

SOME FATHERLY ADVICE

I beg your indulgence if I take advantage of the pulpit, this morning, for matters of personal privilege.

First, I thank all those who have come to join Mrs. Lamm and me in our simchah, and hope that we shall be able to reciprocate at happy and joyous occasions in the lives of all members of the Center Family and all our friends.

It is for me a special privilege to extend a warm, heartfelt, and fraternal welcome to a former neighbor, a revered colleague, and -- above all -- a dear friend, the distinguished Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Dr. Immanuel Jakobovits, who has spanned the ocean in order to repay a six-year old debt in our mutual exchange of celebrating simchahs in our respective families. I am pleased not only that my eminent guest has come to grace our joyous occasion, but that he has consented to teach and address this congregation this afternoon.

Second, my sermon this morning will consist of remarks inspired by what is for me the obviously personal nature of today's event -- some fatherly advice, in the tradition of King Solomon's remark in Proverbs:

שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל אֲבִיךָ

-- listen, my son, to the teaching of your father. But though these words may be directed specifically to my son, I do not mean them exclusively for him, but also for all other young

people. Perhaps, if it be not an immodest conceit, they may be of some relevance and value to others as well.

My fatherly advice, my *פאטערליכע ראט*, is essentially this: grow up fast, set high goals, strive for greatness and nothing less than greatness, because nothing less will do.

Halakhically, bar mitzvah is the time that a youngster reaches the status of gadol, his legal majority. But it is far more than a legal category or a physiological state. It also implies maturity, and, even more than that, gadlut means greatness. And the world thirsts for greatness. Society is pitifully mired in a morass of mediocrity, Jewish life is being strangled by smallness, and only greatness can save them.

Shakespeare said (in his "Twelfth Night"): "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em."

To be born great, that is a gift of God. To be thrust into greatness -- that is the gift of society and the happy conspiracy of circumstances. But to achieve greatness -- that is truly great, and that is within the ken of all of us. The greatness I have in mind is subjective, not objective. I do not mean that one must become the greatest scholar or painter or musician in the world, but that he must exploit his native talents to the fullest, that he become the utmost of what he potentially is, that he achieve all that is possible for him.

I believe that the long and arduous involvement of Jacob with his brother Esau was, at bottom, the story of Jacob's struggle to achieve gadlut or greatness against the nefarious attempts of Esau to reduce him to katnut, to immaturity or inconsequentiality. The original conflict between the brothers begins at their birth. Esau is the ben hagadol, the older or greater son, and Jacob is described as the ben hakatan, the younger or smaller son. Jacob dreams of greatness, and Esau disdains it. Jacob therefore attempts to wrest from Esau his bekhorah, his rank of firstborn, which in Biblical days implied priesthood and the service of God and spiritual preeminence. When Jacob offered to buy it, Esau shamelessly consented and was willing to give it up. He had no use for gadlut. He would rather tend to the satisfaction of his own appetites. But when Esau later learns that bekhorah, the status of greatness, not only imposes heavy duties but brings in its wake berakhah or paternal blessings, Esau is envious, he regrets that he has forfeited greatness, and he is determined to get it back at all costs, otherwise he will kill his brother.

That strange scene reported in today's Sidra, the wrestling of Jacob with his mysterious assailant, was interpreted by our Rabbis as a struggle between Jacob and 1'el Se 1'el, the angel or spiritual ego of Esau. This is, in a sense, a parable of the struggle of the Patriarch to achieve gadlut --

maturity, preeminence, greatness -- against the endeavor of his assailant Esau to reduce him to spiritual venality, to put him in his place, to pull him down a few rungs from the heights to which he aspired.

One thing, therefore, that Jacob teaches us is that gadlut is not attained in one decisive step. It is a lifelong effort, in which man must constantly be on guard, in which he must expect occasionally to slip and suffer recessions, but to be prepared to recoup his strength and to make new advances towards great goals, towards majestic ends, towards royal attainments.


How does one go about attaining gadlut? What can a father advise a young son upon which he urges this royal reach, this mighty ambition? Permit me to list just four of the many vital ingredients in the prescription for gadlut.

The first thing one must do is beware of the major challenge to greatness, and that is triviality, pettiness. The noblest ambitions are often corrupted by the meanest and most insignificant trivia. It is almost unavoidable, but it will do us good to beware of it at all times.

