

ONCE UPON A CHASSID

FESTIVALS

Stories and Anecdotes
told by the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
his predecessors, and their chassidim.
Arranged in conjunction with the festivals of the year.

By **Michoel Green**

Reprinted for Sukkot, 5777
(Vol. 35)



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Vaad L'hafotzas Sichos

788 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213
Tel. (718) 774-7200 - Fax. (718) 774-7494

5759 ♦ 1999

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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Printed in the U.S.A.

A Mindful Host

An elderly Jew from the Holy Land shared the following personal account:

In the late thirties I left my European hometown and set out for America. Upon arriving in Paris, I encountered great difficulty in securing my ticket on a trans-Atlantic liner, and was consequently detained in Paris for several days. I now found myself in somewhat of a quandary: it was the eve of Sukkos, and I earnestly wished to observe the holiday according to Halacha.¹ But where was I to find a public sukkah in the vast and unfamiliar city? I asked a passerby for directions to the Jewish quarter, and traveled there at once. While despondently traversing the Parisian streets, I was accosted by a bearded gentleman, obviously an Orthodox Jew, who greeted me warmly. Returning his greetings I inquired: “Where may I purchase kosher food in this neighborhood?”

“Unfortunately kosher food is not readily available around here,” the man replied, “but in my home, you would be treated as an honored guest.”

1. Jewish law

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With no other alternative I gladly accepted his timely invitation, and accompanied him to his small apartment where I remained throughout the first festive days of Sukkos. Though his sukkah was tiny, my host's beaming face permeated the room with a radiant aura, the likes of which I had never before experienced. Moreover, I was profoundly inspired by the special manner in which he prayed and performed his *mitzvos*.² The few days I spent with the young couple made a wonderful impression on me that would remain engraved in my memory forever. I never forgave myself, though, for failing to catch my host's name.

Thirty years later, while touring the United States, I was told many great things about the renowned Rebbe of Lubavitch. Although not of chassidic tradition, I was curious to meet this revered personality for myself, and traveled to Brooklyn to request a private audience.

As I entered the Rebbe's study, he welcomed me with a warm smile. "We are already well acquainted," he said genially.

Before I had the chance to reply that he must be mistaking me for somebody else, as I had never visited him hitherto, he quickly read my mind and explained: "We had the pleasure of hosting you in our sukkah back in Paris."

Source:

Printed in *Yemei Melech* ("The Days of the King" by Mordechai Laufer), vol. I, p. 461.

2. Torah commandments.

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On the first day, you shall take for yourself a beautiful fruit...

Leviticus 23:41

One should specifically seek an esrog¹ grown in the regions of Calabria or Yanova, for reasons known to me. This tradition also has historical significance: when Moses was commanded, "...you shall take for yourself a beautiful fruit," he dispatched messengers to fetch esrogim from Calabria. Borne aloft by the Clouds of Glory, the emissaries were miraculously transported to the Italian peninsula, where they obtained the much-needed fruit for their brethren in the desert.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi

All for an Esrog

In their younger years the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his wife, *Rebbetzin* Chaya Mushka, resided in Paris. During World War II when France was invaded by the Nazis, may their memory be blotted out, the couple was forced to escape.² Boarding one of the last trains leaving Paris, they

1. Citron.

2. See *Uncompromising Jewish Identity*, p. 244.

All for an Esrog

departed to Vichy where they stayed for several months. Fully aware that they could not remain in Nazi-occupied territory for long, they fled to Nice in Southern France. The small town under Italian rule was relatively safe for the many Jews who sought temporary refuge there during those turbulent times.

Meanwhile the summer months passed and the festival of Sukkos was swiftly approaching. Due to the raging war the prospects of obtaining a kosher esrog for the holiday were slim. The penniless Jewish refugees lived in constant fear of the Nazis, who were rapidly advancing into Southern France. Moreover, the Italian esrog plantations were located in dangerous proximity to the front line of battle, and consequently all the roads leading there were blocked. The few esrogim that the isolated community hoped to receive from abroad were expected to be of inferior stock, hardly befitting the beautiful *mitzvah*³ of the four species.

