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The Widow Mandelbaum Dreams

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The first time the late Moshe Mandelbaum appeared in a dream and gave his widow advice struck Goldie Mandelbaum (nee Finkelroot) as merely odd. Perhaps she had eaten too much the night before. However, the other times Moshe Mandelbaum disturbed her sleep would prove not just odd but life-changing. Also life-preserving.

A year after Moshe's unfortunate demise at the wheels of a motor vehicle, Goldie had received a marriage proposal from a man she was not really interested in. There was nothing wrong with

Hymie Perkofsky, you understand. He was one of the more respected kosher butchers in Khmelnytsky. To tell the truth, that status was not difficult to attain. Khmelnytsky, a small city of perhaps 20,000 people, including nearly 4,000 Jewish souls, supported only three full-time kosher butchers, and Hymie Perkofsky stood second to Mendel Bialovsky as the kind of man one preferred to do business with. Of butcher number three, Yankel Rozenstein, the less said the better.

Hymie proposed to the widow Goldie early one Friday afternoon as she was deciding which of his chickens deserved to grace her Shabbat dinner table and satisfy her son Jacob and daughter Rivka, the two of them growing teenagers and, it seemed to her, always hungry. Hymie knew he was going to propose to Goldie the moment he heard

of Moshe Mandelbaum's passing, an event he did not consider entirely unfortunate. Not that he had anything against the man, of course. But his wife, now widow—ah, what a woman. Her walk, like a captivating rhythm; her shape, *zaftig* without being overly so, no more need be said on that score; her voice, like honey, it was; and her uncanny ability to select the choicest chickens. Now *there* was a woman.

As for Hymie, he was honest enough to consider himself average. Average height, average weight, average appearance—brown hair, brown eyes, not handsome, to be sure, but in no way unpleasant. And maybe just a little more observant of his surroundings, of life, than average. More than one of his female customers had told him it was time he got married. And then, he thought, batted their eyes just a little at him. So, Hymie believed that maybe, just maybe, he had a chance with Goldie Mandelbaum.

As for Goldie, the butcher's proposal came as a complete surprise. She had sensed no prior attraction from him for her, and certainly felt none for him. So, she delayed. "I'm flattered," Goldie said. "But my dear Moshe has been gone for barely a year and my heart still feels like it has not quite gotten up from *shiva* yet."

Hymie Perkofsky looked crestfallen.

Goldie Mandelbaum, never wishing to hurt another's feelings—unless they really deserved it, like the blowhard Dovid Simonvitch, who would lecture one on all manner of things because he

imagined his position as synagogue *gabbai* made him practically a Sage—stopped, looked squarely at the butcher, and said courteously, "I will think about it, Mr. Hymie Perkofsky." Then, poised as usual, steps confident, she exited his shop, one lovingly plucked chicken in her basket.

"Say yes. Don't be foolish!" Goldie Mandelbaum's friend Yehudis Kranz urged her. "You're nearly 40."

Yehudis herself was only 34. But she was honest enough to see the tiny lines at the corners of her beautiful and uncommon blue eyes for what they were: an unmistakable warning that time was running out. Not for her primarily—married as she was to the vigorous if unimaginative Lemuel Kranz—and after three children still slender but not so much as to draw attention to her sharp nose. No, time was running out for others of her acquaintance, the never-marrieds and the widows. They were not as realistic as she was. Others like her dear friend Goldie.

"37," Goldie corrected her.

"37, 38, 50. You're not getting any younger."

About that, Yehudis Kranz was right, Goldie thought, as she tossed and turned in bed that night. It seemed to her, thinking about it in the morning—she finally had fallen asleep sometime after 1:00 a.m.—to have been a startlingly sharp vision. She had dreamed about Moshe often after the accident, but in fragments only, like images one saw from a broken mirror and that vanished if you looked too hard at them. But this time was

almost like a little version of one of those Hollywood movies in Technicolor they showed sometimes at the one theater on the square in the center of Khmelnytsky.

