

ONCE UPON A CHASSID

The Wisdom and the Whimsy
The Fire and the Joy

Stories, Anecdotes & Sayings
translated and adopted from the writings of the
Rebbes and Chassidim of Chabad Lubavitch
Arranged in conjunction with the 54 sections of the Torah

By Yanki Tauber

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
 Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
 ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
 ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח'ל
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY
 Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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What is a Chassid?

When Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch was staying at the health spa in Wirtzburg, Germany in 5667¹ a group of his chassidim came to spend a Shabbos with their Rebbe. Among them was Reb Yosef Yuzik Horowitz, his son-in-law Reb Feivel Zalmanov, and Reb Elimelech Stoptzer.

The Rebbe prayed for many hours that Shabbos morning, as was his manner. Meanwhile, the chassidim made kiddush and consumed a respectable quantity of *l'chayim's*. Later, when the Rebbe had finished and they sat with him to the Shabbos meal, Reb Yosef Yuzik asked:

“Rebbe, what is a chassid?”

Replied the Rebbe: “A chassid is a lamplighter. The lamplighter walks the streets carrying a flame at the end of a stick. He knows that the flame is not his. And he goes from lamp to lamp to set them alight.”

1. 1907.

Once Upon A Chassid

Asked Reb Yosef Yuzik: “What if the lamp is in a desert?”

“Then one must go and light it,” said the Rebbe. “And when one lights a lamp in a desert, the desolation of the desert becomes visible. The barren wilderness will then be ashamed before the burning lamp.”

Continued the chassid: “What if the lamp is at sea?”

“Then one must undress, dive into the sea, and go light the lamp.”

“And this is a chassid?” Reb Yosef Yuzik asked.

For a long while the Rebbe thought. Then he said: “Yes, this is a chassid.”

“But Rebbe, I do not see the lamps!”

Answered the Rebbe: “Because you are not a lamp-lighter.”

“How does one become a lamplighter?”

“First, you must reject the evil within you. Start with yourself: cleanse yourself, refine yourself, and you will see the lamp within your fellow. When a person is himself coarse, G-d forbid, he sees coarseness; when a person is himself refined, he sees the refinement in others.”

Breishis / What is a Chassid?

Reb Yosef Yuzik then asked: “Is one to grab the other by the throat?”

Replied the Rebbe: “By the throat, no; by the lapels, yes.”

Source:

Sefer Hasichos 5701 (The Talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch, 1940-41) p. 136. See Ohr Hachassidus ("The Light of Chassidism") pp. 215-224 for an in-depth treatment and analysis of this dialogue by Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita.

3:9

ויקרא ה' אלקים אל האדם ויאמר לו איכה
*G-d called out to the man¹ and said to
him: Where are you...?!*

Is Anybody Home?

In 5559,² Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was imprisoned on the charge that his teachings undermined the imperial authority of the czar. For 52 days he was held in the Peter-Paul Fortress in Petersburg.

Among the Rebbe's interrogators was a government minister who possessed broad knowledge of the Bible and of Jewish studies. On one occasion, he asked the Rebbe to explain the verse: "*G-d called out to the man and said to him: Where are you?*" Did G-d not know where Adam was?

Rabbi Schneur Zalman presented the classic explanation offered by the commentaries: the question "where are you?" was merely a conversation opener on the part of G-d, who did not wish to unnerve Adam by immediately confronting him with his wrong- doing,

1. *HaAdam* in the Hebrew. The name of the first human being appears in the Torah's account of creation as *HaAdam*, 'The Man', or as *Adam*, 'man'.

2. 1798.

Breishis / Is Anybody Home?

“What Rashi³ says, I already know,” said the minister. “I wish to hear how the Rebbe understands the verse.”

“Do you believe that the Torah is eternal?” asked the Rebbe. “That its every word applies to every individual, under all conditions, at all times?”

“Yes,” replied the minister.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman was extremely gratified to hear this, The czar’s minister had affirmed a principle which lies at the basis of the teachings of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov⁴ - the very teachings and ideology for which he was standing trial!