One Autumn day, in the midst of the High Holiday season, the Rebbe approached a long-time acquaintance, Rabbi Shmuel Rubinstein, who had likewise escaped from Paris. The Rebbe expressed his uncertainty concerning a Halachic issue and sought the latter's opinion. To what extent, he wondered, is one permitted to sacrifice himself for the sake of fulfilling a Torah injunction? May a Jew risk his life just in order to perform the *mitzvah* as perfectly as possible, and not suffice with the minimum requirement?

3. Divine commandment.

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Beset by these questions and others, the Rebbe engaged Rabbi Rubinstein in a scholarly discussion. The former cited a wide array of Talmudic sources in favor of validating such conduct, yet at the same time mentioned conflicting sources. Even after much deliberation the two Rabbis could not arrive at a definitive ruling, and the matter was left unresolved. The Rebbe thanked his colleague for his time and wandered off on his own, noticeably absorbed in his thoughts.

Over the next few days, the Rebbe was not seen in the synagogue, and people became concerned. No one knew of his whereabouts, nor did he leave any explanation as to the reason of his absence. Several days later he suddenly entered, his face beaming with joy. In his hands he held two resplendent esrogim, one of which he presented to Rabbi Rubinstein as a gift. The Rebbe undoubtedly had made the perilous journey across the border and through the war-ravaged Italian backroads, jeopardizing his very life for the sake of a beautiful esrog.

Source:

Told by Rabbi Shmuel Rubinstein, Rabbinic authority of the orthodox Jewish community of Paris, 1933-1940; printed in *Yemei Melech* ["The Days of the King" by Mordechai Laufer], vol. I, p. 520.

Hands-on Beauty

This is my G-d, and I shall beautify Him.

Exodus 15:2

This teaches us to perform the Divine commandments in a beautiful manner: make Him a beautiful lulav, a beautiful sukkah, beautiful tzitzis, beautiful tefillin.

Mechilta, ibid.

Hands-on Beauty

Each morning of Sukkos, when Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch finished reciting the blessing over the Four Species, he granted everyone the opportunity to use his lulav and esrog. Although they all had sets of Four Species of their own, many chassidim regarded it as a great privilege to perform the mitzvah with their Rebbe's set. Moreover, the Rebbe's hand-picked Calabrian esrog was truly a sight to behold – it was of the finest quality, large and perfectly shaped, resplendently yellow and smooth, without the slightest trace of flecks or discoloration.

One day, after it had been handled by hundreds of hands, the Rebbe's esrog was returned to him bruised and sullied.

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A bystander who recalled how the once impressive fruit had appeared in its original state, remarked to its owner: “Why do you allow so many people to hold your esrog? Look at what has happened – it has lost all its pristine beauty!”

“Quite the contrary,” replied the Rebbe in surprise, “this is the most beautiful esrog in the world! What greater beauty can there possibly be for an esrog than the fact that hundreds of Jews have performed a mitzva with it?”

Source:

Told by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, on the 13th of Tishrei, 5737.

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The Announcement Of The Redemption

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It may be suggested that the Temple of the future ("it will be revealed and come from heaven already built and perfected"¹) will first be revealed in the place "That the Temple traveled and settled there"² in the time of exile ("The House of our Rebbe in Bavel"³); from there it will be transported to its place in Yerushalayim.