“Goldie,” the voice in the dream called to her. “Goldie, it’s me, Moshe.” In the dream, Goldie was wide awake, sitting up, staring with big eyes at the face of her Moshe, floating a few feet in front of her, a few feet up in the air.

“I apologize, Goldie, for having been away so long. But after the accident—when that fool omnibus driver had a heart attack or stroke or whatever and ran me over—they took me to this sanitorium. I’m getting better, the tuberculosis is subsiding—that’s the word the doctors use, subsiding—and some day I’ll be able to come home. But not yet. Oh, and by the way, don’t marry that butcher, Hymie Perkofsky. You can do better, much better. Like me.”

And poof! The dream ended. Goldie, really wide awake now, found herself alone in her darkened bedroom, the children asleep in their rooms. The little, neat house, just about at the edge of the Jewish part of Khmelnytsky, and just about at the city limits, near the main road leading south toward the still dense, still expansive forest, lay quiet. The only sound Goldie heard was her pounding heart.

“Oh!” Yehudis Kranz said when Goldie related the dream. “Oh, this is not good. A *dybbuk* is after you!”

A *dybbuk*, as every Jew in Khmelnytsky, and even the sophisticates in Warsaw, 80 long miles to the west, knew, was the disembodied soul of a deceased person desperately trying to latch onto a living body to do harm to them and as many others as possible.

“*Dybbuk?*” Goldie replied. “Don’t be ridiculous. It’s 1935. We have radio, movies—movies in color sometimes—and flush toilets. Khmelnytsky is a small city, not some *shtetl* with mud roads and unpainted wooden houses. Here the streets are brick, sometimes concrete even, downtown at least. The buildings are mostly stone and cement and white-washed even. There are street lights around the square and some people have telephones. We don’t believe in *dybbuks* anymore.”

“We don’t? Just you wait. But in the meantime, do not marry Hymie Perkofsky!”

Goldie had already decided she was not going to accept the butcher’s proposal. Still, she took Yehudis’ words as confirmation of her decision. Too bad, in a way. It meant that in all decency she could not continue shopping at Perkofsky’s, not after rejecting him. Now she would have to patronize Mendel Bialovsky. His meats and poultry were first-rate, and he was polite enough, but he charged prices to match the quality of his offerings.

Goldie Mandelbaum slept soundly for the next three months. As the time went by, her sleep grew

deeper, more restful. More peaceful even than when Moshe had been there in bed next to her, his deep, even breathing a reassurance about everything, about life. She even grew used to the bed itself at last, which she had never liked. It was a big, heavy wooden piece of furniture with grape vines carved into the high, dark, and deeply polished headboard. Moshe could never sell it, so to get it out of the store he finally brought the thing home.

Then it happened again. Her late, beloved husband came to her a second time in a dream, sharp and sustained, just like the first time. This was two days after Reuven Sonenschien asked her to marry him. Sonenschien's wife had died in childbirth—her ninth delivery—and all of Khmelnytsky knew he was searching for a replacement. Reuven Sonenschien, the local wine merchant, was handsome, tall, square-shouldered, healthy, prosperous, well-spoken, and not yet 50.

"You are so fortunate!" Yehudis Kranz enthused. "Reuven Sonenschien! What a catch! Every Jewish woman—and some of the gentile ones as well—have been after him. And he wants you! When are you going to tell him you accept?"

"I don't know," Goldie Mandelbaum said. The pair were sitting in Goldie's kitchen, lingering over cups of Wissotzky's raspberry tea and Yehudis' sugar cookies, something they had been doing nearly once a week for the past, how many years now, nine, ten? "I mean, he is all those things you said,

and he is quite friendly to me. But still, I just don't know if he's the right one."

"What's to know!?" Yehudis practically exploded. "You're not getting any younger. What are you now, 42?"

"38!"

