



How to drink Earl Grey

By Harav Y Reuven Rubin Shlita

Britain is known to tourists throughout the world for its oldie worldly sites. In London one can find all sorts of interesting and colourful places that are rich with history. One such place is a particular tea emporium that has sold that wondrous elixir from the same fancy address for close to three centuries, and has been decorated with Royal Warrants for over one hundred and eighty years. Recently I had an opportunity to visit this famous store and went through its hallowed doors with a feeling of hopeful anticipation. I am of a rare breed, a Yankee that drinks tea rather than coffee. Having heard for years about the sheer assortment of teas available at this spot, my appetite was whetted and my wallet half open.

As one walks into this venerable institution one is greeted with large shelves boasting an assortment of tea tins, all of which bear the imprimatur of Ye Old England. The many sales assistants are dressed in red tails and waistcoats and their demeanour is decidedly superior. One aspect strikes you immediately: most of the customers are American or Japanese tourists. This whole imperialist set-up thrives only because of the thousands of American shoppers coming to buy a little bit of "the mother country". As I waded through the throngs I overheard a very intriguing discussion. A tall fellow, from New York City I guessed, was standing there with a number of boxes and asking one of the red coated assistants where he could find Earl Grey teabags. The red coat looked down his decidedly long nose and said that they didn't happen to have tea bags at the moments and that in fact, tea bags were really not acceptable. "Oh" said the New Yorker, "My wife drinks Earl Grey tea with milk every day" This was said with a hint of hope, believing that all Englishman drink their tea with milk. "Oh my," screeched the offended sales assistant disdainfully, "how can one drink Earl Grey with milk?" How indeed! The poor fellow was then given a long *drosha* on the impropriety of drinking the said tea with milk, as if it were

an insult to the Queen, her late mother and most definitely the long- since departed Earl Grey whoever he may have been.

Now New Yorkers are generally not a timid race, but this poor guy was shaking in his boots. He let go of the tea boxes as tears welled up in his eyes. "Oh dear, what will I tell my wife now?" With this the red coated mashgiach sashayed away, towards another poor soul awaiting his enlightened opinions on the art of tea drinking. I stood for a moment and reflected on the tourist's sad face, before doing what I felt was a true mitzvah; I walked over to him with these comforting words. "Don't let that silly man scare you, you drink that tea any way you like. Believe me, he will take your money even if you use the stuff for mouthwash." In truth I speak from vast experience on this subject since in the Rubin household pots of Earl Grey tea have been served for some fifty years most mornings to the Rebbetzin, with, yes, a healthy dollop of milk.

This morsel of tourist lore is germane in respect of another story. I remember many years ago as a bochur an event that is etched in my memory. I was learning in a large yeshiva that had amongst its student body a number of late starters. One such lad was considered a very special *masmid*, and everyone who came into contact with him wondered at his strength of belief. One day he was invited to daven Mincha "*fare der amud*" something he had never done before. With no small sense of fear he walked up to the front of the Beis Medrash and started leading the tefilloh. When it came to the reader's repetition he made a mistake, one he wasn't aware of. In the Ashkenazi custom one says "*Mashiv Haruach umorid Hagoshem*" from Shemini Atzeres until Pesach. Our young Ba'al Tefilah had somehow not learnt this particular important nugget of halachic practice, and so left this passage out. Of course he was corrected immediately and although a bit shamed, he soldiered on. After the davening, a committee of concerned students went over to an older bochur, one who was learning for *semicha* and told of the red-faced boy's mistake. The future Rav stood up to his full height and announced that all the tefillos the young boy had offered during all the winter months since he became frum were not really proper and hence were worthless.

Now I really don't want to enter into the halachic dynamics of all this. However, can you imagine what those words did to that young boy's neshomoh? Can you begin to feel his pain? No matter what the din may be, saying words to such effect served no purpose other than to destroy the young man's fragile confidence. Sure he had been mistaken, and it wasn't as if he was asking if he needed to change what he was doing until then. However, he had fought many a battle to get to that yeshiva, battles others would never even dream of, and his tefillos were certainly filled with a love and reverence for Hashem. What good was done by telling him that they were of no worth?

In our frum world today many seem all too ready to decide halochah without even thinking what the personal dynamics of individuals may be. We can often do more harm than good with our attitude, and cause some to drift away when what Hashem seeks is our

connection. There are those who feel insecure in themselves and somehow it raises their spiritual temperature if they can tell others of their faults.

Harsh words you may say, well yes, but with reason. You see I am on the periphery, in a place where many first taste the droplets of the Torah's sweetness, and I see the consequences of such an attitude. We will win no brownie points for Torah adherence when we speak to others in a condescending fashion.

It is good to remember that when we talk to others we should be aware that we never know their life story. True spiritual leaders understand this; it's not only the Halochah but that extra volume of the Shulchan Aruch that is vital. The Kotzker was wont to say, "Don't stop looking inside yourself! And do not look inside others!"

Chanukah reminds one how special a little light can be. We should seek to illuminate our world, not darken it with harshness.

Let the red coats drink their tea without milk. For us the sweetest drink of all is one sweetened by a Torah that is honey to the soul.



A heartfelt ***Mazal Tov***

To **Rabbi Benji Rickman** and his Family

On the ***Bar Mitzva*** of their son

Naftoli

May they continue to see nachas
from him and all their children in good health.



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