

# SICHA STORY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



*Likkutei Sichos, Volume 17*

## **Pirkei Avos, Perek 3 (Second Sicha of the week)**

- Rabbi Yossi Nemes, Metairie, Louisiana

*The Sicha, sections 3-4, discusses the Mishna that "but for fear of the authority of the Malchus, a man would swallow his friend alive." Swallow refers to not leaving room for another person when we only see them as an extension of ourselves. This is especially concerning when it appears that we have Torah and Mitzvos while the other person is lacking and needs us to guide and inspire them.*

*How do we rid ourselves of this sense of self – this ego, which does not leave room for another? The Mishna continues: Pray for the well-being of the Kingdom. The earthly kingdom reflects the royalty of Hashem Himself, and respect and awe of Hashem is the great equalizer, that mitigates a person not leaving room for another.*

### **Remove your personal Chomeitz!**

*Based on Hayom Yom 27 Tammuz:*

A brilliant and renowned prodigy, with great talents and wondrously deep comprehension, came to Liozna and devoted himself to the study of Chassidus. Thanks to his immense gifts, he acquired a vast and broad knowledge of Chassidus in a short period of time.

At his first yechidus, he entered the Alter Rebbe's study and asked: "Rebbe, what am I lacking?" The Alter Rebbe answered him: "You lack nothing, for you are G-d-fearing and

a scholar. You only have to remove your chametz, which signifies ego and being the center of your universe, and replace it with matzah, which signifies *bittul*, self-effacement (and thus leaving room for someone else).

... [So what is the remedy for arrogance? The Alter Rebbe uses a Koshering metaphor] A utensil, say a roasting spit, that was used with the arrogance that one imagined to be fire requires *libun*. This means that it must be heated until sparks fly off; that is, until the sparks of self-refinement fly outward and are incorporated in the true light."

### **The earthly kingdom is a reflection of the Heavenly Kingdom!**

The founder of the Chabad movement, the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, was sent to prison in St. Petersburg on false counterrevolutionary charges. In the course of the interrogation, the Chief of Police realized that the Alter Rebbe was a saintly man and of great wisdom. He recommended to the Czar that the Alter Rebbe be found innocent and released, suggesting that it was his opponents who trumped up the charges out of jealousy due to his wide influence.

The Czar was intrigued and wanted to meet the Alter Rebbe in person. He changed out of his royal clothing and visited the Alter Rebbe in his cell. Upon entering, the Alter Rebbe arose. The Czar was puzzled and exclaimed that he is just an ordinary person. The Alter Rebbe answered that he must be the Czar since he was overcome with a trembling fear, which is caused by royalty and had not happened when visited by any other official. He explained that, according to Judaism, the Czar's royalty reflected royalty in Heaven, and therefore his presence caused in him a trembling fear of the Almighty.

### **Jews in your rearview mirror are closer than they appear!**

*Harav Yisroel Meir Lau, Sheyichye relates:*

I once mentioned to the Rebbe that I am actively involved in "Kiruv Rechokim," bringing back lost Jews who have strayed afar. The Rebbe immediately corrected me, "We cannot label anyone as being 'far.' Who are we to determine who is far and who is near? They are all close to G-d!"

“Why didn’t you take advantage of the opportunity to have a private visit with the Rebbe?”, or something to that effect, and your response was that your objectivity would have been absorbed or swallowed up

## Meeting the Rebbe, Meeting Myself

**By Sofya Sara Esther Tamarkin**

*[YN: No one embodied this concept more than our Rebbe. In his presence, we were all thoroughly humbled and yet nobody felt swallowed up.*

*A famous author, who had come to a farbrengen, decided to not ask for a private meeting with the Rebbe out of fear that his objectivity and individuality would be absorbed or swallowed by the Rebbe’s Charisma. He, of course, had it completely wrong. Many people attested that when entering the Rebbe’s room they actually felt, some for the first time, that they were truly in touch with their real selves. I am including here excerpts of one such beautiful story, taken from chabad.org]*

In the spring of 1990, my always proactive grandmother, Zelda, was bargaining in Yiddish at the cash register of the local supermarket in Philadelphia for a lower price on a whole chicken. We had arrived just a few months prior from our home in Saratov in the former Soviet Union.