"Practically an old maid, like the spinster Goldblatt. Listen, Goldie," Yehudis was suddenly whispering, "if you don't take him, tell him I will!"

"You're already married," Goldie reminded her friend.

"Not to Reuven Sonenschien!" Yehudis Kranz declared.

"Goldie," the late Moshe Mandelbaum said to her as she slept that night, clear as the tinkle of a crystal glass when you tap it with your spoon. Not that the Jews of Khmelnytsky tapped many crystal glasses, except some of the more well-to-do, and then only at Rosh Hashanah dinner and the Passover seder.

"What is it, Moshe?!" she heard herself ask breathlessly in the dream.

"I'm so sorry I've still stayed away from you. And that I didn't tell you the whole truth. I'm not really in a sanatorium. The bus driver that ran me over had been paid by some gangsters to do it. They thought I ran off with their jewels, which I did not.

I was going to pay them for the shipment but just hadn't collected all the money yet. Anyway, I'm in jail. I will be out in three years. Oh, and by the way, whatever you do, don't marry that Reuven Sonenschien."

"Why not?" Goldie asked in the dream.

"He's not what he appears to be. For one thing, he dilutes his wine."

"They say that about every wine merchant," Goldie responded.

"Well, do they also say that Mr. Reuven Sonenschien has fathered not nine children but 12, an even dozen—two others by their maid, and one with Masha Lipshitz?"

About the maid, a blonde, round, little Polish girl, that was no surprise. "But Masha the laundress?" Goldie asked, astonished. "She has the plainest face and thickest calves of any woman in town."

"Yes, and the most well-shaped breasts and hips," Moshe replied. "And, you'll remember, not quite two years ago when she disappeared—'went to visit relatives,' the story was—for nearly six months? One learns quite a lot here in the sanatorium, I mean, jail." And with that, Goldie's late husband, or his apparition, vanished.

Though she appreciated her late husband's concern—he always had been thoughtful, always trying to cheer her up when she was down, so why should things be different now?—Goldie was

getting a little annoyed with Moshe, or his ghost, whichever was the case. And, having stared in horror at the tire tread marks across his chest after the mishap with the omnibus, Goldie was pretty certain it was the latter. Here she was, trying mightily to get on with her life, raise the children properly, and Moshe was playing tricks on her from *she'ol* or wherever.

Anyway, she did not need his further matrimonial advice. Goldie felt, with the assurance granted to the just, that when the right man spoke, Hashem would let her know.

It was just a few weeks later that Jacob and Rivka brought home the new *melamed*, their teacher at the Jewish community school. In modern Khmelnytsky, the school was not a yeshiva. "We even learn geometry!" Rivka had told her gentile friend Sylvia Sopko a few weeks earlier when the latter made one of her increasingly rare visits. Throughout the city, Jewish children noticed their non-Jewish playmates slipping away. Usually there was no quarrel, no falling out. But the more the radio told of Jewish merchants cheating their gentile customers, the more local priests inveighed against the Jews' stiff-necked refusal to accept Jesus Christ—"Yeshki" as the Jews of Khmelnytsky referred to him—as their savior, the more a chill settled onto the little city.

The *melamed*, Eli Wysbrodt, was a little taller than average, slender, with a thin red beard that, in color anyway, matched the thick red hair curling from under his *kippah* and covering his head. Goldie had heard good things about this Wysbrodt

from her children—they said that, unlike his predecessor, the unsmiling Isaachar Itzkovitch, he made the subjects in class interesting, corrected their mistakes firmly but respectfully, and started and ended the school day on time.

“We asked Melamed Wysbrodt ...” Jacob and Rivka started in unison.

“Eli, please,” the teacher interrupted.

“We asked Eli,” they began again, Rivka giggling, “to come have some tea and cookies and read one or two of his poems to us.”

