

Stand Tall!

גאון יעקב - שלא ליבוש מפני המלעיגים



Rabbi Zalman Posner related:

I was a young boy when the Rebbe arrived in the United States in 5701. I remember one of the first things we observed of the Rebbe's conduct that made us realize he was of a different caliber than anyone else.*

On the Rebbe's first Rosh Hashanah, a few months after his arrival, the crowd at 770 was getting ready to leave for tashlich, when suddenly the Rebbe stopped them and said: "This is not how we go to tashlich. We need to walk in rows of two, and we should be singing!"

I remember how embarrassed I felt at the time. Eastern Parkway was lined with apartments and homes, all filled with non-frum Yidden. I was so uncomfortable at the thought of parading in front of them while singing in the street...

One year later, I was walking a little further behind the rest of the crowd because I was assisting one of the elder Chassidim. Suddenly, we were stopped by a finely dressed man, who grabbed my elbow and asked, "Why are

they singing?" I started stammering, not knowing what to answer, and he continued, "You should know that deep down inside me I have a spark. When I heard those people singing 'Hurray, I'm a Jew; hurray, I'm a Jew,' that spark burst into a flame!"



This may have been one of the first instances where the Rebbe demonstrated his approach to Yiddishkeit in the United States, an approach which only got stronger and more intense as time passed.

However, this is not an American phenomenon. True, the Rebbe did point out that America is unique in its innate tolerance of Yidden and Yiddishkeit, and thus it presents an opportunity for us to celebrate our heritage openly and unabated. But one of the most important elements of Yiddishkeit has always been, שלא ליבוש מפני בני אדם המלעיגים—never to be ashamed by those who scoff.

Furthermore, the Rebbe asserts that this is the most important challenge

of our time. Whereas in previous generations, Yidden often had to put themselves in real physical danger to keep Torah and mitzvos, today we are mostly not faced with that sort of oppression. Instead, we are tasked with living as proud Jews even in the face of ridicule.

This is our *mesiras nefesh*. Moshe Rabbeinu is said to have humbled himself especially before the Yidden in the last generation before the coming of Moshiach—and it was this *mesiras nefesh* that awed him.¹

It is important to keep in mind at all times that the Shulchan Aruch opens with this ruling—not to be ashamed of scoffers and to always do what is right.

True, there is no *mitzvah d'oraisa* to ignore scoffers. Even Shulchan Aruch doesn't state it as a specific rule which a person is obligated to follow in a certain way — in fact, if someone performs mitzvos while still being ashamed, he most certainly fulfills his obligation. Rather, it is more of a

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נדפס ע"י בנו
הרה"ת מיכאל יצחק חזוגתו מרת חנה
ומשפחתם שיחיו
גורקאו

general approach to how a person is expected to behave.

This is because it has only become more relevant with the passage of time, and it is most relevant today, at the end of the *galus* as we near the time of Moshiach.²

The Rebbe explains why specifically this point of ignoring scoffers is so important:

If someone presents intellectual arguments to dissuade you from doing something, you can at least have an intelligent conversation and respond with an explanation for why what we are doing is special and important. But if all they can level against you is ridicule, that can be very difficult to combat.

That's why the *first* thing the Shulchan Aruch tells us to do, before we can get into the details of all the other mitzvos and *halachos* we keep throughout the day, is to dismiss anyone who scoffs. This is because if you're not vigilant at dismissing these people, their words might actually have a negative effect.³

But when we stand our ground and maintain our pride of being Jewish and following Hashem's ways, not only will we ourselves be fortified; we will actually have the power to transform the scoffers into admirers who offer assistance. As the *possuk* says, "והיו מלכים אומניך ושרותיהם מניקתיך"—Kings shall be your nursing fathers and princesses your wet nurses.

The Gemara relates a story of Huna Bar Nassan who was once standing in front of Izgadar, the Persian king. The king noticed that the *amora's* belt was a bit higher than where it belonged,

so he himself approached Huna bar Nassan and readjusted it. "The Torah says that you are a kingdom of priests," the king explained, and therefore you must be dressed appropriately.

