

SICHA STORY

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Shavuos, Sicha 2 (First Sicha of the week)

- Rabbi Yossi Nemes, Metairie, Louisiana

The royal status, conferred on the Jewish people by Matan torah, is empowered by Jewish leaders and especially by our three leaders connected to Shavuos: Moshe, Dovid, and the Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov and our Rebbe's endow us, even during the darkness of exile, to remain proud royals and not to be affected by our surroundings or even by the natural order itself.

When in Rome, act your true self!

When Reb Zalman Duchman was still an eighteen-year-old bochur, the Rebbe Rashab entrusted him to help organize a conference of Chassidic rebbes in Poland. Reb Zalman related that before leaving for Warsaw, the Rebbe gave Zalman instructions in a yechidus at his Dacha in Babinovitch.

“It was after Shavuos in the summer of 5669 (1909), when the Rebbe Rashab was in Babinovitch. I came out from yechidus, and the Rebbe's son, the Fridiker rebbe, called to me from the woods around the house. “What did my father talk to you about?” he asked. “The trip to Warsaw,” I answered.

The Rebbe's son walked with me and spoke at length. The focus was not to be influenced by the world, and to conduct myself the same as in Lubavitch. “We see how the Chinese

who come to Russia walk around the same as they do at home, for they know that at home everyone conducts themselves the same way.”

(לשמע אוזן ע' 123)

Overwhelmed? Try doing a little more!

Rabbi Adin Even Yisroel related:

Once, I wrote to the Rebbe that I was beyond overwhelmed by work. I was engaged in three major projects in addition to dozens of smaller ones, and although they were all important, it was simply too much for one person to manage. So, I asked the Rebbe for guidance to help me decide what to drop.

His answer was: “You should continue to do all these things and try to do even more things.” He made a similar point to me, the last time I saw the Rebbe on Shavuot of 1991.

Sleepless in Brooklyn!

The following story was originally published in Kfar Chabad magazine. I added excerpts from the take-home lesson of the story by Harav Ha'Chosid Rabbi Akiva Wagner, A"H, culled from one of his alumni emails.

Chaim Tzvi Schwartz was not a Lubavitcher Chassid—before the war, his family had been followers of the rebbe of Munkatch—but a certain day in the late 1940s found him seeking the counsel of the then Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn. Rabbi Schwartz was a young refugee who had lost his entire family, and the only world he knew, in the Holocaust, and was at a loss as to what to do with his life.

“Speak to my son-in-law, the RaMaS”h,” said the Rebbe, and gave Chaim his blessing.

The Rebbe’s son-in-law suggested that the young rabbi take up residence in a certain city in Brazil. “Brazil?” “There are a considerable number of Jewish refugees settling in Brazil. Due to the tribulations that our people have undergone in the last few years, most of them lack even the most basic rudiments of Jewish education. Already, many have fallen prey to assimilation and intermarriage. It is the responsibility of every

Torah-educated Jew to prevent the spiritual dissolution of our people. Go to Brazil and help build a community of knowledgeable and observant Jews.”

Chaim accepted the mission, moved to Brazil, and founded a Jewish day school there. Much effort and toil were necessary to find the funding, train the teachers, and convince the parents of the importance of granting their children a Jewish education. Over the years, Rabbi Schwartz saw his school flourish and grow, and its graduates form the nucleus of a community of proud, committed Jews.

Rabbi Schwartz maintained an infrequent but warm contact with the Rebbe, who had meanwhile assumed the leadership of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement following the passing of his father-in-law in 1950. From time to time, Rabbi Schwartz would seek the Rebbe’s advice on various challenges and decisions he faced in the course of his work.

One day, I received a call from the parents of one of the children in my school, requesting a meeting. While this was a common request, the anxiety in the voices on the phone told me that this was no simple matter. I invited them to meet with me at my home that evening.

“This does not concern our son,” began the father, after they had settled in my study, “who is doing wonderfully in your school, but our eldest daughter, who grew up here before you came. As you know, we are not very observant, but it is important to us that our children should retain their identity as Jews.