“I hope it is not an imposition,” Wysbrodt said, looking directly at Goldie. [He stood in the doorway, straight but not stiff, his expression midway between diffident and amused]. And those red curls, Goldie thought—this must have been what David HaMelech looked like, as it is written. Staring into the *melamed’s* deep brown-green eyes, Goldie Mandelbaum felt a rush of, well, ‘what exactly was it?’ she asked herself. Could it possibly be long-unfelt passion, out of the blue sky and into the teacher’s eyes, so to speak? she wondered excitedly.

“No, no imposition at all,” Goldie managed to say, hoping she was not blushing. As a matter of fact, she thought *he* was, his face reddening toward the color of his beard. Listening with her children to Wysbrodt read several of his poems, she felt something like rapture. This is foolish, she told herself sternly. Stop mooning like an infatuated schoolgirl. After the teacher had taken his leave,

Goldie Mandelbaum could not remember exactly what his poetry had been about, only that his voice sounded like a brook splashing over rocks as it descended merrily through a wood. It was a voice she had to hear more of.

Uncharacteristically, she had run to the Kranz home soon after the teacher had gone from her own house. “Yehudis! I am going to marry the new *melamed!*” Goldie exclaimed to her friend.

“Marry a *melamed*? Are you out of your mind? He’s much younger than you ...”

“Only five years,” Goldie interrupted.

“Much younger, and poorer. Must I remind you that you are a widow with two children and, as you yourself have said, the money from your late husband Moshe’s furniture store is slowly running out,” Yehudis noted. “And *melameds*, while honored for their knowledge and help forming the next generation, are not so honored as to earn much money. Be sensible. If not Reuven Sononschien, then maybe Beryl Shimsoni ...”

“Beryl Shimsoni?!” Now it was Goldie’s turn to ejaculate. “The undertaker? How dreadful!”

“His business is always steady.”

“Please,” Goldie said.

She had barely dropped off to sleep that night, a most pleasant, or perhaps pleased, smile on her face, when Moshe popped up. “Goldie. Goldie,

listen to me.” She was now sitting up, staring at her late husband’s face floating a few feet in front of her and a few feet above her, just as before.

“I’m tired, Moshe, and I just fell asleep. What is it this time?”

“Don’t be angry with me, Goldie. I could never take it when you were angry with me. Anyway, I just came—this will be the last time—to tell you to marry that *melamed*, Eli Wysbrodt.”

“I intend to,” Goldie said. “This means you really are not coming back, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” Moshe confessed. “I only told you those stories about being in a sanitorium and in prison to ease your heart a little at the time. I really am dead. I always have been, ever since that damn fool omnibus driver hit me. He’s dead too, of course, and deserves it. But he’s somewhere else, not here with me, thank God. Otherwise, I’d kill him. Anyway, that’s not what’s important. Listen closely: Eli Wysbrodt is not just a *melamed* who writes poetry in his spare time. He also writes short stories, plays, and novels. He has a desk full of them, mostly drafts, but some nearly finished and quite good. You’ve seen him wandering around Khmelnytsky with his little notebook, occasionally stopping to write something?”

“Yes, of course. The whole town has, wondering if he isn’t absent-minded,” Goldie said.

“He’s not absent-minded. He’s gathering real-life

material for his writing. He will be well-known and almost as widely read—someday respected, and eventually fairly prosperous. A university professor whose books actually sell. But Goldie ...”

“Yes?”

“For this to happen, you not only have to marry him but take him, and Jacob and Rivka of course, to America, to *di goldene medineh*. And soon, very soon!”

Goldie thought that Moshe, so indecisive when alive, sounded unusually insistent. “Why?” she wanted to know.

“Because everyone here agrees. The Angel of Death is coming for the Jews of Poland. It will come quickly. And though the warning signs will have been there ...”

“They already are,” Goldie said. Formerly playful Sylvia Sopko’s growing aloofness toward Rivka was but one of the smaller ones.

“...few will have heeded them.” With that, Moshe disappeared from her dreams forever.

