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THE UGLY DUCKLING

Given by Rabbi Herbert Baumgard, at Temple Beth Am, South Miami, Fla. 2/61

Once upon a time there was a mother duck who gave birth to several beautiful ducklings. Every one gathered around the mother to congratulate her upon her good fortune. How lucky she was to have such lovely children! The mother duck would glide around the lake like a regal queen with her children swimming right behind her like soldiers marching in a line. Then, when the little ducks became tired, the mother would stop to rest and bathe her little ones.

One day after such a trip across the lake, the mother noticed what seemed to be an extra child. This child was just as little as the rest; but unlike the others, she was not pretty at all. In fact, judged by normal duck standards, she was downright ugly. The mother was confused. Was this ugly duckling really part of her family? It seemed to her that there were originally only four children; but, then again, maybe there were five, and she hadn't really noticed. Anyhow, this fifth child was certainly different from the rest, and mostly she was different because she was not at all pretty like the others. All the other fowls swimming in the lake noticed the difference in the fifth child also, and soon they were saying, "Look, here comes Mother Duck with her four beautiful ducklings and that Ugly Duckling."

You can well imagine how the fifth child must have felt. She saw everybody smiling when they looked at her brothers and sisters, but when they looked at her, they frowned. Tears ran down her face. What had she done that people didn't like her. It wasn't her fault that she wasn't pretty. After all, she was born that way.

Some of us are like this poor Ugly Duckling. We don't seem to be as pretty as other people. For example, some of us have a long nose, or some of us have big ears, or some of us are too tall, and some of us are too short. On the other hand, some people are born reasonably pretty, but, as they grow older, something happens in their life that makes them less attractive. For example, some of us lose the hair on our head, and we look at other people with thick wavy hair, and we say, "Gee, I wish I could be pretty like them." Or some of us may not be able to do things as well as other people. For example, some of us can't run as fast as other people; or we can't dance as well as others, and we say, "Gee, I wish I could dance like they do." Or some of us can't sing as well as others, and some of us can't make as much money as other people. Almost all of us are Ugly Ducklings in one way or another. None of us is good and pretty in all things. No matter how pretty or capable we are, there is always something where somebody else is a great deal better than we are, and each of us says, "Gee, I wish I could be like those other people." So we can understand how that poor ugly duckling felt as he swam around the lake with his brothers and sisters and he knew everybody was saying, "Look, how pretty those other ducks are."

Well, a very strange thing happened on that lake that people still talk about to this very day. As the weeks and months went by, and the baby ducks grew larger and larger, people began to notice more and more that the ugly duckling was different. Finally, as the baby ducklings grew up, the Ugly Duckling seemed suddenly to change into the most beautiful of them all, and people understood that the Ugly Duckling was not a duck at all. She was actually a Swan, and there is no fowl more beautiful than a grown Swan. With his neck curved gracefully and his brilliant white feathers gleaming in the sun, the grown Swan swam around the lake with his brothers and sisters, and she heard people saying, "Could that indeed be the ugly duckling? My, she has become more beautiful than all the rest. Look, how proudly she holds her neck. See how lovely are her feathers." The Ugly Duckling, now grown into a beautiful Swan swam around and did not let the people know that she could hear their compliments, for the Ugly Duckling had learned a very important lesson. She had learned that what seems at first to be

ugly and not as good as other things, may, in time, become mere beautiful and better than other things. So, if you are worried that you are not as pretty as someone else, or if you are worried that you may not be as good as someone else, just remember the story of the Ugly Duckling. Remember that if you keep working to improve yourself, the time will come when people will say of you, "My, she has become nicer than all the rest."

If you know boys or girls who seem to be like the Ugly Duckling, if you see people laughing at them, try to help them. The time will come when the Ugly Duckling will grow up to be a beautiful swan.

The truth is that we are all Ugly Ducklings in some ways, but we are also beautiful swans in hiding.