



BE A MENTSCH

Rabbi Yitzchok Sanders



Yiras Shomayim!

פְּרִישַׁת שְׂמוֹת

People's strength doesn't depend as much on their muscles but rather on their values or מדות. If a friend, stranger or boss tries to make us do something, it doesn't make a difference how big are muscles are. It depends on the size of our Values or מדות. If we know it is a good act and the right choice, then of course, we should do it. However, if we know it is wrong, then of course, we should not do it. Just like muscles need exercise to stay in shape, so too our values and מדות need exercise to stay in shape. The most important point to keep in mind is listening to Hashem, following his Mitzvos and having respect for the Torah.

We learn this lesson from שְׂפָרָה and פּוּעָה the two Jewish nurses, מְיַלְדוֹת, in this week's parsha. Pharaoh commands them to kill the Jewish baby boy's. Can you imagine how scary it must have been for them to ignore his order – yet they did ignore it. Why? They respected ה' and they didn't worry about Pharaoh. They chose to live their lives as servants of Hashem who listen to His Mitzvos. They told Pharaoh that the Jewish women were having their babies before any nurse could come over to their homes – so Pharaoh's plan failed. These nurses had value for life and they acted with strength to see to it that the Jewish children would be saved.

We must do the same as these great women and we will אֵי"ה receive the same reward that ה' gave שְׂפָרָה and פּוּעָה. He gave them special, important families, the families of בְּהוֹנָה לְוִיָּה וּמִלְכוֹת. For thousands of years, Jewish people in every country in the world have remained strong and firm doing the Mitzvos of Hashem. This is because they had יִרְאַת שְׂמַיִם, fear of Hashem. May each of us have יִרְאַת שְׂמַיִם, fear of Hashem and ***Be a Mentsch*** !

Red Lights

Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein

When one of the teachers in the school I run was in Seminary, she was invited out for a Shabbos meal with her friend to a family living in Me'ah Shearim. Arriving there with her friend, as Shabbos was about to begin, they met the husband of the house, a sweet *chassidish* man. Wishing them a good Shabbos, he then continued on to Shul for davening. A couple minutes later, the wife of the house appeared. She looked American and was strangely dressed in a wedding gown. Unsure what to make of everything, the two girls quietly lit their Shabbos candles and then waited for the wife to finish lighting her candles. The wife removed her hands from her face and glowingly looked at her two special guests. Turning to the girls, she wished them a good Shabbos and introduced herself as Miriam. And then she asked the question the girls were waiting to here. "Do you want to know why I am wearing a wedding gown? Let me tell you my story:

Living with my family in the south side of Chicago, I was a young nine year old girl in fourth grade. My family was irreligious and far from any strong affiliation with Judaism. However, my parents still felt that I should be familiar with my Jewish heritage and know a little bit about my roots. They therefore decided to send me to Hebrew school on Sundays. The school was staffed with religious teachers who for the most part emphasized Jewish history when teaching the classes. However, one particular teacher took a particular liking to me. She wished she could take me home and allow me to experience a beautiful Shabbos. My teacher called my parents. "Would it be okay if I invite Miriam to stay at my house over Shabbos? I would love to have her." "Sure," said my parents. And without further ado, the teacher invited me over.

As I arrived at my teacher's house Friday afternoon, I settled myself in and prepared for Shabbos. Then Shabbos began. As my teacher arranged the candles, I stood there amazed. I had never before in my life seen Shabbos candles being lit before. At home, I had never seen my own mother do so. Turning to my teacher, I asked, "Where are my candles?" "It's okay, Miriam," said the teacher, "I can light for you." "No," I said, "I want to light myself. I do not know if I will ever get another chance to light Shabbos candles again." As my teacher's heart went out for me, she gently prepared two little candles for me to light. The rest of Shabbos was a beautiful experience. Immensely enjoying it, I went home afterwards uplifted and inspired.

As I got older, I continued to attend public school with Hebrew school on the side. Finally, my parents decided to send me to a private Catholic school. Although I was aware I was Jewish, I still attended the school, although I did not pray with everyone else. But I began to make non-Jewish friends and identify myself more and more with my surroundings. By eleventh grade, I was no longer Miriam, but Mary. And by now, I was

even praying with my friends. Sadly, I had become heavily involved in the Catholic way of life.

Matters didn't get better. After graduating from high school, I enrolled in a private Catholic college. It was there that I met Vinney and decided to get married. Setting the wedding date on Shabbos in a Church with a priest, Vinney and I were soon to be husband and wife. Then the fateful day arrived. After much preparation, I entered the limo that was to take me and my bridesmaids to the Church. Now comfortably situated, the bridesmaids had something to tell me. "We bought you a present," they excitedly said. "Close your eyes and we will give it to you." Following instructions, I closed my eyes as my friends took out a necklace of a cross and placed it around my neck. Upon opening up my eyes, I saw the wonderful gift my friends had given me and graciously thanked them.

As the car moved along, we came to a red light. Standing on the corner were four JEP girls (a *kiruv* organization) from Brooklyn. Totally lost and looking for directions to Shul, the girls were unsure where to go. I rolled down the window from the back seat as I noticed the four girls standing at the corner and appearing lost. Recognizing that they were Jewish, I called out, "Can I help you?" "Yes," they said. "We are a bit lost. We are trying to find the Orthodox Synagogue around here. Do you happen to know where it is?" "Sure I do. It used to be a Conservative school and now it is an Orthodox Synagogue. Hop in the car and I'll take you there. There's enough room for all you to sit in the limo."