Goldie Mandelbaum and Eli Wysbrodt married as soon as the 1937 school year ended. A month later, the S.S. Breslau sailed from the port of Danzig on its way to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Immigration restrictions having complicated getting a visa to the United States, Goldie chose Canada. Anyway, Wysbrodt had a cousin in

Montreal.

So it was that a family of four, a new family, stood at the rail watching the expanse of the gray North Sea grow behind them as Poland receded. They felt sadness, of course, leaving the only place they had ever known. But more than that, they felt relief, as if waking from a troubled dream.

To Be a Stiff-Necked People

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I must admit that I am not interested in learning from most rabbis in times of crisis. Having been a synagogue rabbi for many years, I know from experience that cheap slogans are common in difficult times, but there is often little Torah of substance to be found. Because of this, I tend to want to learn from those willing to look at the world with open eyes, even when it feels as if the pain is greater than one can bear. For that reason, since the beginning of this war, I have turned

repeatedly to the writings of the Piaseczner Rebbe, R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, who refused to offer his followers cheap slogans even in the most difficult moments. Instead, he always strove to say something true, because he knew we have no Torah but a *Torat Emet* (a Torah of truth).

In his sermon for *Parashat Noah* in 1941, the Piaseczner makes some profound points about the nature of the Jewish people. He opens with a quote from Rashi about the difference between Noah and Abraham. The Torah describes that “Noah walked with God” ([Bereishit 6:9](#)), but when Abraham describes his relationship to God, he says “God, before whom I walk” ([Bereishit 24:40](#)). According to Rashi, Noah walks with God whereas Abraham walks on his own because “Noah required assistance and to be supported, but Abraham walked and was strengthened by his own righteousness.”¹

Most of the time, when we discuss the difference between Noah and Abraham, we emphasize the framing that Abraham was more righteous in that, if Noah had been born in Abraham’s generation, he would not have been considered as upright by comparison.² Abraham argued with God to save even the sinful Sodom and Gomorrah, while Noah remained silent when God told him the entire world would be destroyed.³ However, here, Rashi emphasizes something else that separates the

¹ [Rashi to Bereishit 6:9, s.v. “et ha-Elokim hithalekh Noah”](#) (my translation).

² See [Rashi to Bereishit 6:9, s.v. “be-dorotav.”](#)

³ See R. Yehuda Amital’s [discussion](#) of this distinction.

two. While Noah needed help from God to survive the flood, Abraham walked on his own. God gave Noah precise instructions on how to build the ark to save his family, whereas Abraham received little guidance from God. God did not hold his hand, so to speak. Rather, Abraham walked on his own, by his own strength. He was independent. While the whole world did one thing, Abraham had the ability to do another - to act differently. Noah was righteous, and we are all his descendants. But as Jews, we only call Abraham "our father," because we are required to be like Abraham and not Noah. We must be like the one "who walked and was strengthened by his own righteousness."

How exactly does a Jew do this? For many, the answer is simple: if you want to go it alone, you must be strong, perhaps the strongest there is, so that no one dares to hurt you. But this was not the approach Jews took because, for most of their history, the Jews were not strong, certainly not like other nations. Strength alone does not make us like Abraham, and who understood this more than the Piaseczner Rebbe, who lived in the Warsaw Ghetto?

For the Rebbe, the greatness of the Jewish people, what makes us like our father Abraham--a people that walks and is strengthened by its own righteousness--is also the cause of our failures: we are a stiff-necked people.

The Piaseczner Rebbe explains that this expression is of profound importance in grasping the uniqueness of the Jewish people, and he explores its meaning by examining the debate between God and Moses after the sin of the Golden Calf. At

the time, God wanted to destroy the Jews, but Moses managed to convince God to forego His anger. Even so, God tells Moses that there will be consequences and that in the aftermath of the Golden Calf, God's presence will not dwell among the Jews. Instead, God will send an angel to be with them. The reason for this decision is clear. He says to Moses: "I will not come up among you because you are a stiff-necked people" ([Shemot 33:3](#)). In showing their stubborn attachment to idolatry, the Jews have shown that they are a stiff-necked people in the worst possible way, and are not ready to fully commit to God's covenant. Therefore, they will only receive God's emissary, rather than receive God.

