

By Rabbi Levi Goldstein

Music and Chinuch

Reb Hillel Paritcher has said: **He who possesses a חוש (a warm sensitivity) to Negina, has a better חוש in chassidus too.**¹

Music is a gift from Hashem to mankind, a heavenly gift indeed!

Music is one of the greatest gifts that Hashem gave us. Music has unique powers, the power to lift us up to the lofty heights, way up high or to drop us down to the very depths, way below.

We are no more than soft clay, as we permit this heavenly power of music to mold us into the desired shape and design.

No wonder why music plays such a prominent role in Divine Worship, as we find in the Beis Hamikdash, how the Leviim sang harmoniously the beautiful songs of praise to Hashem.

In the Hayom Yom (22 Tammuz) it says: The Rebbe [Rashab], once said: **".. a chassidishe Niggun strengthens one's hope and trust, brings joy, and positions the home and the entire household in a ray of light."**

¹ ספר השיחות תרצ"ו – חורף ת"ש, ע' 221

On the other hand, there is a saying of elder Chasidim: "One who does not possess a חוש (a warm sensitivity) to Negina, suffers from a serious coarseness of his nefesh."

In chassidus it is explained that when one sings or listens to music, he is thereby connecting his very soul with the thoughts and feelings of the composer of that particular music.

If the composer is a G-d-fearing person, who composed the song in order to express a good and “aidele” midda, then, that midda is **automatically “transferred” to the listener.**

Yes, if it is a chassidishe niggun, composed by a Rebbe, or an עובד (a Chasid during his feverent davenning), then a feeling of chassidishkeit and yirs-shamayim “takes-over” the listener and has a very positive spiritual effect.

We must peek “behind the scenes” and ask yourself “Who is the composer?”

Is he the sort of person I want my children to imitate and grow up to?

Bearing the above in mind, let us see what the Rebbe wrote² to a music composer, who asked the Rebbe about Jewish music in regard to the latest style of western music (pop, rock and roll, reggae etc.):

The following is a synopsis of a free translation of the Rebbe’s answer:

“The theme of today’s style of music has been expertly prepared and planned by its composers to target the hearts of the listeners and influence them with the following undesirable feelings:

a) Arousal of the Yetzer. b) To reject all boundaries and “seder” (order) in general, and in Tzenius (modesty) in particular. c) A

² לקוטי שיחות חל"ח, ע' 179

conviction that “everything is permissible”. d) It is totally okay to try-out whatever one desires, and draw one’s own conclusions etc.”

After such powerful words of the Rebbe, nothing more is needed to be said or explained³.

A few more points to ponder on

In my article about “**Kosher Videos**”, I made reference to the well-known Minhag of “stealing” the Afikomen at the seder, concerning which the Rebbe writes⁴, that it is not customary to do so in Beis Horav.

To explain this, the Rebbe quotes the Gemara in Brachos (5b), “**בְּתֵר גִּנְבָא גְנוּב וְטַעְמָא טַעִים**”. “Steal from a thief and feel the taste [of stealing]!”

³ On the other hand, as a child, I grew up in a home where classical music was played a lot. I believe that it cultivated within me sensitivity for “aidele” music, and an appreciation of nature. It also has a soothing and calming effect on the listener.

When I grew up, however, I was doubtful whether this was acceptable, since the composers were not frum yidden. Although they did not include any pieces that were composed for avoda-zara, G-d forbid.

Knowing that Rabbi Marlow ה"ע was a “master of Symphony-music”. (in fact, when he was my 2nd grade teacher, he used to sing the Mozart’s Turkish-march to us).

So I asked him whether it was permitted to listen to classical music, despite the fact that the composers were not Frum Yidden. He answered, yes. In fact, it is just like anything else that is not kedusha per se, but can be utilized to help in avodas Hashem.

Here again, I guess, the deciding factor was, which “side-effect” will it bring about.

⁴ הגדה של פסח עם לקוטי טעמים, מנהגים וביאורים, סוף הקטע ד"יחץ".

This means, that even in a case where one may “justify” his act of stealing, with the “claim” that he is only “taking away” from a thief an object that was stolen from someone else.

Yet, our Chachamim teach us, that by doing so, it will result in giving the “taker” the “**taste**” of **stealing**.

Likewise, in order that the child should not feel the “taste” of stealing, we do not allow him to “steal” the afikoman.