...Perhaps it can be said that this is alluded to in the Rambam's choice of words (in *Hilchos Melech HaMoshiach*⁴) "And build the Temple **in its place**." For apparently [there is a question]: what is the need to inform us here that the building of the Temple will be **in its place**? On the other hand, why isn't the place specified: "And build the Temple in **Yerushalayim**?" [It must be] that "in its place" alludes as well to the place of the king Moshiach in the time of exile (**before** [the status of] "behold he is certainly Moshiach"). Therefore, while he is still **in exile** (for there he sits⁵ and waits and anxiously looks forward to redeeming the Jewish people, and the Divine Presence with them in exile) the king Moshiach builds a Temple (in microcosm). This is an illustration and example of the Temple in Yerushalayim (like "the synagogue of He slipped and settled,"⁶ "that the Temple traveled and settled there."). [This

1. Rashi's commentary and Tosfos on Sukkah 41, end of side a and in other sources.

2. *Aruch*, entry Shaf (brought in the *Chiddushei Aggada MaHaRaSHA*, on *Megillah* 29a).

3. *Megillah* 29a. [In Hebrew, "Beis Rabbeinu Sh'B'Bavel". Translator's note.]

4. End of chapter 11.

5. See *Sanhedrin* 98a: "He is dwelling at the gate of Rome." [In the referenced passage, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asks Eliyahu HaNavi where Moshiach can be found. The quotation actually combines the end of the question ("Where is Moshiach dwelling?") and the answer ("At the gate of Rome"). Translator's note.]

6. *Megillah* 29a. [The phrase is a reference to the Divine Presence going into exile with the Jewish people: G-d's Presence slipped away from Jerusalem and

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settling serves] as a preparation for the future Temple, which will be revealed there first, and from there return (with G-d and the Jewish people) to Yerushalayim.

...Perhaps it can be said that the statement in the Midrash,⁷ that "at the time when the king Moshiach comes, **he will stand on the roof of the Beis HaMikdash** [Temple] and announce to the Jewish people, saying, Humble ones, the time for your Redemption has arrived," refers to the roof of the Beis HaMikdash which is **the Temple in microcosm** outside the land,⁸ which takes the place of the Temple in Yerushalayim ("The Temple traveled and settled there"). [This may be said] because after the future Temple is revealed and descends to the earth below, there is no need **to announce** to the Jewish people that "the time for your Redemption has arrived."

...The above can be applied to "The House of our Rebbe in Bavel" **of our generation**, the house (the synagogue and study hall) of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation:

...In this generation, the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption, "our actions and Divine service during the time of exile"⁹ to make the lands of the nations into the land of Israel even in **the lowest possible place**, that is, **the lower hemisphere** (where the Torah was not given¹⁰) has been concluded

settled in Bavel. Translator's note.]

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

8. Accordingly, the expression "He stands on the roof of the Beis HaMikdash" becomes clarified; that "roofs... do not become sanctified" (Rambam, Hilchos Beis HaBechirah, chapter 6, halacha 7). Hence this alludes to the lands outside of Israel in comparison to the holiness of the land of Israel.

9. *Tanya*, beginning of chapter 37.

10. See *Igros Kodesh of the Rebbe RaYaTZ*, vol. 2, p. 492 ff. See there for

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and completed. Through the elevation of the lowest possible place all the other lands of the nations are also elevated.¹¹ This [objective] is achieved through "**Beis Rabbeinu**" [Our Rebbe's House] in the lower hemisphere, from which light goes out to all the world, to make the whole world (until the furthest corner of the world) into the land of Israel. This is the concept that "In the future the land of Israel will extend into all the lands,"¹² and "In the future, Yerushalayim will extend over all the land of Israel."¹² For then there will be established a connection between all the synagogues and study halls throughout the entire world and the Beis HaMikdash. [This will occur] in the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach, the leader of the generation, who is the Moshiach (the Redeemer of Israel) of the generation. Further, and this is also essential, he is the leader of the Torah of Chassidus,¹³ since through the spreading outward ("when your wellsprings spread forth," until there is nothing beyond, to all corners of the world) is achieved the coming of the king Moshiach.¹⁴

Therefore the greatness of "Beis Rabbeinu" can be understood. It is the essential "Temple in microcosm" of the final exile, "that the Temple traveled and settled there." Therefore, it is the actual place of the Temple of the future; not only that, but the future Temple will be revealed there, and from there return to Yerushalayim (as

cross-references.

