



By Rabbi Moshe Wolf

THE WOODEN BOWL

I was out on the street during the Holidays and my phone rang, it was one of our department brothers. He mentioned how his family brought mom home from the hospital for the holidays, so she can celebrate with the children and grandchildren. He asked if I can stop by and see the family, I said "my pleasure".

I knew it was no easy feat to bring home and care for, a terminally ill, frail grandma, but the children did it anyway cause "it was the right thing to do". I walked into the home and there they were the whole family, grandmother, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren all there to give grandma an opportunity to enjoy the fruits of her labor. I said to myself there is no better way to teach children and grandchildren love and respect of elders than by being a living example. This family made me proud; no sacrifice was too much when it came to their beloved Mom. It reminded me the story of "The Wooden Bowl....."

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and seven year old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered.

The family ate together at the table. But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth.

The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about Grandfather," said the son. I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor.

So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl. When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometime he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food.

The seven-year-old watched it all in silence. One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?" Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up." The four-year-old smiled and went back to work.

The words so struck the parents so that they were speechless. Then tears started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled.....End of story....some points to ponder and remember. Not always in life will things work out the way we planned, that doesn't mean you can't enjoy the moment.

That, no matter what happens how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow.

That, regardless of your relationship with your parents you'll miss them when they're gone from your life. I've learned that making a "living" is not the same thing as making a "life".

That life sometimes gives you a second chance.

That you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.

That if you pursue happiness, it will elude you. But, if you focus on your family, your friends, the needs of others, your work and doing the very best you can, happiness will find you.

That whenever we decide something with an open heart, we usually make the right decision.

That even when we have pains, we don't have to be one.

Every day, you should reach out and touch someone. People love that human touch -- holding hands, a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back.

Life is a journey not a destination, let's enjoy the ride!

On behalf of ALL your Chaplains, may G-d bless you, keep you safe and always keep you in His loving care. Amen!

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