



Mussar HaMadda

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Jack Sprat

“JACK SPRAT WOULD EAT NO FAT, HIS WIFE WOULD EAT NO LEAN; AND SO BETWEEN THE 2 OF THEM THEY LICKED THE PLATTER CLEAN.”(I KNOW JACK 54’40”)

Everyone remembers where they buried the hatchet.

THE first part of this verse is fairly straightforward. Jack and his wife exemplified the ultimate level of marital harmony. Each knew his/her place in the marriage. Jack, with his *chachmah yiseira*, knew that his role was only to eat the lean and avoid the fat. His wife, with her *binah yiseira*, knew to eat only the fat and avoid the lean. This fabled poem sets an example of the opposite, yet complementary roles that each partner brings into a marriage.

The second mouse gets the cheese.

The end of the verse, however, is more problematic. We are able to easily discern the clearly fatty foods and the clearly lean foods. For example, Jack wouldn't touch the *kishke*, and his wife wouldn't touch the turkey breast. However, many foods fall in between. Moreover, many foods themselves are mixtures of fat and lean (e.g., Gefilte fish). How was it possible for these two paragons of harmony and symmetry to exactly analyze each morsel, determining its standing as to either be fat or lean. How were they able to make such complex calculations quickly enough to eat? Didn't they get into any squabbles as to whether a particular food was fat or lean? Finally, weren't there any victuals that couldn't be properly classified, requiring its abandonment on the plate, and preventing these two from licking the platter clean? And how could they ignore the dictum of the **Rambam** to leave over something on the plate for the purposes of *prishus*?

Hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue.

Arguments and doubts are the products of a mind clouded by the *yetzer hara*. Truth appears as Falsehood, Evil appears as Good, fat appears as lean, etc. When one has purified oneself to be free of his/her evil drives, doubts and arguments cease to exist. Truth is Truth and Falsehood is Falsehood. Food is either fat or lean. Mixtures are easily separated into their fat or lean parts. No arguments or doubts can exist.

This also explains why they licked the platter clean, instead of leaving anything over. *Prishus* is for wimps who haven't conquered their *yetzer hara*, and need a crutch to help them beat it. These two outstanding members of society were beyond *prishus*. Everything they did was *l'sheim shamayim*. At the same time, their *shleimus* didn't eliminate their unique personalities. Jack still went for the lean, and his wife went for the fat.

While it's not *muchrach*, it's *mestaber* that the fact that they had such marital harmony helped them reach *shleimus*. Otherwise, why else does the verse put them together? May we all be *zocheh* to have the marriages exemplified by the first half, and the *shleimus* exemplified by the second half, of this verse.