“*Where are you?*” explained the Rebbe, “is G-d’s perpetual call to every man. Where are you in the world? What have you accomplished? You have been allotted a certain number of days, hours and minutes in which to fulfill your mission in life. You have lived so many years and so many days - Rabbi Schneur Zalman spelled out the exact age of the minister - where are you? What have you attained?”

Source:

Told by Rabbi Menachem M. Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita, on December 12, 1957, on the occasion of the 159th anniversary of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s release from prison in Petersburg (Kislev 19th on the Jewish calendar).

3. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchoki, 4800-1105 (1040-1105) whose commentary is the most basic aid to understanding the literal meaning of the Torah’s words.

4. Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, 5458-5520 (1698-1760) was the founder of the chassidic movement, Rabbi Israel’s successor, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, and considered himself his ‘spiritual grandson.’

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The Announcement Of The Redemption

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In our times, miracles and wonders are happening throughout the world. These include "great wonders,"¹ beyond those miracles discernable to G-d "Who **alone** performs great wonders," but where "the beneficiary does not recognize the miracle."² Rather, the miracles we experience now include wonders obvious and revealed to all; they are thus representative of, analogous to and a prelude for the miracles and wonders of the future Redemption, which shall arrive imminently. About this imminent Redemption, it is said:³ "As in the days of your departure from Egypt, **I will show him wonders.**"

To illustrate:

a) Several major and powerful regimes are undergoing progressive, positive developments and changing for the better - in the spheres of goodness, righteousness and justice.⁴ These transformations are representative of, analogous to and a prelude for the **correction and perfection of the world in the days of Moshiach.**⁵ Further, by affecting the Jewish people, granting them freedom in all matters associated with Judaism, Torah and Mitzvot, even permitting the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews to freedom [from the former Soviet Union, etc.], these changes are also representative of, analogous to and a prelude for the **ingathering of the exiles**⁶ which will transpire in the days of

1. *Tehillim*, 136:4.

2. *Niddah*, 31a.

3. *Micha*, 7:15.

4. See also *Sefer HaSichos* 5750, vol. I, p. 152 ff.

5. See Rambam, *Hilchos Melachim*, end of ch. 11: "And he will perfect the world."

6. In the spirit of "those who savor it will merit eternal life." See *Likkutei*

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Moshiach.

b) The events which occurred in the Persian Gulf - *are among the signs of the Redemption*, based on the saying of our sages that when "nations provoke one another..."⁷ it portends the coming of *Moshiach*. More specifically, our sages in the *Midrash* present the following scenario as an indication of the arrival of the Era of Redemption: "The king of Persia (obviously referring to the entire geographic area comprising Iraq) will provoke the Arabian king... and all the nations of the world will be in turmoil and terror... and (G-d) says to them (Israel)... "Do not fear, the time for your Redemption has arrived."⁸ The *Midrash* continues and concludes: "When the King *Moshiach* comes, he will stand on the roof of the *Beis HaMikdash* [Holy Temple] and proclaim to Israel: "Humble ones, the time for your Redemption has arrived."

Ironically, in recent days the (seventy) nations of the world gathered, in a way reminiscent of "The nations are in an uproar and the peoples mutter,"⁹ in order to accuse Israel: "You are thieves for having conquered the land of Israel," They refer not just to Gaza or Samaria, but also (and primarily) to Judea which includes **Jerusalem**, the capital of the Land of Israel, "The city where David encamped."¹⁰ This accusation comes at a time when everyone knows the refutation, as clearly enunciated by Rashi at the very beginning of his commentary to the Torah: "All of the earth is G-d's, He is the one who created it and gave it to whomever was just in His eyes... He gave it to us."

(And, incredibly, this cacophony of nations accusing Israel includes even those who have traditionally endeavored to further

Sichos, vol. XX, p. 173. See there for cross references.

7. *Bereishit Rabbah*, 42:4. *Midrash Lekach Tov*, *Lech Lecha*, 14:1.

8. *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Yeshayahu*, *remez* 499.