...The cashier in the local American supermarket was unmoved by my grandmother’s attempts. Fortunately, behind my grandmother stood Rebbetzin Batsheva Shemtov. She recognized Yiddish and saw my grandmother’s struggle to obtain provisions for the family.

Rebbetzin Shemtov realized we were about to have a non-kosher chicken soup and graciously suggested a kosher chicken option. She wisely explained that in America bargaining at the register was not a customary behavior unless the goal was to traumatize the cashier.

That was the moment that started our journey with a new vocabulary of words, like “kosher,” as we began to embrace Jewish traditions and customs.

Years later, I read that a visitor shared with the Lubavitcher Rebbe that he was educating Jews, bringing those that are “far” back to their heritage. The Rebbe was surprised to

hear such a statement, explaining that no Jew is truly distant. Perhaps an insensitive person could think that ignorance of our Jewish inheritance signaled the distance between us and our people, but our souls are eternally connected to our heritage.

The Rebbe understood that despite what the Soviet Jews had experienced, communism never replaced our yearning for authentic truth. We knew absolutely nothing about our heritage, but we never forgot that we were Jews. After living under the Communist regime for more than 70 years, we were like children of G-d who had been kidnapped from the palace by barbarians.

While we may have been unfamiliar with the customs of the King, we knew that we were His children. When the time came and we were finally free from our captors, returning to the palace was both exciting and terribly intimidating. We were the children who knew nothing about the rules of the unfamiliar, luxurious residence. We didn't know the etiquette, the language, the customs, the dress code, traditions, or annual celebrations. We were scared, confused, and perhaps resistant to change, yet we knew with absolute certainty that we had finally come home to our Father.

Our first Passover Seder was spent with Rabbi Avraham and Rebbetzin Batsheva Shemtov.

At 13, I remember thinking to myself that I belong to some strange group of people. We were invited for dinner and served lettuce and salt water. We couldn't understand much of what was going on but felt incredible warmth and unconditional love from the Shemtov family.

During the intermediate days of the holiday, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov decided to take my family to receive a blessing from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I remember getting on the bus in Philadelphia with another family and going to New York.

We couldn't understand why there was a need for us to meet yet another rabbi. We were rather satisfied with the acquaintance of Rabbi Shemtov. We had no concept of going out of state to receive ... well, a blessing.

...We were mesmerized by the existence of so many Jews dressed in traditional Chabad garb. Black hats, black coats, beards; were these all rabbis? We were convinced that we had entered some alternate reality.

I remember going down the steps in a line of people. Suddenly, I saw an older gentleman giving a dollar bill to each person, saying something as each individual reached out to receive their dollar.

I remember approaching the Rebbe. Even now, 30 years later, I choke up as I replay this moment in my head.

The Rebbe looked at me with his kind, blue, piercing eyes, and I saw my own reflection in them. Not the version of me who was shaped by Soviet childhood, but the real me with an unblemished soul and G-dly consciousness.

It was a moment of complete clarity, like the dark forest illuminated by a bright flash of lighting; my life was forever shaped by the knowledge of my true essence. As I stood next to him—an immigrant lost in this new world, seemingly disconnected from my Jewish roots—the Rebbe granted me a completely unexpected gift, a glimpse inside my own soul and its potential.

I felt powerful, undefeated, and determined.

True leaders don't strive to make others similar to themselves; they want each person to be the best version of who they can be. This was the case of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, for he inspired people to reach deep within their souls and emerge as powerful leaders in their own right. The Rebbe saw that every person is capable of achieving greatness....My parents took the dollars from my brother and me.

...Much has happened since that day when I met the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I learned I belong to an eternal nation with deep wisdom and Torah values. My gift of connection was earned by the unwavering dedication and very hard work. I spend many hours a day studying Jewish texts, familiarizing myself with the rules of G-d's "Kingdom."

On my 40th birthday, my parents surprised me by presenting me with a dollar from the Rebbe. I was speechless. Apparently, they saved one of the four dollars we received that day. This was the most meaningful gift I could ever wish for.

I suddenly felt myself a 13-year-old teenager, humbly standing before the Rebbe as he was handing me this dollar bill.

In so many ways, I am still that girl, yet I am no longer lost in the palace of our traditions and heritage. I have found my way back home by clinging to the true essence of my soul in the vision that I discovered while standing next to the Rebbe.

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