

By Rabbi Levi Goldstein

## **“Kosher” videos – and “Who is a Jew?”**

In the early 1970's, at almost every farbrengen, the Rebbe spoke out openly and sharply against the terrible decree of מיהו יהודי (“Who is a Jew?”), the Rebbe did not spare time, sometimes for an hour or so, pointing out that regardless of what the Israeli politicians may decree in determining as to who is a Jew, the only One to decide is Hashem, Who has written so in His Torah. That only he/she who was born to a Jewish mother or has converted according to Halacha, is actually a Jew.

At a farbrengen with his Talmidim, the well known Mahspia in Kfar Chabad, Reb Shlomo Chayim Kesselman, has once asked the following question:

“Why does the Rebbe spend so much time at the Farbrengens speaking about מיהו יהודי. After all, isn't it a matter which pertains to only a select few of attendants of the farbrengen. Why does the Rebbe want you, Talmidim of the Yeshiva, to hear about something in which you seemingly have no power or influence? There must be a message and Hora'ah for you too.”

“The lesson for you seems to me as follows: In our private lives, we are often faced with the very same question. מיהו יהודי?

For example: When we contemplate about doing something which we “really” know that we shouldn’t. The Yetzer comes along and gives a “stamp of approval” !יהודי, It’s Jewish! It’s Chassidish!! So, **GO FOR IT!**

And here, the Rebbe is encouraging us not to fall into the Yetzer Hara’s traps.

One must be purely honest with himself and verify whether the act is indeed “Jewish” (=Kosher) and proper to do.”

### **“Kosher” Videos - Really?!**

Practically speaking, there are many areas where this can/should be applied. For instance:

To allow a video into one’s house just because it has a “Jewish” title, and is not in the Ruach of Yiddishkiet and chassidus, is the equivalent of the decree of מיהו יהודי, taking a non-Jew(ish) object and calling it Jew(ish).

Let me explain:

Audio CDs and Videos have made unbelievable progress in bringing all sorts of information to anyone who just knows how to turn on a VCR or computer, including innocent little children.

We must know that the messages that come across to the watcher/listener remain embedded in the young frail and absorbent mind and heart for a lifetime!

When a child hears a clear message that promotes yiddishkeit in general, and good character (middos-tovos) and yiras-shamayin in particular, it will have an amazing everlasting effect on him.

There is however one prominent condition, namely, that the message be delivered in a 100% proper manner.

That is, in the way of chassidus-chabad, emphasizing ONLY the “good” and the positive of good behavior, the great nanchas that Torah and Mitzvos bring about.

But, not at all to portray how “bad” is the opposite.

Practically speaking:

While telling a story to a child (whether live, or via audio/video), when part of it must call for the mentioning of a “Mocker” (=“fighter”) against torah and mitzvos (Eisav, Haman, etc.), it must be done with extreme caution.

That is, to mention it in a very passive manner, thereby not emphasizing or portraying the negative, **and of course, not to “act-out” the “bad-guy”**, unless there is no choice, but then too, it should be done without passion.

For otherwise, during those few moments, the child's mind and heart is totally absorbed in that act of negativity. And even though, the “bad-guy” ends up as “the loser” and is totally defeated, nevertheless, **the damage was done!**

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### **The Alter Rebbe: When not to act Bold as a Leopard - ?**

At the beginning of his Shulchan Aruch<sup>1</sup>, the Alter Rebbe quotes the teaching of our chachomim<sup>2</sup>, that in the service of Hashem, a Jew must be **"עז כנמר"**, “Bold as a Leopard”<sup>3</sup>, to be “Tough”. Not to feel humiliated from people who are “mockers” (of Torah and Mitzvos).

At the same token, the Alter Rebbe warns us, that one is not to respond in return to these mockers in an arrogant fashion, **"שלא יקנה"** **"קנין בנפשו"**, so as not to “acquire” to oneself [this undesirable character trait of arrogance], for it may result in acting arrogantly in other dissimilar situations too.”

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<sup>1</sup> שלחן ערוך או"ח סימן א' סעיף ג.

<sup>2</sup> אבות, פרק ה' משנה כ.

<sup>3</sup> שלחן ערוך או"ח – מהדו"ק – סימן א' סעיף א'.