In response, Moses attempts to defend the Jewish people in a surprising manner. He implores that God should forgive the Jews and dwell among them *because* they are a stiff-necked people. He says, "Please, God, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and forgive our iniquity and sin and take us as Your own" ([Shemot 34:9](#)).

This, of course, makes no sense, for how can the cause of the sin also be the reason God should forgive them for it?

The Piaseczner Rebbe explains Moses' reasoning as follows:

Being stiff-necked is one of the most positive of attributes. One who is not stiff-necked flips back and forth. One time, they hold like this, and another, they hold differently. It is not possible to

come to a final decision with them. Now, they may want to serve God, but at a later time, they can be a different person. Especially when they are put to the test, they may not be able to endure, God forbid. This is not the case for one who is stiff-necked. This person is straight when you speak with and work on them. When they decide to serve God, you can trust they will do it. In fact, the more one is stiff-necked, the better one will be able to withstand difficulty. Being a stiff-necked people is [only a] terrible thing when the attribute is used for evil, and one becomes stubborn about evil matters.⁴

To be stiff-necked is to be stubborn, but it also means that one never fails to commit and dedicate oneself fully to something. Those who are stiff-necked fulfill their commitments even as it may seem impossible to others. When the pressure increases, you can trust a stiff-necked person to do what they are supposed to do.

According to the Rebbe, a person who is not stiff-necked is like a leaf blowing in the wind. They say they will do something today, but what will be the case tomorrow? Today, they say they will be there for you, but what will happen if it becomes inconvenient to them? Moses' argument to God was as follows: 'Yes, the Jews are a stiff-necked people. They stubbornly cling to idolatry. But Lord,

⁴ [Eish Kodesh 5701, Noah](#) (my translation).

You should know that when they fully commit to You, they will never abandon You. Their commitment to the *berit* will be absolute. No matter how much they suffer, their stubbornness means they will never give up their love for You.'

The moments when we most clearly recognize those who are stiff-necked is in a time of crisis, and to show this, the Piaseczner Rebbe brings a fascinating *aggadah* from the Talmud ([Sanhedrin 104b](#)). It is the story of two Jews kidnapped by a non-Jew on Mount Carmel. The kidnapper instructed his captives to walk in front of him on the road as they moved, and as one of the Jews looked ahead in the distance, he was able to discern a camel walking ahead of them. He then remarked to his fellow Jew:

One of the captives said to the other: The camel that is walking ahead of us is blind in one of its eyes and laden with two wineskins, one filled with wine and one filled with oil. And two people are driving the camel, one a Jew and one a gentile. The captor said to them: Stiff-necked people, from where do you know these matters that you cannot see?

They said to him: We know that the camel is blind from the grass that is before it, as from the grass on the side that it sees, it eats, and from the grass on the side that it does

not see, it does not eat, i.e., it eats grass from only one side. And we know that it is laden with two wineskins, one filled with wine and one filled with oil, as wine drips and sinks into the ground and oil drips and floats on the surface, and we see the difference on the ground. And we know that two people are driving the camel, one a Jew and one a gentile, as the gentile defecates on the road and the Jew, in the interests of modesty, goes to the sides of the road to defecate.