11. "As in raising the walls of a house, it is necessary to raise the lower beam and then the upper beams will be raised automatically; this is not the case if one begins in the middle of the wall, one does not raise the lower beams" (*Torah Or Bereishis* 4, beginning of side a).

12. See *Sifrei Devarim* at the beginning, *Pesikta Rabbasi*, *Parshas Shabbos v'Rosh Chodesh*. *Yalkus Shimoni*, *Yeshayahu*, remez 503.

13. One should note that the Torah of Chassidus is the aspect of the Yechida in Torah (See the pamphlet concerning "On the essence of Chassidus), which is connected with the aspect of Yechida in Israel - the soul of our righteous Moshiach (*RaMaZ on Zohar* vol. 2, 40b and other sources).

14. *Igros Kodesh* of the *Baal Shem Tov - Kesser Shem Tov* at the beginning.

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mentioned above).

It may be added, that this concept is also alluded to in the name¹⁵ of "Beis Rabbeinu" in our generation:

"Rabbeinu" [our Rebbe] - His two names alluded to the Redemption: His first name - Yosef - "And it shall come to pass that on that day, the L-rd shall **continue to apply** [yoseef] His hand a second time to acquire the rest of His people that will remain from Assyria and Egypt, etc. and from the islands of the sea, etc, and He shall **gather** [Asaf] the lost of Israel and the scattered ones of Judah He shall gather from the four corners of the earth."¹⁶ His second name - Yitzchak - refers to the laughter and rejoicing that will be complete in the future Redemption, and which will be completed through our righteous Moshiach. Thus it is written,¹⁷ "Then our mouths will be filled with laughter [S'chok]. It specifies "then," in the future,¹⁸ when they will say to Yitzchak (specifically), "Because you are our father."¹⁹

And **Beis** (Rabbeinu) [**The House** of our Rebbe] - its number is seven hundred seventy.²⁰ The name by which "Beis Rabbeinu" is called by all Jews has been universally accepted to be this number,

15. As is well-known, the name indicates the content and nature of the thing called with that name (*Tanya*, "*Shaar HaYichud v'HaEmunah*," end of chapter 1. See at length *Teshuvos u'Be'urim* (Kehos, 5734), section 1 and the cross references there).

16. *Yeshayahu* 11:11-12.

17. *Tehillim* 126:2.

18. Which is not the case during the time of exile, when "it is forbidden for an individual to be completely joyful [literally, fill his mouth with laughter] in this world, since it is written that "Then our mouths will be filled with laughter [we will be completely joyful]" (*Brochos* 31a).

19. *Yeshayahu* 63:16. Shabbos 89b.

20. One should note the customs of the leaders of the Jewish people, who learned allusions and lessons in Divine service from secular matters as well (for example, the number of wagons in the train, which is incidental, and all the more

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"770."²¹ This number in Gematria is "**Paratzta**," derived from "You shall spread out [U'Faratzta] west and east and north and south."²² This indicates that from this house light will go forth to all four corners of the world, in a manner of **breaking through barriers**, so that all four corners of the world will be elevated to the status of the land of Israel. (In the future the land of Israel will extend to all the lands.) This means in particular that all the synagogues and study halls throughout the world will be established in the land of Israel and connected to the Beis HaMikdash in the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. For about him it says,²³ "**You have broken barriers for yourself**," which our Sages of blessed memory explain²⁴ as follows: "This is Moshiach, about whom it is said,²⁵ "**The breaker** is come up before them."²⁶

...In the completeness of the number seven (seven hundred and seventy) can also be found an allusion to the completeness of the Divine service of our Rebbe during his complete lifetime of **seven** decades, **seventy** years (5640-5710). His Divine service was concluded and completed in the lower hemisphere in the **seventh** decade (from the house whose number is seven hundred seventy). [This completeness] includes as well the extension of his Divine service in the years afterwards, through the **seventh** generation -

so in regard to an established dwelling). This is particularly true in our case, when the number becomes **the name of** the house, as discussed below.