“Our daughter has informed us that she has fallen in love with a non-Jew and that they intend to marry. We have tried everything to dissuade her, but our arguments, appeals, threats, and tears have all been to no avail. She now refuses to discuss the matter with us at all and has moved out of our home. Rabbi! You are our only hope! Perhaps you can reach out to her and impress upon her the gravity of what she intends to do!”

“Would she agree to meet with me?” I asked. “If she knew that we had spoken to you, she’d refuse.” “Then I’ll go speak to her on my own.”

I took her address from her parents and rang her bell that very evening. She was visibly annoyed to learn of my mission, but too well-mannered not to invite me in. We ended

up speaking as she listened politely, and promised to consider everything I said, but I came away with the feeling that I had a negligible effect on her decision.

For several days I pondered the matter, trying to think of what might be done to prevent the loss of a Jewish soul. Then I thought of my last resort—the Rebbe. I called the Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Hodakov, related to him the entire affair, and asked for the Rebbe's advice. A few minutes later the phone rang. "The Rebbe says to tell the young woman," said Rabbi Hodakov, "that there is a Jew in Brooklyn who cannot sleep at night because she intends to marry a non-Jew."

The unexpected reply confused me, and I failed to understand what Rabbi Hodakov was saying. "Who is this Jew?" I blurted out. Then I heard the Rebbe's voice on the other line: "His name is Mendel Schneerson."

I slowly returned the receiver to its cradle, more confused than ever. Could I do what the Rebbe suggested? Why, she will slam the door in my face! After agonizing all night, I decided to carry out the Rebbe's instructions to the letter. After all, the fate of a Jewish soul was at stake, and what did I have to lose, except for my pride?

Early the next morning, I was at her door. "Listen," she said before I could utter a word, "whom I marry is my own affair, and no else's. I respect rabbis and men of faith, so I heard you out when I should have shown you the door. Please go away and stop bothering me."

"There is one more thing I need to say to you," said I. "Then say it and go."

"There is a Jew in Brooklyn who cannot sleep at night because you intend to marry a non-Jew." "That's what you came to tell me?!" she said, incredulous, and proceeded to close the door.

Midway, she stopped. "Who is this Jew?" "A great Jewish leader, known as the Lubavitcher Rebbe," I replied. "The Rebbe is greatly concerned about the material and spiritual wellbeing of every Jew and agonizes over every soul that is lost to its people."

"What does he look like? Do you have a picture of him?" "I should have a picture somewhere. I will get it for you."

To my surprise, she did not object. I rushed home and nearly turned the house upside down in search of a photograph of the Rebbe. I finally found a photo in a desk drawer and hurried back to the young woman's apartment.

One look at the Rebbe's likeness and her face turned pale. "Yes, it's him," she whispered.

"All week long," she explained, "this man has been appearing in my dreams and imploring me not to abandon my people. I told myself that I was conjuring up an image of a Jewish sage, and putting those words in his mouth, as a reaction to what you and my parents have been saying to me. But no, it was no conjecture. I have never met this man in my life, seen a picture of him or even heard of him. But this is him—this is the man I have been seeing in my dreams."

There are many powerful arguments that can be used to deter a person from such a drastic and tragic step as intermarriage R"L; in this story, however, the Rebbe's message to her was: YOU make a difference! Although the Rebbe is the leader of the entire Jewish nation, a leader of millions of people and overseeing the largest Jewish org in the world, nonetheless – the Rebbe said to this woman – you, as an individual, are important to the Rebbe.

...Lubavitch is not only about large undertakings with worldwide influence, rather it is about every single Maaseh, Dibbur, and Machshava performed by every and any man, woman, or child. It is about recognizing the magnitude of every single individual deed. The Rebbe's most-often-repeated quote was from the Rambam about how one act, word, or thought by one person tips the scale for the entire universe.

To be sure, the Rebbe's objective was, and is, to change the entire world. But the Rebbe never allowed us to forget that this is achieved by changing ourselves.

A Chasid once said to the Rebbe "L'chaim for Lubavitch!" to which the Rebbe responded: "Lubavitch ken zich alein an eitzah geben, zog L'chaim far zich!" (Lubavitch will manage alright, say rather, L'chaim for yourself!)
