

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

Reprinted for Parshat Matos-Masei, 5779
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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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Rabbi Yosef Y. Shagalov,
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Once Upon A Chassid

31:1-3

נקם נקמת בני ישראל...

לתת נקמת ה'

G-d said to Moses: Avenge the vengeance of Israel on the Mideanites...

And Moses spoke to the people, saying: Arm from yourselves man for an army, to take G-d's revenge upon Midean....

The Almighty sees the war on Midean as the avenging of the honor of His people, but Moses and the Jewish people are concerned only with the honor of G-d.

the biblical commentators

A Matter of Timing

The old cantor in Chernigov passed on to his eternal rest, and the town's rabbi, Rabbi Nachum, had to appoint another in his place. A most promising candidate was proposed, but Reb Nachum hesitated, and explained:

“The late cantor was a pious man, who wept as he led the prayers. This fellow also weeps, but the difference between them is in the timing: the old cantor shed tears when pro-

Matos / A Matter of Timing

claiming 'I [G-d] am the first, and am the last, and, beside Me, there are no gods.' But this one is more moved by man is founded in dust and is destined to dust...''

Source:

Shmu'os V'sipurim ("Sayings and Stories") by Rabbi Rephael Nachman Kahan, vol. 1†*, p. 66.

*. Correction: Vol. 2.

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32:22

והייתם נקיים מה' ומישראל

*You shall be clean before G-d, and
before Israel*

The 3:00 AM Audience

Rabbi Z.M. Steinmetz (Hebrew poet Zvi Yair) told:

A family crisis had arisen in the home of my relatives, not-so-distant cousins who lived in South America. Their daughter had met and fallen in love with a young man and the two wished to marry. But the woman's parents were vehemently opposed to the match since the man came from a non-religious background and did not lead a Torah-observant life. Although the young man declared his willingness to begin to observe the laws and customs of Torah, the entire family, extended family, and circle of friends were united against the young woman's choice.

The young woman grew increasingly bitter over the fact that all those dear to her had closed ranks against her. She felt that her entire world had conspired to deprive her of her happiness. The situation continued to worsen, as both daughter and parents became more and more enraged over the other's 'betrayal'. Finally, they struck a deal: the case would be brought to the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita. Although the family did not count themselves among the Rebbes's chassidim, both the young woman and her parents

Matos / The 3:00 AM Audience

held the Rebbe in high regard and felt they could trust him. Both parties agreed to do as he would advise. As the 'Lubavitcher' in the family, I was asked to accompany the young woman to her audience with the Rebbe.

In those years, the Rebbe would receive people three nights a week, beginning in the late evening and continuing through the night. Often, the final visitor would depart at dawn.

We entered the Rebbe's room close to 3:00 a.m. First, the Rebbe and the young woman conducted a brief search for a common language: they tried Yiddish, Hebrew, English, and French, and finally settled on German. As the young woman told her story, I could hear the frustration in her voice: "I don't understand what they want of me," she said. "My friend has promised to lead a Torah-true life. I know that he is sincere. Why is everyone so set against us?"

"He may be sincere," said the Rebbe, "but of what value is his declaration if he does not know what he is committing himself to? You know, according to the law, a signed blank check is worthless, even if the holder fills it in for a single cent - one cannot legally obligate oneself without knowing what the obligation consists of. Living one's life in accordance with the Torah's precepts is a most demanding challenge for anyone, but it is even more difficult for someone who has not been raised that way."

"But he is willing to learn," said the young woman.

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“Learning alone is not enough,” replied the Rebbe. “One may study and accept Torah with the best of intentions, but applying it to day-to-day life is quite another matter. This is what I suggest: let your friend live with a Torah-observant family for several months. Let him study, but let him also experience firsthand what such a commitment entails on a day in, day out basis, from the *Modeh Ani* prayer upon opening one’s eyes in the morning to the reading of the *Sh’mah* before going to sleep. If he *still* declares his desire to lead a Torah-true life, I give my wholehearted blessing to your life together.”

The young woman left the Rebbe’s room with a lightened and joyful heart, and I remained to discuss several personal matters with the Rebbe. But the Rebbe immediately told me to call her back in, explaining: “I do not want her to think that we are discussing her behind her back.”

It was three o’clock in the morning, and the Rebbe had seen dozens of people in the course of the night. Yet he was sufficiently attuned to her feelings to discern her sense of alienation and abandonment and to pick up on her notion of a ‘conspiracy’ against her. So although the issue had been resolved to her satisfaction, and although she would not in any case understand the Yiddish in which we spoke, he refused to speak with me without her being present in the room.

Source:

Told to the author by Rabbi Z. M. Steinmetz.

