



Go Public!

Should Jews be loud or quiet?

Noisy or Quietly?

At a Bar Mitzvah in our Shul not long ago, a man who had not been to a Synagogue in many years approached me after services with a question.

"I've noticed," he began, "that the services start off quietly and as they progress and the people get more into it the volume rises. Then the services reached a crescendo at Shema when everyone said the prayer out loud, together. But right after that the congregation fell silent as everyone stood to say the Amida. Why is the height of the prayer said quietly?"

I explained to him that throughout the services, especially during the Shema, we reaffirm aloud our faith in the One G-d and acceptance of His sovereignty. The Amida, however, is a prayer of personal requests and these must be said in a humble undertone.

In this week's parsha we read that the High Priest wore a robe with bells attached to the hem. These bells rang whenever the High Priest would walk, signaling his entry to the sanctuary to perform the services there. They were also the signal to the people that he had completed those services and had left the sanctuary.

However, on Yom Kippur, when he would enter the Holy of Holies, he was forbidden to wear the robe with the bells. In fact, the whole

service inside of the Holy of Holies had to be performed very quietly. Again, we see an example of “a time to be still and a time to speak out.”

What is the lesson for us in our daily service of G-d? When must we serve Him noisily and when is it proper to tread softly?

New Approaches?

In the seventies, the Rebbe came out with the idea of “Mitzvah Tanks” telling Chabad Yeshivah students to go out into the heart of New York City with Jewish music blaring from loudspeakers, to set up tables in the middle of the Manhattan and have Jews put on tefillin in public. This caused uproar in the Jewish world. If a Jew wanted to put on tefillin he would go to his temple or he’d put them on at home. Trumpeting religion out in the streets was unheard of!

The Rebbe responded to this claim by saying that the Baal Shem Tov had faced a similar complaint. He was asked, why is it that for generations Jews used to pray quietly and standing still, and now Chassidim cry out and move around so much during prayers.

The Besht answered them as follows:

When a person is drowning in a river and he cries out for help, his hands and feet thrash about and nobody laughs or finds his behavior strange. Similarly, when Jews pray they are crying out to G-d to save them from their overwhelming worldly affairs that threaten to extinguish their spiritual fervor.

Our generation of Jews is in danger of being drowned in secularism. Many of the Jews who roam the streets of Manhattan will never step into a Shul to put on tefillin. The only way to reach these Jews is go out into the center of their world and to make such a loud commotion that their attention is drawn to us and subsequently to their heritage.

Then the Besht added: when a deaf person sees people dancing and clapping their hands, he can become confused for he cannot hear the music, the reason for their ecstasy.

If one becomes confused when he sees Jews performing mitzvos and reveling in the warmth and joy of Judaism, perhaps it's because he is "deaf to the excitement of Judaism"; perhaps his own Judaism lacks vitality.

The only way to get such a Jew to appreciate mitzvos is to imbue them with your excitement for Judaism. And that's what the Mitzvah tanks were all about.

Take a Lesson

We must take a lesson from the way G-d instilled an excitement over mitzvos in His people. When He gave us the Torah at Sinai it wasn't a dry presentation of dos and don'ts. It was amidst an awesome display of thunder, lightning and maybe even some fireworks. This is how we have to approach our children, with excitement and joy, if we wish to give them a real appreciation for mitzvos.

It is interesting to note that there are mitzvos which are done joyfully and there are other that are done reluctantly. The Talmud explains that those mitzvos which the Jews accepted at the very beginning with joy are still performed with joy. For example, circumcision which is painful for all the parties involved is performed with great joy. This is because Abraham the first Jew to perform the mitzvah made a great feast in celebration of the circumcision of his son Isaac.

However, those mitzvos that were accepted bitterly are still performed somewhat grudgingly. The best example for this is marriage where both parties are quite willing, in essence, but there is always fighting among the families and sometime even between the couple. This is because when G-d laid down the laws of marriage (Arayos) the people

complained and cried that it was too hard. And so it has remained till this day.

It is clear that the attitude with which the mitzvos are introduced to the child is the attitude that will remain with him throughout his life. If we display joy in our performance of Mitzvos, this joy will carry over and remain with our children throughout their days.