The captor pursued the camel and its drivers to determine whether the statements of the captives were accurate, and found that the reality was in accordance with their statements. He came and respectfully kissed them on their head, and brought them to their house and prepared a great feast for them. And he was dancing before them and said: Blessed is He who chose the descendants of Abraham and granted of His wisdom to them, and in every place that they go they become princes to their lords. And he released them and they went to their houses in peace.⁵

There are many interesting details in this story, especially at a time when Jewish captives are constantly on our minds. What is significant for the Piaseczner Rebbe is that after the Jewish prisoners describe the camel far ahead of them, the kidnapper refers to them as a “stiff-necked people.” What could possibly be the meaning of this phrase in this particular context? The Piaseczner Rebbe explains that to be held captive is to experience unimaginable fear and suffering. In the Rebbe’s words, it “diminishes one’s wisdom.” In such a situation, it is nearly impossible to think clearly; the anxiety can completely overwhelm a person. So why does the kidnapper call the Jews stiff-necked? Because, despite being in an unimaginable situation, they insist on believing they can still be smart and discerning about the world around them. Pain, suffering, and fear take so much away from us that it can feel as if we have lost ourselves. To be stiff-necked is to be stubborn enough to remain who we are and to do what others think is impossible.

To be stiff-necked means running toward the terrorists when you hear that lives are in danger, even if it means risking your life. It means staying in a shelter for twelve hours with small children, doing everything you can to calm them down as murderers wait outside. It means visiting funeral after funeral and *shivah* after *shivah* because a Jew never mourns alone. We have heard many stories about how the Jews were a stiff-necked people on October 7 and the days that followed, and I am

⁵ Translation from *Koren-Steinsaltz*.

sure there are many more that have yet to be told.

For the Piaseczner Rebbe, the fact that the Jews are a stiff-necked people makes them even greater than the angels. Why is this? He explains that angels cannot immediately return to heaven after descending to the world. This is because the world affects them. It changes them. Before they return to heaven to worship and serve God, they must prepare and cleanse themselves of the impurities they encountered here. But the Jews are different. The world presses in on us and tests us, but even in times of pain and suffering, we continue to serve God, we continue to pray, and we continue to do *mitzvot*. Even in the Warsaw Ghetto, and even in Nahal Oz, Kefar Azah, Be’eri, and all the communities that were attacked on the terrible day of October 7.

As the Piaseczner Rebbe wrote:

[Jews] have the unique ability not to change due to the world. They withstand all the challenges that they face, and not only this but they are even able to make the divine presence dwell in this world. The attribute of being stiff-necked [is divine and] draws directly from the attribute of [God as expressed in the verse] “I, God, do not change” ([Malachi 3:6](#)), which is a level above the angels.⁶

If the Jews are in some way able to be God’s representatives in the world, it is because they do not change, and they do not submit, as God says about Himself, “I, God, do not change.” The world constantly changes, nothing ever remains the same, but somehow, after everything, the Jews are still here. The meaning of this holds great importance. Since the beginning of the war, I have frequently heard the slogan “Together We Will Be Victorious” (*yahad ne-natzeah*). Everyone knows that our enemies cannot be defeated if we are divided, but we have to understand that unity in a moment such as this is not something unique to the Jews. Every nation becomes unified in times of war, for when a nation is threatened, people always rally around the flag. What we must remember is that the Jews are not meant to be like all other nations, and therefore, our victory is different from theirs. It comes not from an impulse for unity, but rather from being a stiff-necked people.

We are a people chosen by the God who says, “I, God, do not change,” and as the [verse](#) concludes, “You, the children of Jacob, will not come to an end.” We call ourselves *am ha-netzah*, the everlasting people, not because we are stronger than other nations, for historically, we do not defeat our enemies with a gun or a fist or on the battlefield. We defeat them because we find a way to remain even when others think this cannot be done. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the

⁶ [Eish Kodesh 5701, Noah](#).

Romans are no longer here. The Jews remain. Why? Because we are a stiff-necked people, the children of Abraham. And even if the entire world stands on one side, Abraham and his children will find a way to remain on the other.⁷

As Rashi explained, “Noah required assistance and to be supported, but Abraham walked and was strengthened by his own righteousness.”

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⁷ See [Bereishit Rabbah 42:8](#).