33:1

אלה מסעי בני ישראל

These are the journeys of the children of Israel

Our chapter opens, "These are the journeys of the children of Israel." However, it then proceeds to recount the 42 encampments at which they stopped during their wanderings in the Sinai Desert!

But these encampments were not ends unto themselves, only way-stations and stepping stones to advance the nation of Israel toward their goal of attaining the Promised Land. So the stops themselves are referred to as "journeys."

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher
Rebbe shlita

The Chassid and the Fool at the Leipzig Fair

Once Rabbi Hillel of Paritch was overtaken by an immense longing to spend Shabbos with his Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch. But to realize this desire was quite another matter: it was already late in the week, and the distance from Babroisk (where Reb Hillel lived at

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the time) to Lubavitch formidable. There seemed no way to make it to the Rebbe in time for Shabbos.

But then a young chassid offered to make the trip. His sleek new coach and superb horses could do the job, he insisted. However, time was of supreme essence. So Reb Hillel must agree to two conditions: they would take the highway (as a rule, Reb Hillel refused to make use of the paved roadway constructed by the wicked czar Nikolai) and Rabbi Hillel would not take too much time with his prayers. Under the circumstances, Reb Hillel agreed.

That night they slept at a wayside inn. In the morning, the young fellow prayed and breakfasted and then looked in on Reb Hillel. Still praying. After a while he checked again - same story. Hours went by, and still the elder chassid continued to pour out his heart before his Creator.

When Reb Hillel finally finished, his companion was quite upset: "I don't understand - you wanted to spend Shabbos with the Rebbe, and you promised to hurry with your prayers. Now you've ruined all our chances of reaching Lubavitch on time!"

Answered Reb Hillel: "Say you wished to journey to the Leipzig fair to purchase some rare merchandise, available nowhere else. But on the way you meet another merchant, who is offering the very same wares at a good price. Only a fool would say: 'But I must go to Leipzig!' The purpose of the journey is not some town or another, but the sought-after merchandise.

Massei / The Chassid and the Fool

“Why does one go to the Rebbe, if to not seek his counsel concerning the ‘service of the heart’? If not to learn how to arouse oneself to the love and awe of G-d in prayer? So if on the way to Lubavitch my praying goes well, should I dump the merchandise and run to Leipzig?”

Source:

Shmu'os V'sipurim ("Sayings and Stories") by
Rabbi Raphael Nachman Kahan, vol. 11*, p. 56.

*. Correction: Vol. 2.

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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The connection between Ahavas Yisroel and the future Redemption can be emphasized yet again, not only because the negation of exile comes through the negation of the cause of exile (which comes through the opposite of Ahavas Yisroel¹). For in our situation, after the completion of our actions and Divine service throughout the time of exile, and after the completion of all forty two journey in the "wilderness of the nations," [when] we find ourselves already "by the Jordan near Jericho"³ (the stage of Moshiach who "smells and judges"⁴), on the threshold of Redemption, certainly the reason for exile has already been corrected. Therefore, the emphasis on Ahavas Yisroel anticipates the beginning of the true and complete Redemption, which is connected with the point of unity above any division. This emphasis on the unity of the Jewish people is a result of the aspect of *yechida* (the fifth level [of the soul])⁵ that is in all Jews equally. For this is a spark of the soul of Moshiach,⁶ the general *yechida*.⁷

*(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Matos-Masai,
2 Menachem Av, 5751)*

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1. See *Yoma* 9b.
 2. See *Likkutei Torah* of our Parsha 88:c and further.
 3. Our Parsha 33:48.
 4. *Sanhedrin* 93b. See *Likkutei Torah* of our Parsha 89b.
 5. [Literally, "like a taste." Translator's note.]

[There are five levels to the soul. The fifth and highest level, "yechida," which means unity or singularity, is the "actual part of G-d Above" within every Jew. Translator's note.]

6. *Remaz to the Zohar*, vol. 2 40b. And to the *Zohar*, vol. 3 260b. And elsewhere.

7. It is known that the verse "A star shall go forth from Yaakov" refers to king Moshiach. It also refers to each and every Jew who is compared to a star, since in each and every Jew is a spark of the soul of Moshiach. (See *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 2, p. 599. See there for further references.)

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
Reb **Ariel Leib** ben Reb **Chaim** ע"ה **Milner**
Passed away on 27 Shevat, 5779

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

DEDICATED BY HIS CHILDREN שיחיו

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FREIND
Reb **Yosef Yisroel** ben Reb **Sholom** ע"ה **Rosner**
On the occasion of his second yahrtzeit, 7 Menachem-Av, 5779

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

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