

FORGIVENESS

By Mike Harris

The following incident took place ninety years ago. A seven-year-old boy of immigrant parents, very proud of a special accomplishment, full of himself, could not wait to brag to his grandfather, "Grandpa, I can read a Jewish Daily Newspaper." Grandpa seemed impressed and took him into his study and opened the prayer book and said, "Read." Yiddish and Hebrew, while they share the same alphabet are two different languages, just as English and Spanish are distinct, separate languages. Of course the seven-year-old stood looking, not able to read the Hebrew. The grandfather, disappointed, and for whatever reason lost his cool and struck the child and sent him flying across the room. The boy did not cry! He picked himself off the floor and left the house to sit on the stoop in front till it was time to go home. He did not enter the home to say good-bye.

A wrong was done, no explanation was forthcoming, resentment, and hurt on the part of the boy was planted. The grandfather, a pious orthodox Jew, was a lay scholar and had immense standing in the orthodox community. He never approved or liked his son-in-law who he considered a heretic and, in spite of learning and orthodox education, was not considered by his father-in-law to be a true Jew. The boy's father adapted to the new world. It was necessary to work on Saturday, the rest of the world worked on Saturday, they rested on Sunday. Survival and keeping a job called for adaptability. Orthodoxy did not bend! The boy's father felt that his God was a just and understanding God and would be forgiving. At any rate the sin was against God not man and he felt he would deal with it at the proper time and orthodoxy would have to stand in line to render judgment. He gave his children a secular education and explained orthodoxy when it was necessary.

When they returned home the boy's mother perceived that something was amiss. On questioning, the boy told his mother what had happened. Angry as she was with her father she recognized that something needed to be done. Mom and Pop had a discussion and Dad was elected to handle the problem. The following weekend Dad and the son sat down alone and the father began to explain. First he said Grandpa was not angry with the boy, but struck him because the father was not there to be struck, so the apology from the father to the son. Then came a long discussion of the orthodox Hebrew view and the responsibility of parents for the education of their offspring. After much talk the son was asked to write a Jewish letter to grandpa forgiving him for what had happened and a gift of a carton of 'Murad' cigarettes was sent.

The boy did what his father wanted him to do. The letter and gift were never acknowledged. Ten years later the grandfather made a trip to the home of his daughter. Surprised, she asked if something was wrong. Ignoring her question he asked to see his grandson. On being told that he was in school and would be home in two hours, he said that he would wait. Mom knew that he would not eat in her home when she offered him sustenance so she went out and bought a

small pan and a glass. Came home and showed him the brand new pan and glass, and he agreed to partake of a glass of tea.

The boy came home and grandfather took him aside and tried to apologize for the action that was more than ten years old. The boy listened and explained that his father told him that what had happened was not his fault, and that he wrote him a letter in which he forgave him. Now ten years later you come and there is nothing to forgive. I am sorry if you did not understand my letter ten years ago. Grandpa left and went home. The grandson never visited Grandpa, and never saw him again.