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Rosh Hashana in a Non-Kosher Restaurant!??

Rabbi Moshe-Meir Lipszyc (pronounced Lipshitz), a Chabad representative in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, hosts up to 50 guests for Shabbat dinner – together with his wife, of course. The guests don't come just for a piece of gefilte fish and a portion of noodle kugel; it is primarily a Jewish identity experience, getting more in touch with and experiencing their spiritual essence, the *neshama*, the unique Jewish soul.

Exactly thirty days before *Rosh Hashana*, on Friday, Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5779 (8/30/19), the Lipszycs were expecting even more guests than usual. So the rabbi decided to invite his friend, Rabbi Yehoshua Mendelson, to also come and thereby be available to help enhance all the guests' experience of a genuine, traditional Shabbat meal.

In that area of Florida, the sun sets much later than most of the rest of the USA. One consequence is that many Jews, for the sake of their children or other personal reasons, start their Shabbat [by accepting its restrictions] while it is still daytime, and complete the entire Shabbat Evening prayer services before nightfall [hopefully remembering to repeat the entire Shma Yisrael prayer some time after dark].

The local Chabad synagogue also adjusts its Friday afternoon prayer times accordingly, for the sake of its congregants. Rabbi Mendelson joined in with the lively *Kabbalat* ('Welcoming') Shabbat service even though the sun was still high above the rippling Atlantic waters, but he elected to delay his personal Shabbat *Maariv* ('Evening') prayer until it was actually night.

When the stars came out and he had completed his prayers, he left the synagogue, heading towards the Lipszyc house. On the way, a man passed him walking in the same direction. It was too dark to recognize if the stranger was Jewish or not, so Rabbi Mendelson wasn't sure if he should say to him "*Gut Shabbos*." Then he recalled one of the praises attributed by the great sages of the Mishna and Talmud to Rabbi Yochanan ben-Zakkai:

"No one ever greeted him before he greeted them, not even a non-Jew in the marketplace."

This inspired him to call out "Good Shabbos" to the other, even though he had no idea who or what he was.

To the rabbi's delight, the man responded with his own hearty "Gut Shabbos," and a friendly conversation quickly developed. The man, who introduced himself as 'Jerry,' related that he was on his way to "Nick's Restaurant."

As it turned out, Jerry was not going there to eat. He was the representative of a group of friends who desired to have a Rosh Hashana festive dinner together. So he was going to 'Nick's,' the well known, upscale, expensive establishment, situated on a nearby beach – but absolutely not kosher, of course -- to order a menu appropriate for the occasion. This would involve teaching Nick's elite gentile chef what is a traditional Jewish holiday meal and how it is prepared, Jerry explained to the astonished rabbi listening intently to him.

R. Yehoshua recovered quickly. He thought to himself, "Who is like you, O Israel?' Jews so assimilated they don't care about Keeping Kosher or Observing Shabbat, yet a dot of Jewishness beats in their hearts that draws them to desire to celebrate Rosh Hashana together with other Jews, to the extent they are prepared to teach a Gentile chef how to prepare a meal for a Jewish holiday...and pay a lot of money for the result."

Looking Jerry in the eye, he suggested calmly, "I think that all of you should come to the Rosh HaShana festive meal at the Fort Lauderdale Chabad House, which by the way, just happens to be located directly across the street from Nick's. I can assure you that the menu and the food itself will be much more authentic than in a non-Jewish restaurant."

Jerry was astonished. Just like that? To invite him and his eight companions so casually for such a major undertaking?

He found himself intrigued by the idea. The more he thought about it, the more he was attracted to it. A genuine authentic Jewish holiday meal on Rosh Hashana...and with real Chasidim too!

Jerry smiled broadly and accepted the invitation on behalf of himself and his friends. He knew they too would be receptive to the spontaneity and the authenticity. He told the rabbi he would continue on to Nick's and cancel the group's reservation.

But R. Yehoshua was not finished inviting. He asked Jerry, "What about the Shabbat meal tonight? Where will you eat it?"

"What? A Shabbos meal! It's been years since I participated in one of those."

“Then why don’t you come along with me and enjoy the Shabbat meal at the Rabbi’s house?”

Jerry stared at his new friend, the chasidic rabbi. It was difficult for him to believe that it was possible – and acceptable! – to show up suddenly for a large meal at a stranger’s house without advance notice. But the courtesy and friendliness of R. Yehoshua’s invitation overwhelmed his reservations, and he agreed to come along.

The rabbi perceived that Jerry’s acceptance was not because he was especially hungry. Rather, he could see on his face that it was a result of an inner spiritual arousal of his Jewish soul. When Jerry entered the Lipszyc’s home, one sweeping glance was enough to take in the dozens of other guests and the tables laden with delicious-looking food. Add to that the free-flowing wine and the lively singing of traditional Shabbat Table songs, and it wasn’t long until Jerry was ‘out of his mind’ with delight and emotional upheaval.

Although his original intention was to remain for just a short time, he ended up staying for two full hours. Before he left, he shyly approached R. Lipszyc to ask if it would be alright for him to attend again the following Shabbat eve, this time together with his wife.”Something sparked in me here tonight,” he murmured.

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*Source:* Excerpted and translated by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by **Rabbi Baruch Wilhelm** of Nahariya, Israel, as printed in *Alon Lubavitch*, a weekly publication of the Chabad community of Tsfat.

*Connection:* Seasonal – **Rosh HaShana 5780!** Let’s start the year as kosher as possible -- in all aspects of our lives, not just food.

***Rabbi Wilhelm adds:***

Besides the beauty and depth and pleasure awaiting those Jews who commit to Shabbat, there is a major life-lesson for every human being to be gained from this episode.

We should always be prepared to greet others warmly, no matter who they are or what the situation. This applies not only to these that are in ‘the people business,’ so to speak. Everyone should cultivate this awareness. We should always relate to others with courtesy and sincerely say, “Hello. How are you?” Lives can be changed for the better from one extreme to another simply because of a few simple words.