

SICHA STORY

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Vaera, Sicha 5 (First Sicha of the week)

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לזכות חי' מושקא בת חנה לרגל יום הולדתה כ"ג טבת

Section 7 of the Sicha teaches how we go out of our personal Mitzrayim (imitations) in the four areas of our Kochos Hanefesh, following the opinion of Rebbe Eliezer that each plague consisted of four. We bring here stories connected to each of these four inner Yetzias Mitzrayims. [Note: two of the stories were already brought previously in this series, perhaps it is because they are of my favorites...]

Yetzias Mitzrayim 1: Overcoming our limitations of thought, speech and action, including the struggle to not transgress

A farbrengen can accomplish many things, including in this area of our Yetzias mitzrayim:

- 1) When Reb Pinye Althaus returned to Israel from visiting the Friediker Rebbe, in 1949, a lively Farbengen was held at his home in Tel Aviv. As they ran out of Farbiesen, Reb Pinye's wife borrowed some vegetables from the neighbor for Farbiesen. One of the participants started a discussion on whether the vegetables were tithed (apparently only a remote Chashash in this situation). Reb Pinye, fearful the momentum of this beautiful Farbrngen was slipping away, was not pleased with this 'distraction'. Reb Moshe Gurary responded, "Pinye, the entire objective and purpose of the Farbrengen is that we should care, to the core, if these vegetables were tithed properly before we partake of them!" (From Reb Sholom Feldman, A'H)
- 2) A Baal Habatisher Yid in Montreal was taking his Shabbos stroll, after Davening, eating his Seudas Shabbos and taking a nap, and passed by the Lubavitch Yeshiva where he

heard singing. He entered but could not understand why this group of fine people had not yet gone home for Seudas Shabbos. Someone tried to explain the traditional idea of a Farbrengen but the man was completely lost and bewildered.

- 3) Finally, R' Heshel Ceitlin, A'H, explained to him "that we are in the midst of a crucial meeting!" "About what would Yiden be meeting at 3:30 pm on a Shabbos Afternoon?", inquired the visitor. Reb Heshel responded "There is someone that is seriously bothering and harassing all of us and, thus far, our efforts to get rid of him have not worked. Now we are meeting to make a joint plan to stop him from bothering us and hopefully even get rid of him!" The man now fully understood why they were there and asked, "Do you mind sharing who this someone is?" Reb Heshel responded, "Sure, its name is the יצר הרע ונפש הבהמית!"

Yetzias Mitzrayim 2: Overcoming our limitations of wanting to fit in and worrying about what the world thinks

The Rebbe first 'whistled' at the Farbrengen of Purim 5731. Though the whistling at Farbrengens achieved positive results in many areas it also encouraged us to not worry about (אנפייפערן) what the world around us thinks, beginning with what they might think about whistling in Lubavitch...

...at a Chasidic gathering on Purim the Rebbe caused quite a stir when he encouraged thousands of confused Chasidim to whistle together as a form of prayer and celebration. This norm-defying yet soul-intoxicating scene was captured beautifully by R. Dr. Meir Michel Abehsera, who was present that evening:

"On the feast of Purim, I attended a Chasidic gathering with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. We were several thousand strong, all singing and clapping.

"...[Suddenly] without warning, the Rebbe turned my way and looked me straight in the eyes; he placed two fingers against his mouth and nodded in my direction, several times. I could not understand what he meant... The thought crossed my mind that he might have commanded me to whistle, but I dismissed it. "I looked over my shoulders to be sure that there was not someone else he was addressing, only to find that the people behind me were all looking at me. I placed two fingers over my mouth and waited.

"The Rebbe's face lit up. This was it! I entered an unknown dimension as I blew my first whistle. Others soon joined until we were hundreds whistling. The air caught fire with the resonance of the piercing sounds. My lower lip ached from blisters. But the Rebbe would not let me pause. He was taking the matter quite seriously.

“He called for still more energy as I, in my abruptly unbound imagination, envisioned thick threatening black clouds shattering into dust. We discomfited darkness with our collective breath. Minds were swept clean of all indoctrination....“Our final blast took off like the plaintive calls of a ram’s horn...a rehearsal for redemption.”

It is clear from Abehsera’s description that this moment was tangibly transformative and that the experience of such ecstatic expression opened the hearts and minds of the multitudes in attendance. However, not everyone was moved in the same way.

A few years later a photographer snapped a picture of the Rebbe encouraging whistling at a farbrengen, which was then published in a widely-circulated Jewish newspaper.

Though the story in the paper was written favorably, letters began pouring in from numerous people who were aghast at such a display, and by a Rebbe no less! In response, other letters came in defending the Rebbe’s decision, but the detractors remained vocal and vigilant.

A few months later, on Purim of that year, the Rebbe directly addressed the controversy at a farbrengen:

“Some months have gone by, and in the meantime, I thought that someone would find a source for our whistling, but in fact, it hasn’t happened.”

The Rebbe then went on to cite numerous examples of whistling in both written and oral Torah, making a point to highlight several common themes present within all the different stories. For instance, whistling is a sign of uninhibited and unreserved joy. When such ecstatic expression accompanies a mitzvah, it implies the person’s complete identification with the act itself, as well as with G-d, Who commanded it.