The Rebbe points out the irony: Izgadar was king over a superpower

empire, while Huna bar Nassan was a Yid who was exiled in a foreign land. Nevertheless, when the king saw a person dressed proudly like a Yid, he did everything in his power to make sure that this Yid looks the part, as befitting his illustrious heritage!

How to Gain Respect

In this letter, written in response to criticism leveled against Chabad for placing menorahs on public property, the Rebbe offers a perspective about what it means to display Jewish pride in America today:

Why is it so important for Jews to have a Chanukah menorah displayed publicly? The answer is that experience has shown that the Chanukah menorah displayed publicly during the eight days of Chanukah has been an inspiration to many, many Jews and evoked in them a spirit of identity with their Jewish people and the Jewish way of life. To many others, it has brought a sense of pride in their Yiddishkeit and the realization that there is no reason really in this free country to hide one's Jewishness, as if it were contrary or inimical to American life and culture. On the contrary, it is fully in keeping with the American national slogan "*e pluribus unum*" and the fact that American culture has been enriched by the thriving ethnic cultures which contributed very much, each in its own way, to American life both materially and spiritually.

Certainly, Jews are not in the proselytizing business. The Chanukah menorah is not intended to, and can in no way, bring us converts to Judaism. But it can, and does bring many Jews back to their Jewish roots. I personally know of scores of such Jewish returnees, and I have good reason to believe that in recent years, hundreds, even thousands, of Jews experience a kindling of their inner Jewish spark by the public kindling of the Chanukah menorah in their particular city and in the Nation's capital, etc., as publicized by the media.

In summary, Jews, either individually or communally, should not create the impression that they are ashamed to show their Jewishness, or that they wish to gain their neighbors' respect by covering up their Jewishness. Nor will this attitude insure their rights to which they are entitled, including the privilege of publicly lighting a Chanukah menorah, a practice which has been sanctioned by precedent and custom, as to become a tradition.

(Letter dated 3 Teves 5742)



This is the proper way to display our Jewish pride, never being intimidated by *goyishkeit*. When we act appropriately, the world recognizes and respects us all the more.⁴

A Lesson in History

Few events of our past teach us more about standing up for what we believe in than the Purim story recorded in Megillas Esther.

Right in the beginning, in describing Achashveirosh's seven-day party, the *possuk* says, "לעשות כרצון איש"—ואיש—They would fulfill the will of each and every man..." Meaning, that they provided kosher food and drink for anyone who wanted it.

Imagine: A Yid is in the capital of the civilized world, in the king's palace in front of so many other people. Wouldn't he be better off keeping to himself? Why must he stick out like a sore thumb and show everyone he's eating a different kind of food?

But the truth is, the one and only correct approach is to indeed pride yourself with who you are and not try to hide it.

Your non-Jewish contemporary already knows that you're Jewish. If he sees you attempting to hide who you really are, his respect for you will plummet. How can he trust a person who is not being honest about who he really is? A healthy and confident

person is not ashamed of who they are. If you feel the need to hide your identity there is obviously something wrong with you.

On the contrary, the most sound advice in this situation would be to wear your Yiddishkeit proudly. That's how you will be successful in gaining the respect and admiration of others.

The lesson is clear and obvious:

We need to teach our children to walk proudly with their Yiddishkeit, with "*Ge'on Yaakov*." Not only is this the best education we can give them for their *ruchnius'dike* future; it is actually important for their physical, mental, and material welfare as well.⁵

How?

The way to ensure that we never get intimidated by others when doing the right thing is by finding the sense of pride within ourselves and letting it guide our actions. Remember who you represent—you are on a mission from Hashem to transform the whole world. How can you be distracted by petty talk when you have to be busy with such a great task?⁶

When you feel embarrassed or self-conscious about doing the right thing, tell yourself that these feelings are coming from the *nefesh habahamis* and the *yetzer hara* and you don't have time to pay attention. As the Rebbe said at one farbrengen: "שעם זיך אפ און"

טו וואס דו דארפסט טאן—Just get over your embarrassment and do the thing you need to do!"⁷

Additionally, the Rebbe teaches us that by connecting ourselves with the Rabbeim—the אילנא דחיי—and learning their Chassidus, we can be sure that we will not stop at the scoffing of others.⁸

The Result

Throughout the years, the Rebbe pointed at the lack of *Ge'on Yaakov* and the self-conscious feelings of the Jewish people as the cause for many painful problems we face as a nation.

