

These are the offspring of Noach – Noach was a righteous man. (6:9)

There is a devout Jew in Bnei Brak who serves as an *Admor*, *Chassidic Rebbe*. He does not have a multitude of *chassidim*, but he has a *shul*, which, as a result of his being the *Rebbe*, is full and serves as a Torah center for Jews to gather, pray and study Torah. *Horav Yitzchak HersHKowitz, Shlita (Nitzotzos)*, explains how a man who was not born a *Rebbe* could become one (*Chassidic* leadership is transferred from father to son/son-in-law. In any event, it is a pedigree, family transference. One does not just put up a shingle on his door and proclaim himself as an *Admor*.) Apparently, the *Rebbe* had a *bais hamedrash* (real estate parcel which he used as a *shul*), and he decided that if he called himself *Rebbe*, he would increase his membership and fill the seats. Furthermore, he felt that he had something to offer people in terms of his erudition and character. So, why not?

The *Rebbe* approached the saintly *Chazon Ish, zl*, the primary rabbinic leader of Bnei Brak and, indeed, the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, the leader of the Orthodox Jewish community and its spokesman, and asked, “*Rebbe*, I have a *bais hamedrash*, but who is to say that I have the right to call myself ‘*Rebbe*’. Perhaps, I might even be considered a thief for taking a title that is not inherently mine. This is a misrepresentation.”

The *Chazon Ish* replied, “Today (in contemporary times) the mere fact that a Jew has the ability to support/sustain another Jew – and he does – is sufficient reason for him to label himself as a *Rebbe*. Furthermore, even if the purpose was personal, but, since by assuming a title it resulted in your growing in Torah, then you may, and should, do it!”

At times, the title makes a considerable difference to a person. We are living in a time when there is such guilt, such depression, that anything that succeeds in elevating a person’s self-esteem, which results in positive consequences for the person, is well worth it. We see this from *Chazal (Bava Metzia 85a)*, who relate that Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi*, the redactor of the *Mishnah*, the one who saved *Torah She’baal Peh*, the Oral Law, for all posterity, saved the son of Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon (bar Yochai) from spiritual extinction. It happened that “*Rabbi*” (as he was called) visited the village where Rabbi Elazar had lived. He asked the people who lived there if Rabbi Elazar had left over a son. They replied that, indeed, he did, but alas he was distant from Torah observance. (These things happened even then.) *Rabbi* summoned the young man and, immediately upon meeting him, conferred *semichah*, ordination, on him. He was now a Rabbi – unschooled and unknowledgeable – but a Rabbi. *Rabbi* then sent the young man who was now ordained – but not yet observant - to Rabbi Shimon ben Issi ben Lekunia, to reach out to him and teach him Torah.

At first, it did not go easily. A number of times when the young man had difficulty with the learning process, he wanted to throw in the proverbial towel and return to his easy life of abandon. Each

time, Rabbi Shimon ben Issi told him, “They have spread the cloak of *chacham* upon you. You are an ordained Rabbi, and you want to return to your old life? In other words, you are no longer the “loser” that you once were; today you are a candidate for spiritual leadership and distinction. Are you willing to eschew such a promising future randomly for a life of abandon?” The young man listened and eventually became a great *Tanna*, of the caliber of his exalted father.

We see that placing a person in a position of responsibility and distinction has a positive effect. It makes the difference between success and failure. Let us see how this plays out in Jewish life as expounded by *Chazal*. The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* 5:2 teaches that ten generations ensued from Adam *HaRishon* until Noach (during which people either did not grow spiritually or regressed). They angered Hashem for ten generations until Hashem brought the *Mabul*, Flood, upon them. He has no use for a society that is both spiritually and morally corrupt. Once again, Hashem’s patience allowed for a waiting period of ten generations between Noach and Avraham *Avinu*. At the end of the day, Avraham took the reward of all the previous ten generations of mankind who were found to be unworthy of reward.

Amazingly, when Avraham *Avinu* came onto the world scene, the world was already 1948 years old. As Noach, who had lived ten generations before him, the world community had not achieved much more than angering Hashem. If so, what purpose was served by all of the ten generations – first from Adam until Noach, and then again, from Noach until Avraham? One person. It was all for the sake and merit of two people, Noach and Avraham, one in each generation. Twenty generations, millions of people who did absolutely nothing for the betterment of G-d’s world. They had descended to the nadir of spiritual and moral living. Not only had they destroyed their own destiny – they had destroyed all of the world, rendering its creatures also corrupt. Why maintain such a world for ten generations? For one person: Noach; and then again ten more generations for Avraham. These two men received the reward that should have gone to millions before them. The lesson is compelling – overwhelming – mind-boggling: the purpose of an entire world can be one person. *Tzaddik yesod olam*, a righteous person is/can be the foundation of the world. Noach and Avraham proved this verity. What the *Chazon Ish* teaches us is that the “one” person for whom the world could have been created can possibly be “you.” A Jew should bear this in mind. He has a noble calling, a sublime mission. This alone should serve as the impetus to inspire great things from us.

Rav Yaakov Yosef Herman, zl, was an Orthodox Jewish pioneer in the United States in the early twentieth century. His story is too vast for these pages, but his perspective on life as a Jew is one that every Jew should feel and adopt. He considered himself a “soldier of the Boss.” He would reiterate this maxim as he spoke out against flagrant desecration of *Shabbos*, and the morally flawed behavior to which Jews were succumbing. He had no qualms concerning printing on the invitation for his eldest daughter’s wedding invitation: “Ladies, please come dressed in accordance with Jewish law.” His home was open to anyone in need. He saw to it that such “traditions” as *cholov yisrael*, eighteen-minute *matzos*, kosher for *Pesach* products, *shatnez* testing – all things which we take for granted – were available to those Jews who wanted to adhere to the

Torah and *mitzvos* and join the “Boss” army. He was a revolutionary, but his revolution was for Hashem. He sent promising young American boys to Europe to study in the great *yeshivos*. He influenced his own son-in-law, *Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl*, to advance his Torah studies. Approximately fifty boys benefitted from his European influence – boys who grew into men who changed the spiritual panorama of this country.

His mission did not end in America. It continued in *Eretz Yisrael* in 1939, as he and his wife set sail for the Holy Land on the last passenger ship to leave the United States before World War II started. He devoted himself to his newly-adopted community of Zichron Moshe, where his acts of Torah and *chesed* were legend. His life story is more than an inspiration. It is a *mechayeiv*, a requisite, that obliges us all to become soldiers for the “Boss.”