Chasidut teaches that just as when someone is overcome with joy, they cannot help but dance and sing, so too, the opportunity to connect with the Divine should evoke genuine expressions of unrestrained elation.

In the Book of Samuel, King David is described as dancing and prancing in front of the nation as he returned the Ark to Jerusalem after it had been captured and then returned by the Philistines. King David was also chastised for such exuberant behavior, but he defended his actions based on inspiring the masses to increase holiness. In the words of the Rebbe, “King David behaved this way specifically when it was a situation having to do with a mitzvah that elicited great joy.”

The Rebbe also quoted a passage from Maimonides, who states that dancing and prancing, as demonstrated in Scripture itself, when done for the sake of a mitzvah or for spiritual ends, is not only allowed but is an expression of spiritual greatness.

The Rebbe also pointed out that the idea of whistling is actually found in the Talmud, which, in citing the verse, I will whistle for them and gather them, teaches that whistling is a sign that

Moshiach is about to arrive, when G-d will whistle and gather in the exiles, as the commentators on Scripture explain the verse.

Based on this, the Rebbe concluded:

..When it is a matter of increasing Jews' desire and joy in performing a mitzvah, even if there is only a [slight] chance that one person present will have a geulah, a "redemption" from his yetzer hara, then it is a mitzvah to whistle [to arouse their soul to Divine service], even if it's only a remote possibility.

...Even more so when we actually see that in certain instances, there are Jews who, through such whistling, experienced a fundamental change [in their spiritual expression] from one extreme to another!

In our situation, when the whistling was going on, there were Jews present who resolved that from this very moment they would have increased enthusiasm in the fulfillment of practical mitzvot. In such a case, Maimonides rules that you need to behave exactly as King David did, "dancing and prancing" with all one's might!

Especially when the whistling was (not a mistake, but) a deliberate plan that actually worked to arouse and reveal the good hidden in a number of Jews.

..Through this [whistling] we shall soon have the fulfillment of the promise, On that day G-d will whistle and gather [the Jewish People] from the ends of the earth. [As it says] And you will be gathered one by one, in a way that no Jew will remain in exile... May this happen with kindness and mercy, and soon.

(From the book "Positivity Bias" chapter 13)

Yetzias Mitzrayim 3:

Overcoming our limitations of reason and order - טעם ודעת

After the war the Zionists from Israel helped survivors in Europe come to Israel. In Poland, which was now behind the Iron Curtain, they set up the Breicha (escape) to help Jews get out of Poland, with the sole purpose of the mission being to bring the survivors to Eretz Yisrael.

When the Chasidim escaped Russia in 1946-47 the young Zionists helped them, with great sacrifice and dedication, to get to the West, even though they did not necessarily commit to go to Israel. Rather, they said they would go wherever the Rebbe instructed (eventually the Fridiker Rebbe sent many to Eretz Yisroel but also many to other parts of the world).

These youngsters completely transcended their original way of thinking and passionately helped Jews just for the sake of helping Jews. Rebbetzin Chana remarked about these young Zionists ``I have met Tzadikim who don't wear Tefilin!"

(As heard from my mother A'H, who witnessed this personally)

Once a young Zionists unfortunately remained stuck in his way of thinking and distributed chocolate, provided by the joint, only to the children who said they were going to Israel. Fradel (Shemtov) Sudak, a young girl at the time, was told by all her friends to say she was going to Israel for chocolate expediency but she refused. When she got to the front of the line she told the person "We are going to the Rebbe in New York!"

(as told by Rebbetzin Sudak on the Homesick for Lubavitch podcast)

Yetzias Mitzrayim 4: Overcoming Mesiras Nefesh that is limited...

Before the Friediker Rebbe left Russia, he appointed certain chassidim to be in charge and responsible for maintaining the underground Yeshiva's. Reb Yonah Poltava was one of them.

Some years later he managed to obtain a visa to move to Eretz Yisroel and they were all packed up. The week before he was to leave a Chassid came over to him and said, he heard that the [Friediker] Rebbe mentioned he was happy at how Yonah is overseeing the yeshivas.

Hearing this he unpacked his belongings and gave away the coveted exit papers to someone else. If the Rebbe is happy with what I am doing, how can I leave Russia and stop doing it?

Later in 1946 Reb Yonah, Mumeh Sara, Reb Mendel Futerfas, and others worked on obtaining fake Polish passports, while bribing certain Soviet officials in Lviv, to facilitate the 'Great Escape' of Chassidim from the Soviet Union. To say that what they were doing was fraught with danger would be a huge understatement.

At one point Reb Mendel sensed that the KGB was closing in on him and he had better get on the next train they organized, with his family, to get out now.

Before doing so he went to Reb Yonah to discuss with him his situation. Reb Yonah understood the situation, as the KGB was also closing in on him, and he replied, "I hear you Mendel. I see now that even mesiras nefesh (which seemingly is rooted in the infinity of our Yechida) also has limitations!"

Hearing these words Reb Mendel sent his family out of Russia on the next train, but he himself remained. Indeed, sometime later he was arrested and was in Prison/Siberia for nine years.

(As heard from many sources. This version is based on an article by Reb SB Avtzon)