What is it that caused Jacob his setback, that got him involved in this life-and-death struggle with his adversary? The Rabbis say that Jacob had moved all his family and belongings across the stream or ford known as maavar yabbok, but that he

went back only to retrieve some pakhim ketanim, some minor possessions, some small pots and pans -- and that is where he was attacked by the angel of Esau! The threat to Jacob's gadlut came when he allowed himself to be distracted by pakhim ketanim, by matters of no value and no consequence. And it is usually on these smallest of obstacles that the greatest of men trip and destroy themselves.

So that the road to greatness lies in the ability to discern between the important and the unimportant, between the primary and the secondary, between what is truly vital and what is merely urgent. The man of gadlut must learn to isolate the real issues from the phony ones, and attend only to them. He must, early in life, identify the real goals that are worthy of his best efforts, and those which he had best ignore. The great man must learn to overlook petty insults and not be impressed by petty compliments.

Now, that is easier said than done. The danger to our developing maturity and our noble aspirations comes, all too often, from the strangest and most unexpected sources. Jacob, the man who aspired to the bekhorah, to preeminence, was almost permanently crippled by the angel of Esau, symbol of the enemy of his gadlut-aspirations. What did this angel look like? There are two opinions in the Jewish tradition. One is that , he looked like a ferocious, barbaric pagan, a natural enemy.

People who are obviously mean, trite, and ignorant seek to diminish our highest endeavors. But there is a second opinion that is somewhat more subtle and sophisticated: *רשע זינדיג* *יח נזי*. This incarnation of triviality and superficiality, this embodiment of spiritual shallowness, appeared not like a cannibal, but like a scholar, a student, a cultured gentleman! The challenges to our maturity are ubiquitous, and come from all directions. Position is no guarantee of the absence of pettiness. Even supposedly dignified people, who occupy high rank and eminent station, try to provoke us, to incite us to loss of perspective, and thus to trivialize us. You will find the meanest of men in the highest of places. *רשע זינדיג* *יח נזי*. Some fatherly advice would include a warning never to relax your guard in your career of achieving moral greatness and spiritual eminence and true maturity. Never be ensnared by the pakhim ketanim of life, never be dragged down into spiritual impotence by the ever-present *רשע זינדיג* ; no matter what he looks like.

The second thing to remember is that greatness requires the absence of selfishness. In order to be great you have to have supreme confidence in your ability to achieve your goals, but your ego must be placed at the service of some higher, transcendent, overarching, impersonal ideal. The great man is one who will never disdain the smallest of men or the loneliest of people.

It is the state of noblesse oblige. It is what Aristotle called "magnanimity," and what our Rabbis called *חַיְיחַיָּוּת*, when they stated the following characteristic of God Himself: *אֵל גָּדוֹל וְחַיְיחַיָּוּת לְבִין נְחִלָּה אֵל אֲדָרָה לֵב לְחַיְיחַיָּוּת לְבִין נְחִלָּה*

-- wherever you find mention of God's greatness, there you find mention as well of His meekness, of His magnanimity. We read of God Who dwells in the highest of heavens, the Creator of the entire universe and the splendor of the cosmos -- and yet it is He Who listens to the silent cry of the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the lonely, the dispossessed. And in this, as in so much else, man must imitate his Maker.

Hence, to be a gadol means to be able to overcome the greatest of all enemies -- one's self. Greatness of character and soul is one ambition for the achievement of which you must sacrifice all other ambitions. To be great, you must be willing to suffer privation, to yield on immediate satisfactions and pleasures. Gadlut means to practice renunciation of your own wants in favor of a higher ideal, to forego momentary fame and the acclaim of the masses, to silence the desires that rage within.

That is a hard task, a tall order. But that is what makes a man great -- to embrace hardship, to welcome difficulty, to attempt the impossible.

Gadlut is, paradoxically, attained by awareness of your

own katnut, of your own smallness, of your own lack of merit. Never did Jacob rise higher and become more of a gadol when he said, as we read today, פִּזְוֹנָהּ דְּבָנִי הִנְיָהּ, I am too small to deserve all Your goodness, O God. The real gadol always considers himself הִנְיָהּ. He follows the difficult and hard path of renunciation and self-restraint.

אֲבִירָא דְּמִינֵי מַלְאָכֵי שָׁמַיָא : abjure the simple solutions and disdain the easy paths which will allow you to effortlessly expand your own ego. Take the hard road which requires you to swallow your pride and suffer frustration -- and become great.

There is a third bit of advice that a father must give a son today if he is to guide him to the path of greatness, and it is something which, in our days, the son's generation knows better than the father's. Greatness requires enthusiasm, zeal, even passion. You cannot become great by being tired before your time. You cannot become a gadol if you are going to be "pareve." You must not be a respecter of the status quo, because the status quo was likely as not established by mediocrities. You must not be overly calm and philosophical in the face of injustice.

