

TINOK SHENISHBA

“Once, I remember seeing a cartoon showing a father examining his young son’s report card that was filled with D’s and F’s. As the father scowled, the boy asked, ‘Dad, do you think the problem is heredity or environmental?’

“Perhaps the most revolutionary measure taken by the Chabad leader of our time—the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson—was to classify all non-*Torah* educated Jews in our times as Tinok Shenishba, literally ‘captured infant.’ This ideology was based on the approach of his father-in-law, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe.

“Tinok Shenishba is a Talmudic term that refers to a Jewish individual who inadvertently sins as a result of being raised from infancy among gentiles and, therefore, has no understanding of Judaism.¹⁵⁹ Raised without an appreciation for the ideology and practice of Judaism, by Talmudic law, one is not held accountable for failing to live in accordance with *Torah*. In this case, Judaism absolves the person because he or she cannot be blamed for his or her lack of belief and observance.

“At the end of a long letter, in response to a certain individual, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak writes:

...The Sages tell us that even when one sins, he or she is still called a Jew. Even one, who discards Judaism and becomes—Heaven forbid—an apostate, remains a Jew. To stop being a Jew is impossible (Sanhedrin 44a). Whether he or she wants to or not, one who is born a Jew remains a Jew and sooner or later will feel the sentiment expressed at Sinai: ‘We will do and we will hear,’ (Exodus 24:7) because the Pintele Yid—the essence Jewish soul—always remains whole...¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Shabbos 68b; Shavuos 5a.

¹⁶⁰ Igros Kodesh of the Previous Rebbe, Vol. 2, p. 526.

WHAT CHABAD REALLY BELIEVES

“The late Lubavitcher Rebbe crystalized this philosophy throughout his 50 years of leadership. Expounding on the theme of Tinok Shenishba at a Shabbos gathering of Parshas Vayechi,¹⁶¹ the Rebbe stressed that, in our generation in particular, we must always relate to our less observant brethren in the context of Tinok Shenishba. Furthermore, our relationship with such individuals should be one of inspiration and encouragement towards observance, if only one Mitzvah at a time: