

The Yelping Chihuahua

WE SET STANDARDS FOR OTHERS BY OUR OWN BEHAVIOR

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There was a noted Chabad chossid of the last generation, a man of great mesirus nefesh for Yiddishkeit in the Soviet Union who had demonstrated profound ahavas Yisroel. He was also somewhat obstreperous in his dealings with others. He was so determined to accomplish what he felt was needed that he was often at odds with others.

I once listened to him defending his irregular but effective method at a chassidische farbrengen, after a l'chaim or two. He said of himself: "*Ich bin a hoont... ich bin dem Rebbe's hoont. Ich shtey un behil un ich heet dem Rebbe's grenetsun.*" (I am a dog... I am the Rebbe's dog. I stand and bark and I protect the Rebbe's borders.)

This chossid felt that the Rebbe's borders must be protected from foreign intrusion and since protecting them was his job, he could use all means at his disposal, even if it meant ruffling feathers... or worse.

(When he said, "*Ich bin a hoont...*" I could feel the murmur among his detractors, "Hear, Hear!")

Well, in comparison to him, I am a yelping Chihuahua.

I am also an infrequent visitor to Crown Heights and have the benefit of the "guest who comes for a while and sees for a mile."

On several recent visits I attended a number of weddings. I was happy for the grooms, brides and their parents. The ballrooms were set up beautifully; the food was plentiful and tasty. However, what I experienced as disconcerting was that the music and the dancing were more styled after a disco than that of a chassidische, Lubavitcher wedding.

It is not for me to delve into the *halachah* of what is improper dancing; rather I will simply paraphrase a U.S. Supreme Court Justice who said, "I know it when I see it." I would like to believe that these events are rare exceptions to the rule, but, unfortunately, they do not appear to be that uncommon. What is inappropriate should not be tolerated.

Why does the wedding *meal* have to be glatt-kosher, but not the wedding *celebration*?

I would be dishonest if I said that I personally felt compromised; I didn't. I live in Los Angeles, California, just a few blocks from its border with Hollywood, where just walking in the street is a moral challenge, and we learn how to deal with these challenges. But I am offended and demeaned, as a Lubavitcher chossid, that in the Rebbe's *dalet amos* such behavior is taking place. I am embarrassed for all of us as a community and for the Rebbe.

At many Crown Heights weddings, a few guests from the surrounding chassidische communities attend. When I see these people observing this type of dancing I cringe and ask myself, what are they thinking?! Then I ask myself, what are we thinking? Are we thinking at all? Have we just given up and capitulated? Are we oblivious to what this does to our image and, therefore, also to the Rebbe's image?

For the FFBs amongst us, this type of "worldliness" (to be kind) is to invite the world's trash into our greatest simchos. For the BTs amongst us, I quote a BT friend of mine from California, who, while watching the dancing with me, said to me bluntly, "For this I became frum? I thought I left all of this behind me!" How can I enjoy the beautiful achdus of our diverse community when we dredge up the lowest common denominator and place it front and center? What happened to our self-respect? What happened to the Lubavitcher "V'niflinu" (Shemos 33:16), to the sense of our being unique and exceptional?

How one talks, walks, even how one closes the door, says a lot about the person. Body language speaks loud and clear. Uncouth body language isn't about the body at all; it describes character.

When standards decline a little at a time, we barely notice and be-

come inured and insensitive; when we become desensitized, things deteriorate further.

Twas a time, in the early 1950's, that a proper mechitzah at a Lubavitcher wedding was not that common. The Rebbe took it upon himself to change this. He spoke about it to individuals and wrote about it (see the first letter in Igros vol.9), encouraging us to set our standards higher. He wrote that not having a proper mechitzah is wrong, not only because it is inherently wrong, but also because it creates an obstruction in the path of the blessings that are showered from On High for the new couple. If we really believed this we would not tolerate vulgar music and dancing at the young couple's royal sendoff.

The yetzer hara wasn't *Made in the USA*; it flourished in Europe in earlier generations, too. There are passionate Rabbinic responsa on this subject. When the behavior at the wedding is not as it should be, many authorities forbid adding the words *Shehasimchah B'me'ono* (there is joy in His dwelling) in the "*Raboisai...*" call, by the one leading the bentching, "because He has no joy in this setting!" (See *Kitzur Shuchan Aruch* 149:1)

So the Rebbe won the mechitzah battle, but not the wedding war. Now the battlefield has moved to the dance floor. By carrying on this way, wittingly or unwittingly, it bemsirches and sullies the standard and image of Lubavitch and the image of the Rebbe.

There are other things happening at weddings that are new-and-not-improved, which are signs of declining standards. The juvenile flirtatious behavior of the chosson and kallah toward each other in public is no longer uncommon. It sets a poor example for their peers. The new-

fangled family dance of the kallah's father and siblings — of both genders — on the distaff side of the mechitzah didn't used to happen. These are simply inappropriate and inconsistent with long-established Lubavitcher standards. This is not to be confused with a mitzvah-tantz (which we also don't do) nor is it the mezinke-tantz.

The responsibility for these examples of declining standards rests on all of us and, if we care, we must speak out sincerely and persua-

tained throughout the evening, have we now reached the point that we need the mesader kiddushin to stay through the evening and take responsibility that appropriate kedushah standards are maintained for the entire celebration?

There are things that the Rebbe personally campaigned for or against, setting the standards for his community. Some are straightforward dinim in the Shulchan Aruch and some go be-

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sively; we cannot be passive in the face of it. Yiras Shamayim without courage is wimpy and, communally, worthless.

The lion's share of the responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of the ones who call the shots and pay the bills — the mechutonim. Where there is meticulous concern for the menu and flowers, there is apparently no such concern regarding the type of music to be played, which determines the tempo and choreography of the dancing. The musicians and bands are hired professionals; they will play exactly as asked. The people signing the band's contract must put in it, in writing, what they do want and what they don't want. They carry the responsibility for the resulting atmosphere and dances.

Just as the mashgiach on the kashrus is present throughout the celebration to make sure that the proper kashrus standards are main-

yond it: beards (untrimmed), eiruv (not in larger cities), mechitzah (of proper height and density), sheitel (not hats, falls, etc.), cholov Yisroel (not cholov stam), and more. These are important to us because they were so essential to the Rebbe that he spoke out and campaigned for setting a unique and higher Lubavitcher standard.

I am sure we can relate to one who says he does certain things (*dinim, chumros, minhagim*) a certain way, because "this is the way my father insisted that our family do it." Well, our father, the Rebbe, insisted that our greater family should do these things this way. Let us not embarrass the family and let us not disregard our father.

We are one family. Each of us sets standards for others by our own behavior. By raising our own awareness, we elevate ourselves and others in a positive way and make our family, community and world purer, brighter and holier.■