus hours of debating Torah. He loved Lag B'Omer.

Jedidah looked at her happy mate. She succeeded in pulling herself into a mindset that might share in his joy. Her sense of loss, though, walled his rapture from her. So, rather than smile at Basmat, she held out her palm. "So, where're the tickets? Where're we going?"

Basmat, who was glistening from elation as much as from sweat, smiled at his beloved. Without her working to finance their family and without her parents' decade of generosity, he would not have been able to toil in Torah. Jedidah was a woman of valor! He filled her outstretched palm not with a registration form for a hotel or with a surprise of jewelry but with kisses.

Jedidah yanked her hand from Basmat's lips and glared at him. "Your sisters' husbands work even though they, too, were once at the top of their respective yeshiva classes."

"Yes. One's a store manager and one's an accountant. Their lives are neither easy nor illuminating."

“But they go away for Shavuot.”

“So, will you.”

“?”

“Raphael ...”

“Your afternoon learning partner...”

“... has a sister-in-law, who has a cousin, who has rental property near Meron.”

“Lag B’Omer will be over when the stars come out.”

“Yes, but Shavuot in Tzfat won’t start for another few weeks.”

“Tsfat?”

“Tsfat!”

“When there, can we pray at the Breslov synagogue? Do you remember that Chanukah, when I was pregnant with the twins, that you watched our three oldest so that I could join the collective recitation of *Tehillim*?

“A sweet time.”

“Can we buy cheese from Kadosh?”

“Of course. I’d anticipated you’d want to do so and have already written “dairy cutlery” on the packing list.”

“And...”

“You want to come home with one piece of microcalligraphy. That’s why we’re arriving a day before the holiday and leaving a day after— so you’ll have time to shop.”

“What did you trade Raphael?”

I’m teaching his sister’s cousin’s nephew *te’amim*. That boy, with Hashem’s help, will become Bar Mitzvah next year.”

“I’m blessed! I can’t wait to tell our girls!”

“About that... before Pesach, your mom bought them new dresses and bought you this gift card. Last week, at the post office, I picked up the package that contained those goodies but didn’t tell you since we can’t buy new things until after Shavuot, anyway.”

“The card’s for Ohr Boutique! I can use it after we return from Tsfat! Life *is* good. Why was I complaining?”

“I don’t know. We have each other, our children, a Torah life, and a home in Jerusalem. Gifts and trips are bonuses.”

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“Forgive me?”

“Nope. You never hurt or otherwise upset me. There’s nothing to forgive.

“Besides, my dear, pretty little miss, I’ve always known that you like sparkly things. I’ve also always known that you wanted to be married to someone who learns full-time.”

“Not a contradiction?”

“Does it have to be?”

“Keep me?”

“There was never an option not to.”