This is where "greatness" goes beyond "maturity." About Isaac we read וַיִּגְדַּל וַיִּשְׁׁמַד וַיִּשְׁׁמַד, "and the child grew and was weaned" (Gen. 21:8). The Midrash read into this a somewhat larger

significance. One Sage said that he was weaned אור נורא,
 from the Evil Urge. Isaac at this point developed a sense of
 responsibility and restraint, he was able to hold himself in
 check and take things in stride. He attained the אור נורא,
 the Good Urge, and became a good person. This is the definition
 of אור נורא, he was weaned or he became mature. But the other
 Sage says just the reverse: אור נורא -- Isaac trans-
 cended the Good Urge and developed the Evil Urge! The אור נורא
 or Evil Urge for the Rabbis never meant wickedness as such, but
 always implied the primitive force and raw energy that usually
 characterize evil conduct. But they admired it -- and demanded
 that it be used for constructive and moral purposes. And so
 this Sage tells us that Isaac had already known in which direc-
 tion the good lies, but now he achieved the ability to put pas-
 sion and power and force and vitality into his striving for the
 good. He attained not only אור נורא, but also אור נורא --
 more than maturity, he now had greatness. He knew how to harness
 the elemental powers of his very being and to release his massive
 vigor and the passion of his convictions -- the trademark of the
אור נורא -- to serve the goals already identified by his
אור נורא.

To take things in stride -- that is merely nature; to
 get excited, to become indignant about evil, to put heart and
 soul and vigor and passion into the pursuit of noble ideals --
 that is the way of greatness.

So *אם לא תתן* -- if you want to become great, you have got to give it your undivided attention and undiminished energy and undiluted vigor. You can't become great with half a heart. You must learn, like other members of your generation, not to sugarcoat the reality of evil or whitewash corruption and hypocrisy in the society about you. You must not hear about outrages and fail to be outraged by them. You must be revolted to the core of your being by the am ha'aratzut that prevails in Jewish communal life from top to bottom. You must shriek your protest against injustice and put every fibre of your being and your strength into setting the world aright. You must put your *כח וצ'ו* to use in the achievement of what your *אבא וצ'ו* has taught you.

Finally, the best fatherly advice that a father can give his son is to get out of his father's shadow and strike out on his own. Parents can only do so much in providing their son with all the necessities for attaining greatness; but the essence of the journey must be made by himself, alone, and by virtue of his own inner resources.

The momentous struggle for greatness by Jacob is described by our Sidra in three words: *ויהי ערב*, and Jacob remained alone -- alone to face the angel of Esau, alone to face the demons that would pulverize his gadlut and reduce him to pettiness. Ultimately, no matter how Jacob's mother tried

to protect him, no matter what blessings his father finally gave him, Jacob's maturity had to be won by himself. He had to fight by himself for his ultimate greatness. So, parents, teachers, principals, rabbis, can only give a young man the weapons with which to fight for his gadlut, but the war is his and no one else's. It can sometimes become a lonely battle, as it has been for most of us who have gone through it, but that only makes the ultimate triumph so much sweeter.

In the financial law of the Halakhah, gadlut is treated as a special case. In this section of Jewish law, majority is attained not automatically at the age of thirteen, but it means economic independence. The Talmud (B.M. 12) discusses the law of מציא or finds, in which an article found by a katan, a minor, belongs to the father, whereas an article found by a gadol, an adult, belongs to himself.

אדם גדול מצא פסוק אחד
אדם קטן מצא פסוק אחד
אדם גדול מצא פסוק אחד

An adult is not merely one who is bar mitzvah, and a minor is not merely one who is under age. A chronological adult who still is dependent on his father's table -- that is, he cannot earn his own living but must be supported by his father -- is considered a minor; and a minor who is not dependent upon his father's table is considered a gadol, an adult.

This applies not only to the law of property and finds

but to the development of the total personality as well. Real gadlut is achieved when a people or an individual is no longer satisfied with the crumbs from the table of another culture or religion or life-style. A child starts out in his road to greatness when, having imbibed all he can from the teachings at his father's table, he can strike out on his own, can begin the long and wonderful process of building his own life and his own home in which he eventually will have a table at which he will incorporate all he learned at his parents table; a table at which Torah will be spoken, at which mentschlichkeit will be observed, at which a blessing will be heard, a table which -- as our Rabbis put it -- will become a kind of altar in a miniature sanctuary. Personal gadlut requires true Jewish independence -- neither fruitless rebelliousness nor crippling dependency, but an autonomous contribution to continuity and continuation.