From this we derive a fundamental lesson in chinuch:

When one evaluates a particular song/singer to listen to, whether it is chinuch-appropriate for a child, he must not only examine it whether it is permissible according to “the letter of the law”.

But also, whether or not it may bring about any negative “side-effects”. As our chachomim say: "איזהו חכם הרואה את הנולד", (who is wise? – he who foresees the outcome”)

That is to say, that we must not only “look” at the surface of the subject-matter, to judge whether it is chinuch-appropriate or not, but we must also look “ahead” and see what may follow as a result of this.

The “Chain-Reaction”

A yeshiva student once confided with me, that he has regretfully developed a “taste” for “goyeshe”-music.

He explained himself:

“It all began when I started listening to “Jewish”-Rock and Reggae music.

The words of the songs were either pesukim from the Torah or sayings of Chazal, and even “Chassidic anecdotes”!

So, although I never listened to goyeshe music before, and I still do not intend to. But, the “taste” for such music is now somewhere inside of me, to the extent, that I unfortunately do not despise goyeshe music as I used to.

Which, by the same token, I have, sadly, lost my appreciation for “aidele” nigunim, which I really wish I will regain some day ”

This shows us how “tricky” the Yetzer is, in starting one off with a so-called “kosher-lobster”. And then, once the taste is developed, the Yetzer’s “trap” has worked!

The following are two more episodes, which emphasize the need to “look ahead” at possible “side-effects.”

Is “Frum-College” OK?

A reputable chasid has recently shared with me the following story:

“Dr. Bernard Lander ז"ע, founding president of Turo college, was in Yechidus by the Rebbe during the founding stages of the college, after which he told me the following:

“I was just in yechidus by the Rebbe, to share with the Rebbe my intentions in the establishing Turo college, which would be for men and women separately, and would also insure that the subjects taught there should be properly chosen.

I was sure that the Rebbe would be happy with it and give me his blessings.

But, the contrary took place. The Rebbe requested from me that I should not open up the college.”

The Rebbe said:

“You are opening up a "פתח" to going to college בכלל.

Consequently, one year they will go to your college, and then they will want to go to Colombia and then to Harvard etc. and you have no guarantee that they will stay by you.

The very fact that they get a “היתר” to go to your college, they forget which college it was intended for.

So, what you’re actually doing is, you are encouraging young men and young women to go to college!.”

5-6 years after the college has been opened, Dr. Lander me at a certain occasion, and said to me: “Reb Yid, the Rebbe was right!” “But once it’s open, I cannot retract it.”

The point of this story:

Although one may say, “Wow! What a great idea!” “A Frum-college!”. Yet, the Rebbe is warning him about the “side-effect” that may result from it and was therefore against its establishment.

“Roller-Skating”?

A similar episode:

In the early 1980's, a certain Jewish children's organization of crown heights planned a kosher, all-boys “roller-skating” event for the talmidim of our Mosdos.

For this, they rented the “roller-drum” hall (on Empire Blvd. near Bedford Ave.), to be used exclusively for this purpose.

However, Rabbi Hodokov ה"ע stopped them from doing so, with the following explanation:

“You are introducing a “new פתה”, a new idea to these children who have not yet gone to roller-skating rinks until now.

So, although you are now providing them this in a “kosher” manner, who knows where they will go next time, especially since you will (probably) not provide this for them every time they want to go roller-skating in the future.”

The lesson is obvious - Play chassidishe nigunim in the house, in the car, and whenever. Our children then (begin to) appreciate them.

In conclusion, let's get our eyes and ears "ready" to see and hear the great revelations in store for us in the time of Geulah.

The very future of our generation and Klal Yisroel hangs in the balance, and thus, depends on our "Action" today.

Resolve to monitor your precious gem, your gift from Hashem, your child.

Be aware of what he or she is watching and listening to.

In return for this, you will have a well-mannered child fortified with true love to Hashem and the torah.

To top it off, your child will appreciate what you are doing and love you for it, too.

The bootom line:

We must be VERY selective in regard to the "style" of the music we or our children listen to. That it should not only be **sung** by a yid, but that it conveys and fosters a "yidishe-chassidishe" message, and exemplifies "mentchlichkiet" "aidelekeit" etc. and moreover that it consequently develops a "taste" for aidele chassidishe nigunim, so that the listeners will experience the fulfillment of the guarantee of the Rebbeim **"A chassidishe Niggun strengthens one's hope and trust, brings joy, and positions the home and the entire household in a ray of light."**