9. *Tehillim*, 2:1.

10. *Yeshayahu*, 29:1.

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the cause of righteousness and justice in the world, as seen by their reaction to the events of the Persian Gulf; there, they based their behavior on righteousness and justice, (that is, to prevent a state of theft of one individual from another, of country from country, etc.). However, in this matter, they too have conducted themselves improperly towards the **Children of Israel.**)

One might suggest the following explanation for this paradoxical phenomenon (that such an undesirable situation occurred in this era of open miracles):

As mentioned earlier [in the full text of the *Sicha*], in the Divinely ordained system for this world, concealment and darkness precede the revelation of light. Thus, we should not be dismayed by the "Nations raising an uproar and the peoples muttering," since it is - as the verse concludes - "In vain." As the Midrash comments: "All of their uproar is... in vain,"¹¹ because "the One who dwells in Heaven will laugh, G-d will mock them."¹² Therefore, the Jewish people stand firm in all matters relating to the integrity of the Land of Israel (particularly Jerusalem), knowing that "All of the earth is G-d's, He created it... and gave it to us."

Moreover, the phenomenon of "the nation raising an uproar and the peoples muttering" is, in and of itself, one of the **signs of Redemption**, as Rashi observes that: "Our sages interpreted the entire verse of the "nations raising an uproar..." as a reference to the **King Moshiach.**"

(From the talk of Shabbos Bereishis (Isru Chag of Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah) 5751)

11. *Midrash Tehillim* and *Yalkut Shimoni* loc cit.

12. *Ibid* 4.

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We have already openly seen the miracles at the beginning of this year, in continuation of the miracles of last year, in connection with the fact that that country (Russia) freed and assisted thousands and thousands of Jews to go the land of Israel (and other places). In those places they can live their individual lives in full freedom. This reveals the greatness of Israel, that even the nations of the world recognize this and assist them.

The revelation in the world and recognition by the nations of the greatness of the Jewish people has increased from generation to generation. As we approach ever nearer to the final and true Redemption, the declaration that "And nations will go by your light,"¹ "And kings will be your midwives and their princes your nursemaids,"² comes closer to its fulfillment.

Over the course of generations - even in the time of exile - we find that the nations of the world have recognized that the Jewish people are the Chosen People. We see this in many places in the Midrashim of our Sages of blessed memory. (For example, in Zevachim,³ saying to the Rabbi] "I will fulfill the Biblical prediction of: kings will be your midwives," **and in other sources.**)

It is also known that non-Jews call the Jewish people (even when speaking among themselves) - the "Chosen People."

In the United States and other benevolent countries, Jews are permitted to perform their Divine service with a calm mind and amidst physical comfort. Jews in the Diaspora and in Israel are

1. *Yeshayu* 60:23.

2. *Ibid* 49:23.

3. 19a at the beginning.

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commonly offered assistance.⁴ This assistance itself has increased in recent years, specifically last year (the year of "I will show them wonders") and beginning with this year (a year with miracles within it) in relation to the permission to emigrate and the aid from that country to our fellow-Jews to go to the land of Israel.

*(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Bereishis,
Blessing of the month of Mar-Cheshvan 5752)*

4. There are many well-known stories in which non-Jews gave honor to our Rebbeim and leaders (see for example in relation to the Rebbe MaHaRash, *Sefer HaMaamarim Meluket*, vol. 4, p. 26.)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Reb **Reuvein** ben Reb **Mordechai Yaakov HaKohen** ע"ה **Caplan**
Passed away on 11 Tishrei, 5778
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF HIS WIFE - שתבלחט"א -
Mrs. **Elka** bas **Raizel** שתחי' **Caplan**
May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah and *mitzvot*.
* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY DEAR FATHER
Reb **Tuvya Velvel** ben Reb **Meir** עי"ה **Strauss**
Passed away on 27 Tishrei, 5770
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*

DEDICATED BY HIS DAUGHTER
Mrs. **Miriam** שתחי' **Fishman**
and family שיחי

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