In other words, in certain instances, due to the fear of a resulting negative side-effect, one must refrain from doing an action, regardless of how praiseworthy it may be per se, or in other circumstances.

We find a similar teaching in the Haggadah:

In regard to the well-known Minhag of “stealing” the Afikomen at the seder, the Rebbe writes<sup>4</sup>, that it is not customary to do so in Beis Horav.

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

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 the above two teachings, we derive a fundamental lesson in chinuch:

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

When one evaluates a certain activity, to determine 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”.

For example, when we examine the ingredients on the label of a certain food product, not only do we verify that it’s “kosher” halachically, but we also look out for anything that may be otherwise harmful to the child/adult, such as, food coloring, MSG etc.

The same must be applied before providing our child with any sort of entertainment; we must examine all its details, to make sure that it does not contain anything negative which may bring about an undesirable side effect.

### **The proof is in the pudding**

As a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher, I hear/see, when children imitate characters and actors that they have seen in a video or heard on a CD.

It is to my utter painful dismay, that more often than not, I find them imitating the “bad-guys” and repeat the **negative words!**.

Although one may argue, “It’s only for fun. what’s wrong with little children acting out as the “bad-guy”.

Here is where we turn to the Alter Rebbe’s warning, that although the person (child) is “only acting-out” in a negative behavior, yet, we

must be aware that שלא יקנה קנין בנפשו, the child may acquire this undesirable character trait.

The following are several instances where we the Rebbeim clearly caution us in a similar manner:

a) The Rebbe writes<sup>5</sup> that when we give a child an animal-toy to play with, we must make sure that it is only a kosher animal (or fish).

Although one may argue “it’s ONLY a ‘toy’, why make a fuss?.”

Yet, the Rebbe warns us that if it is an unclean animal, it inevitably has a negative side-effect on the child and should be avoided.

b) Another very similar cautioning comes from the Rebbe<sup>6</sup> regarding acting out at a Purim play.

The Rebbe strongly admonishes against having a child act out the role of haman in a **passionate** manner. Since it may have a long-lasting negative effect on the child’s future behavior.

c) Likewise, the Frierdiker Rebbe writes<sup>7</sup> “Recess time must be under supervision. To insure that they do not argue or fight with one another, and particularly that they don’t speak arrogantly or with a “coarse” language.

One is to explain the students, that also during play-time one must conduct himself with derech-eretz.”

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<sup>5</sup> לקוטי שיחות חכ"ה ע' 309

<sup>6</sup> לקוטי שיחות חל"א ע' 280.

<sup>7</sup> אגרות קודש אדמוהריי"צ נ"ע ח"ח, ע' תיד.

It follows to say, that playing “cops & robbers”, or make-believe shooting etc. is surely to be discouraged for this same reason.

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Remember! Chassidus teaches, that our eyes are like a “camera”. Whatever it sees gets recorded and deeply engraved into the Neshama and pure mind of the person.

Yes, of all the five senses, sight does have a much deeper and everlasting effect on the person.

To be lenient in this serious matter is similar to a parent who leaves a container of poison reachable to the innocent child.

On the other hand, we must search for something good and proper in its place, we cannot just say “No!”.

I have once asked my father שליט"א, “how have your parents succeeded so well in bringing up ALL of their seven children, to be Frum, shomrei-shabbos, and G-d fearing Jews, at a time when there was hardly any Yiddishkeit at all in America (1930’s),

He answered me, that besides סעייתא דשמיא, which is 99% of the answer, there were a few more factors. The number one factor was, that the parents have always provided “substitutes” for any “non-kosher” entertainment that their classmates, friends or neighbors were enjoying.



Instead of just saying to us “No, you’re not going!”, He replaced it with other “kosher” entertainment. “For example, while our friends went to the circus, we were treated to a visit to the airport to watch the “new” planes take-off and land.

We can surely find enough substitute material in which the children will be nourished with refinement of good character, Midos Tovos, Ahavas Hashem and Yiras Hashem.

When a child watches videos of the Rebbe, he is absorbing a tremendous amount of Kedusha (holiness), which will have a direct effect on him and his behavior, in Torah and Mitzvos, as well in general behavior, as a Chasid of the Rebbe.