21. Whether in Hebrew, Yiddish or English - "Seven Seventy."

22. *VaYeitze* 28:14.

23. *VaYeshev* 38:29.

24. *Aggados Bereishis*, end of chapter 63. See *Bereishis Rabba*, end of chapter 85 and Rashi's commentary on it.

25. *Micha* 2:13.

26. One should note that "Beis Moshiach" in gematria is "Paratzta" (770). Consider this carefully. [*Gematria is the numerical analysis of words. Translator's note.*]

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"all sevenths are beloved."²⁷ Through this [extension] is accomplished the completion of our actions and Divine service during the time of exile in all seven continents of the world. Immediately and imminently "the L-rd shall **continue to apply [yoseef]** His hand a second time, etc., and He shall **gather [Asaf]** the lost of Israel, etc." In this way, "**You have broken** (in Gematria, seven hundred and seventy²⁸) barriers for yourself," "The breaker is come up before them."

All this receives added emphasis in this last period:

The Divine service of spreading Torah and Judaism and the wellsprings outward from "Beis Rabbeinu" ("770") has continued and expanded with greater vigor and greater strength, even after (the last ten years of) his life in this world, for more than forty years (5710-5750). It has done so in a way that "G-d has given you a heart to know and eyes to see and ears to hear."²⁹ Thus we find that "Beis Rabbeinu" ("770") is a "fortress," "the mount that all mouths turn to,"³⁰ for more than a Yovel of years (5700-5750) - "Forever."³¹

[That Beis Rabbeinu is a "fortress"] receives further emphasis when we see with our own eyes the many Jewish people, and the increasing numbers of them, that come to "Beis Rabbeinu," with greater vigor and greater strength, - "in the multitude of people is the splendor of the king"³² (which includes also "Who are the

27. *Vayikra Rabba*, ch. 29:11. See the discourse *Basi L'Gani* of the year 5750 at the beginning. Also at length, the same-named discourse of 5751.

28. [*The letters of the word "Paratzta" have the numerical value of 770: Peh=80; Reish=200; Tzadik=90; Tuv=400. Translator's note.*]

29. *Tavo* 29:3.

30. *Brochos* 30a.

31. *Shmuel I* 1:22 and Rashi's commentary. *Yerushalmi Brochos*, chapter 4, halacha 1. See *Kiddushin* 15a. *Mechilta* and Rashi's commentary on *Mishpatim* 21:6.

32. *Mishlei* 14:28.

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kings? the rabbis,"³³ and specifically the leader (king) of the generation). [The increase] has made it necessary to enlarge and expand "Beis Rabbeinu" further. The enlargement and expansion must be in a way that breaks through barriers, "Paratzta" (770 in Gematria), as if constructing **a new building**.³⁴

According to what was said previously concerning the pre-eminence of "Beis Rabbeinu Sh'b'Bavel" - that "the Temple traveled and settled there," and "this is the place of the actual Temple in the future," so that there the future Temple will be revealed and from there return to Yerushalayim - the great merit each and every Jew has in becoming a partner, physically and monetarily³⁵ (and all who increase are praiseworthy) in building "Beis Rabbeinu Sh'b'Bavel" is obvious. And this is like a preparation for the actual descent and revelation of the future Temple, imminently and immediately.

*(Pamphlet concerning "Mikdash M'at Zeh Beis Rabbeinu Sh'B'Bavel" -
Sefer HaSichos 5752, p. 465)*

33. See *Gittin* 62, end of first side. *Zohar*, vol. 3, 253b in *Raya Mehemna*.

34. Including the laying of the corner stone. *[On the eve of 18 Elul 5748 was arranged the laying of the cornerstone for (increasing and expanding) the synagogue and study hall of Lubavitch in Lubavitch. The Rebbe placed the cornerstone with his holy hands. Publisher's note.]*

35. Following the example of the Beis HaMikdash, that "everyone is obligated to build and support it themselves and with their money, etc." (*Rambam, Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*, chapter 1, halacha 12).

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