

The Weekly Farbrenge



למן ימינו • ייחי תשפ"א
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RELIVING THE PAST (III)

CHOOSING A STORY

The Rebbe taught: We should tell children stories from the *Tanach* and from *Chazal*, and true stories of *tzaddikim*, and not relate *bubeh maisehs*, as some people do. Every story should have a lesson of goodness and *kedusha*. Telling a story without a purpose is not the *Yiddishe* way.

(שיח' ק תשמ"א ח"א ע' 246, תומ"מ ח"ל ע' 52)

When at *yechidus*, the Rebbe instructed Reb Abba Pliskin to *farbreng* with the *temimim* at 770, that quietly-spoken chossid asked what he should talk about. In reply, the Rebbe spoke of the need to repeat *sippurim* of *chassidishe Yidden*. The Rebbe emphasized that he meant stories specifically about chassidim, for when hearing *sippurei tzaddikim*, people can think that they are too far removed from them.

(היכל מנוח ח"ב ע' רכא)

AUTHENTIC STORIES

When telling a story, the Friediker Rebbe was particular to record all the details, even those not directly related to the subject of the story. On one occasion he said, "The Alter Rebbe was very particular that a story should be told with exact details."

(אג"ק מוהריי"צ ח"ד ע' סה, לקו"א ק"ע"א)

The chossid Reb Shlomo Yosef Zevin authored a rich collection of *chassidishe* stories. Upon receiving the book, the Rebbe wrote him a lengthy reply about his responsibility to retell only reliable stories from trustworthy sources.

Particularly in our confused generation, the Rebbe pointed out, we must be exceedingly careful to transmit a story with precise details and not leave room for possible misunderstanding. Unfortunately, the circulation of inaccurate *chassidishe* stories in recent times has led many to false conclusions about *Chassidus*. Such stories sometimes imply that the hero of the story conducted himself contrary to *halacha* or contrary to the principle of *lifnim mishuras hadin* – both of which are out of the question – and usually, by

correcting some detail, the difficulty falls away.

To highlight his points the Rebbe pointed out two such stories in Rabbi Zevin's book:

The first is a story about how the *tzaddik*, Reb Aharon Leib of Premishlan, was reprimanded by Reb Elimelech of Lyzhnsk for not wanting to learn Torah from Eliyahu HaNavi. Reb Aharon Leib excused himself by saying that he wished to toil in Torah. This implies, said the Rebbe, that Eliyahu came to the other *tzaddikim* to spare them effort, since they did not wish to toil in the study of Torah. The truth, the Rebbe explained, is that those *tzaddikim* also toiled; however, they saved their efforts for more advanced levels of study, beyond what Eliyahu HaNavi had taught them.

Every year on *Motzaei Shabbos Parshas Mishpatim*, a *melava malka* would be held in support of the Crown Heights *gmach*. The custom developed that during the Rebbe's *Shabbos farbreng* the head of that *gmach* would don a *shtreiml*, and before inviting all those present to the gathering, he would tell a story.

One year the *gabbai* Reb Shimon Goldman related a story about a *chossid* of Reb Nochum of Tchernobyl, who would always host the *tzaddik* when he visited his town. On one visit, the *tzaddik* sent him a message that he must bring him two thousand rubles, otherwise he would not stay at his home, and the *chossid* would even be forbidden to visit the Rebbe or participate in his *tefilos*. The *chossid* had no way of collecting such a sum, and so, to his terrible dismay, he was unable to see his Rebbe throughout his entire stay in his town. A short while later a miracle occurred to him, and he received exactly two thousand rubles. When he presented it to the Rebbe he was told to keep it, and the Rebbe added, "You were destined to be wealthy. However, the only way you could receive it was if you would plead for it. That is why I caused you all that pain."

The Rebbe questioned the viability of this story: Would Reb Nochum Tchernobyl cause his *chossid* to endure such suffering for such a long time?! Why, even a coarse person (*grobber yung*) would experience unbearable pain watching everyone going to hear the *tzaddik's* *davening* while he is forced to remain outside!

It must be, concluded the Rebbe, that the *chossid* was merely held back from joining one *tehilah*, and shortly afterwards the *tzaddik* returned to stay at his home. This pain was surely enough to arouse the *chossid* to *daven* to *HaShem* for the wealth.

The Rebbe then added, "It should not come as a surprise that a story could become so mistaken. We often see how when a story is transmitted from one person to another, each narrator tries to embellish it, at times at the cost of ruining it all ..."

(תומ' תשמ"ז ח"ב ע' 501)

CONSIDER

**What harm is there in telling:
an invented story? Or a true
story that carries no lesson?**

Or an inaccurate story?

**When should stories of
Rebbeim be told? And when
are stories of chassidim
preferable?**

The second is a story of a man who, shortly after his father's passing, dreamt that his father ordered him to convert. When the dream repeated itself several times, he visited Reb Zusha of Hanipoli who instructed him to open the grave, since there was surely a *tzeilem* inside. They followed his instructions and found some coins with crosses that had mistakenly fallen inside during the burial. Now, concludes the Rebbe, since it is forbidden to open a grave, it must be that the coins were in the vicinity of the grave, and not in the grave itself.

(אג"ק חי"א ע' רשת, הסיפורים בסיפוריו ח' זיין ע' 372, 118)