The Rebbe explained many times that it was a lack of taking pride in who we are that led political leaders in Eretz Yisroel to give away portions of the land. Why else would a Yid think of doing something that even the non-Jew would never have thought possible, putting his country and its citizens at risk? It is only because the Yid feels the need to "latch on" to the non-Jew and impress him. This can make the Yid do things that are completely irrational.⁹

And the grave error of registering people who are not Jewish as Yidden is similarly based on this approach.

Conversely, the Rebbe called on people to foster the Jewish pride needed to influence non-Jews in a

positive way, by teaching them about the *sheva mitzvos b'nei Noach*.

Additionally, the Rebbe promoted the concept of pride in your beliefs for non-Jews too, going as far as thanking the then president of the United States for “not being intimidated by the scoffers” and announcing proudly that it is important to allow the name of Hashem in our public schools.¹⁰

Practically:

The Rebbe repeated the need to silence the noise of those ridiculing, especially when it comes to going out on *mitvzoim* and spreading Yiddishkeit.

When there were actual questions on the legitimacy of the *mitvzoim* themselves, the Rebbe would sometimes address those questions, adding that he was doing so primarily, “so as to prevent any discouragement by those who are doing the work.”

But more generally, the Rebbe teaches us to adopt the approach of “אל יבוש מפני המלעיגים.”

“The way to go out on *mitvzoim* is by freeing yourself from all disturbances, breaking through all boundaries, and certainly not being embarrassed by any scoffers, whether real or internal. Instead, go out with a high-held hand (“יד רמה”) and with a *shturem!*”¹¹ **T**

Ripple Effect

Quite a few times, the Rebbe recounted incidents of people who practiced the notion of not being ashamed of their Yiddishkeit and the positive results it brought about.

At the *farbrengen* of Yud-Aleph Nissan 5743, the Rebbe related a recent incident that illustrated this:

There was a Jew, the Rebbe related, a wealthy person [Chassidim would later discover that this was philanthropist David Chase, but the Rebbe did not mention his name], who among his abundant assets owned a yacht on which he would sail from time to time during vacation. When it came time to *daven*, he needed to know which way was east, and being that, for a while now, he had learned that Yiddishkeit was nothing to be embarrassed of, he did not hesitate to ask the captain to point him in the right direction.

After this occurred a few times, the captain asked for an explanation, and the Yid told him that he needed to face Yerushalayim in order to properly *daven* to Hashem.

This made a profound impression on the captain. “If a successful person like you,” he said, “who owns a yacht with a captain on staff, finds it important to connect with G-d three times a day, stopping everything he’s doing in order to *daven* in the proper way, I too will begin thinking about G-d!”

The very fact that he thought about Hashem is significant in itself, the Rebbe pointed out. It is a form of prayer, and also falls into the category of “not serving idolatry,” one of the *sheva mitzvos*. And surely, the Rebbe said, the story didn’t end here. The fact that he began thinking about Hashem certainly affected him in the following days. If he considered doing a negative act, not in line with *tzedek* and *yosher*, he remembered the “eye that sees” and refrained from doing it!

1. Maamar Kimei Tzeischa 5743, et. al.

2. Maamar Ko Sevarchu 5745.

3. Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 15 Shevat 5743, sicha 2.

4. 13 Elul 5742, sicha 3.

5. Purim 5742, sicha 2.

6. Sichu to N’shei Chabad, 23 Elul 5743, et. al.

7. Purim 5743, sicha 4.

8. Shabbos Parshas Ekev, Chof Av 5743, sicha 1.

9. Third and sixth nights of Sukkos 5743, et. al.

10. Yud-Beis Tammuz 5743, sicha 3.

11. Acharon Shel Pesach 5742, sicha 3.