But then I realized the problem. "Oh, I forgot, you girls are religious and will not come into the car. Okay, just follow me and I will lead you to the Synagogue." As I was talking to them, one of the JEP girls noticed my necklace. It clearly was inconsistent with my knowledge of Judaism and Synagogues. "How do you know anything about a Synagogue?" the girl asked. "What do you mean?" I astounded. "I am Jewish!" Looking back at me and subtly hinting to the cross hanging around my neck, the girl found it hard to believe that I was Jewish. "I am really Jewish," I repeated. "It's just that I am now on my way to marry Vinney." "Oh," said the girl. "What's your name?" "They call me Mary, but my name is really Miriam." "Really?" said the JEP girl. "My name is also Miriam."

Following the car to the Synagogue, the girls finally arrived at the Shul with the limo alongside. Now, the girls needed to figure out what to do with me. Time was of the essence. Quickly thinking what to do, Miriam, the JEP girl, turned to the car and said, "Miriam, you know what? Since you are on your way to get married, why don't you come inside the Synagogue and get a blessing from the Rabbi?" "A blessing from the Rabbi?" I said. "Yeah, they are in the middle of Shabbat services. Come inside and you can ask the Rabbi that he bless you to have a future successful marriage."

After thinking for second, I agreed. "You're right; I should get a blessing from the Rabbi." Looking back at my friends in the limo, I told them, "Just wait two minutes. I'm going to get a blessing from the rabbi; I'll be right back." And with that, I walked with Miriam towards the

Shul. Getting inside, we begin to head towards the Ezras Nashim, the women's section in the Shul. But then Miriam, the JEP girl, paused. Turning to me, she gently said, "I don't think you should wear that cross around your neck in the Synagogue. It might shock everyone." Realizing that I was still wearing the cross, I profusely apologized. "Oh, you're right; I'm so sorry." And with that, I immediately slipped the necklace off from around my neck and placed it on a nearby chair.

As we entered the Ezras Nashim, everyone's attention turned towards me. Here I was walking into Shul on an ordinary Shabbos in Chicago wearing a wedding gown. But they assumed that I was from out of town and was perhaps a *baalas teshuva* who has taken the term "Shabbos Kallah" quite literally. Sitting there was the Rebbetzin, the wife of the Rabbi of the Shul. Seeing me, the Rebbetzin got up and gave me a big hug. "Welcome," she said. "What's going on?" Shyly, I told the Rebbetzin, "I'm wearing this because I'm getting married to Vinney today." "Is he Jewish?" asked the Rebbetzin. "No," I said. "And where are you getting married?" "In a Church," I replied. Catching on to what my story was, the Rebbetzin said, "We are almost finished praying. My husband is the Rabbi of the Synagogue. Wait here just a little while longer and perhaps he will give you a blessing." And so, I waited in anticipation of a blessing. Of course I later realized that the Rebbetzin and the other Miriam were well aware that the Rabbi would certainly have something else in mind for me than a blessing to marry out of the faith. As I waited, I could hear from a distance the sounds of my friends persistently beeping the horn of the car and screaming, "Mary, where are you?" But I ignored their yelling and remained in the Shul for the meantime.

Not too much later, the Rabbi walked in. Being told of my situation, he said to me, "Listen, I will not tell you if you should marry Vinney or not. However, for your own sake, before you marry him, come and spend a Shabbos or two with us. Then, if you still want, you can marry him. If, however, you go marry him right now, you will never again experience a Shabbos in your life. Push off the wedding for two or three weeks and look into Judaism a little bit." Taking to heart the Rabbi's words and not wishing to make an impulsive decision which would throw away my Jewish heritage forever, I headed outside. There I saw my friends continuing to frustratingly beep and call for me. Walking up to the car, the girls screamed, "Where have you been?" Telling them what had transpired inside the Shul, they were not surprised. "We knew it! We knew that the minute you started talking to those Jewish girls, that was the end of it. Sorely aggravated by my antics, the girls drove away.

Left now before the Shul I stood in my wedding dress I had put on to marry Vinney. But now that was all going to change. The Rabbi took me into his house, taught me about my rich Jewish heritage and showed me the beauty of Shabbos and Yiddishkeit. Eventually he raised enough money to send me to the Neve Seminary in Israel. Incredibly enough, I continued learning in Seminary for not only one but two years. After doing so, I became engaged to a wonderful *chassidish* boy. It was no longer "Vinney and Mary;" it was now me with my *chassidish* husband. And here I am today with a beautiful family living in Me'ah Shearim.

"Now," concluded Miriam looking at her two guests, "you might be able to understand why I am wearing a wedding gown. It is because I was rewarded on Shabbos. It was due to my teacher

inviting me over as a little girl for Shabbos and allowing me to light the Shabbos candles which saved me. Shabbos and the Shabbos candles saved my *neshama*. And because I found Hashem on Shabbos wearing this wedding dress, I made a *neder* (vow) that for the rest of my life I will always light my Shabbos candles in this wedding dress.”

Here is a story of a moment which all began at a red light. At a red light which lasts for seconds a girl went from the lowest point to the highest point. We all experience sometime in our lives red lights. The only question is what will we do with them. For Miriam, she stopped at the red light and offered her help. She could have said, “I am sorry, but I am off to my wedding.” Had she done so, the light would have eventually turned green and Miriam’s life never would have been the same. Quite likely, she would have forever remained Mary. But she didn’t. She looked outside of herself and helped another. And little did Miriam know that the person she would be helping most was none other than herself.

Have a Great Shabbos!