A youngster of thirteen is neither economically nor spiritually ready to do that completely. But he must start -- thinking not only of a career but of a grander future, one in which he will never forget the בית הוריו, the home of his parents, indeed one in which he will build his life on the model of what he saw at home; but one in which he will no longer be satisfied with the crumbs from the table of another, even from his own parents, but where he will prove his independence, form-

ing a new whole link in the great golden chain of the Torah tradition.

It is not an easy task to advise a child that he is now on his way to being on his own -- especially not for the parent. There is, I admit, just a bit of anxiety in this advice on how to achieve greatness. Independence, after all, implies openness and risk. But there comes a time when a father must tell his son: You are on your own now, son, on your way to being responsible before God and man for your own life, your own failures, your own successes. Of course, this won't happen all at once. We are not abandoning you! We will always be ready to help and encourage and correct and criticize you -- even if uninvited to do so -- for as long as God gives us strength. But a beginning is now to be made in the independence that is crucial to gadlut. Without severing the umbilical cord a child cannot be born. Without the grant of responsibility, creativity is impossible and greatness unthinkable. A bird cannot really learn to fly until its mother pushes it out of the nest -- and, whether bird or human, a parent looks on hopefully, wistfully, prayerfully, and maybe, with God's help, proudly

שמעו בני ישראל, listen my son to the teaching of your father. The greatest teaching a father can give to a beloved but dependent son is always to remain beloved -- but to become gradually but surely independent, no longer a בן חסד
בן חסד.

Josh, your mother and I have tried our best to give you the wherewithal to achieve, or at least to have the ambition to strive for, gadlut. Your *י"ל נסע* has not been perfect, and it is not mere modesty that inspires this confession. But we have endeavored to preach it and even, where possible, to offer a model for you and your brother and your sisters to strive for Jewish gadlut. And not only your parents have tried to instill this in you, but also your grandparents, both your mother's father, *נ"ל*, whose memory has inspired the both of us though neither of us knew him, and your wonderful and respected and beloved grandfather and grandmothers who are with us today *נ"ל פ'נעל נ"ל נ"ל*.

We have tried hard to teach you these four lessons -- to overcome triviality and pettiness; to practice self-restraint in order to attain greater results; to put zeal and passion into the service of Torah and all your sacred ideals; and, finally, to achieve your independence.

Now you are, in a legal and in a moral sense if not in a completely practical one, beginning to be on your own. Along with you will always go our most heartfelt wishes and prayers from the very bottom of our hearts for gadlut, for spiritual and psychological and moral and scholarly greatness. Above all else, our very greatest wish, one so precious we are almost afraid to articulate it, is that you achieve gadlut in Torah. Your parents

and grandparents hope for that blessing more fervently than for anything else. It is a blessing which you must achieve ultimately by yourself and which, no matter how much we help, will always be to your credit.

Josh, we realize full well that in your case your parents have perhaps sometimes been a bit of a burden for you. It is not always easy to be a child whose parents are in public life and have a high degree of public visibility. You, as well as your brother and sisters, have had to contend with this pressure on your own identity because people identified you as "Rabbi Lamm's son." I apologize for that; I really can't help it.

But this I will tell you. Mother and I dream and hope, as only parents can, and are confident that eventually הגדל
הגדל ה, we will live to see that great day of your gadlut when people will point to your mother and to me and identify us admirably, "They are the parents of Josh Lamm."

Yehoshua, I leave you with a blessing that Almighty God
gave to the first Joshua (3:7):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵל יְהוָה עִזָּז לְךָ כֹחַ וְכֹסֶף מִצִּדֹנִים

בְּעַתְּ חַגְשָׁם בְּעֻזְךָ תִּפְּחוּן דָּם יִשְׂטָאוּ אֲשֶׁר צִדְדוּ פִי בְּאַשֶׁר תִּי"ח

אל , "And the Lord said unto Joshua, this day will I begin to make you great in the sight of all Israel that they may know that as I was with Moses so will I be with thee."

May the Lord grant you נתינת חסד, this day of your
Bar Mitzvah, that great blessing of true gadlut, greatness in

character and above all greatness in Torah, the kind of greatness that will reflect the traditions of your family, of your great forebears who have inspired your mother and myself, and in particular that wonderful human being and great sage and saint for whom you are named, my beloved and revered grandfather אברהם יצחק ^{אב"י} אברהם יצחק, who was the greatest inspiration of my life.

With these wishes and this blessing, go on to your own greatness, so that you will become a מקור ברכה, a source of blessing for your parents, family, for your community, and for all of Israel, Amen.