

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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Rabbi Yosef Y. Shagalov,
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4:35

אין עוד מלבדו

There is none else beside Him

The Bottom Line

Rabbi Binyomin Kletzker, a chassid of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, was a lumber merchant. One year, while he was adding up the annual accounts, he inadvertently filled in under a column of figures: TOTAL: *ein od milvado* (“there is none else beside Him”).

Upon hearing of Reb Binyomin’s ‘Chabadian slip’, a fellow chassid berated him for his absentmindedness. “Don’t you know, Reb Binyomin, that everything has its time and place?” he admonished. “There is a time for chassidic philosophizing, and a time to engage in worldly matters. A person’s business dealings are also an important part of his service of the Almighty and must be properly attended to.”

Responded Reb Binyomin: “One considers it perfectly natural if, during prayer, one’s mind wanders off to the fair in Leipzig. So what’s so terrible if, when involved in business, an ‘alien thought’¹ regarding the unity of G-d infiltrates the mind?”

Source:

Igros Kodesh [Letters of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneersohn, The Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita], Vol. XVI, p. 349.

1. *Machshovo zoro.*

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4:39

וידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך
You shall know... and take to heart

Rebbe'itis

For many years Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch suffered from ill health, compelling him to undertake many trips to various European healing centers to consult with medical specialists.

On one such occasion, a professor-physician who had examined and interviewed the Rebbe categorized his ailment in the following manner: the heart craves something that is beyond the capacity of the mind, and the mind understands more than the heart can bear...

Source:

Sefer Hasichos 5701 [The Talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch, 1940-41], p. 28.

6:4-5

שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד
ואהבת את ה' אלקיך

*Hear O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the
Lord is one. And you shall love the
Lord your G-d....*

The Maggid of Mezeritch expounded on the verse "*And you shall love the Lord your G-d*": how can there be a commandment to love? Love is a feeling of the heart: one who has the feeling loves. What can a person do if, G-d forbid, this love is not imbedded in his heart? How can the Torah instruct "you shall love" as if it were a matter of choice?

But the commandment actually lies in the previous verse, "*Hear O Israel.*" The Hebrew word *sh'mah* ('hear') also means 'understand'. So the Torah is commanding a person to study, comprehend, and reflect upon the oneness of G-d. Because of the nature of the human mind and heart and the relationship between them, this will *inevitably* lead to a love of the Almighty since, in essence, the mind rules the heart. If one contemplates deeply and is still not excited with a love of G-d, this is only because he has not sufficiently cleansed himself of the things which stifle his capacity to sense and relate to the Divine. Aside from this, such contemplation by the mind will always result in a feeling of love...

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch

Boneparte and the Chassid

In his Tanya, the bible of Chabad chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi states: "By its very nature, the mind rules the heart." This axiom, known as the 'aleph of chassidus' forms the cornerstone of the Chabad-chassidic approach to life.

The renowned chassid Rabbi Moshe Meisels of Vilna, youngest of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's disciples, once told Rabbi Eisel of Homel: "The aleph of *chassidus* saved me from a certain death."

Rabbi Moshe Meisels, an extremely learned man, was fluent in German, Russian, Polish, and French. During Napoleon's war on Russia he served as a translator for the French High Command. Rabbi Schneur Zalman had charged him to associate with the French military officials, to attain a position in their service, and to convey all that he learned to the commanders of the Russian army¹. Within a short while Rabbi Moshe had succeeded in currying the

1. Rabbi Schneur Zalman actively supported the Czar against Napoleon during the Napoleonic Wars, both on the celestial level, intervening on high for a Russian victory, and by down to earth methods such as the chassidic spy of our story. Rabbi Schneur Zalman was of the opinion that while Napoleon's plans for 'emancipating' the Jewish community might bring respite from the harsh czarist decrees and improve the community's material conditions, it would be but the glittering veneer of forced assimilation and spiritual genocide.

Vo'eschanan / Boneparte and the Chassid

favor of the chief commanders of Napoleon's army and was privy to their most secret plans.

It was he, Reb Moshe, who saved the Russian arms arsenal in Vilna from the fate which befell the arsenal in Schwintzian. He alerted the Russian commander in charge, and those who attempted to blow up the arsenal were caught in the act.

“The High Command of the French army was meeting,” related Reb Moshe “and was hotly debating the maneuvers and the arrangement of the flanks for the upcoming battle. The maps were spread on the floor, and the generals were examining the roads and trails, unable to reach a decision. Time was short. Tomorrow, or, at the very latest, on the day after, the battle on the environs of Vilna had to begin.

“They were still debating when the door flew open with a crash. The guard stationed inside the door was greatly alarmed and drew his revolver. So great was the commotion, that everyone thought that the enemy had burst in an attempt to capture General Shtaub...

“But it was Napoleon himself who appeared in the doorway. The Emperor's face was dark with fury. He

The Rebbe's contribution to Russia's victory was recognized by the Czar, who awarded Rabbi Schneur Zalman and his progeny the status of 'An Honorable Citizen For All Generations.' Five generations of Chabad Rebbes were to make use of this special standing in their work on behalf of the Jews of Russia.

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stormed into the room and raged: ‘Has the battle been planned? Have the orders to form the flanks been issued?’

“‘And who is this stranger?!’ he continued, pointing to me. In a flash he was at my side. ‘You are a spy for Russia,’ he thunder , and placed his hand upon my chest to feel the pounding heart of a man exposed. At that moment, the aleph of chassidus stood by me. My mind commanded my heart to beat not an increment faster. In an unwavering voice I replied: ‘The commanders of His Highness the Emperor have taken me as their interpreter, as I am knowledgeable in the languages crucial to the carrying out of their duties...’”

Source:

Igros Kodesh [The Letters of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch], Vol. 111*, p. 312.

*. Correction: Vol. 3.

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The Announcement Of The Redemption

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It has been said often of late that according to all the signs we are situated in the "year that the King Moshiach will be revealed."¹ (This is in addition to the calculation that we are in the afternoon of the eve of the Sabbath, which began in the year 5751.²) These signs are represented by the widely known initials of this year, "It will be a year when I will show him wonders," particularly since throughout this year we have seen (and we will continue to see) many incidents that can be characterized as "wonders." Moreover, each one of these wonders could be described as a "wonder" even in relation to the preceding "wonder," that is, a wonder which continues to evoke a new sense of amazement as compared to the previous wonder.

Among the wonders there is also a "wonder" that has occurred in these last few days: A gathering of Chassidim and emissaries in Russia! People gathered from various places and countries in the city of Lubavitch, with the intention, among other things, to make a pilgrimage to the holy resting places of our Rebbes and leaders there, including the holy graveside of my father, master and teacher, of blessed memory (whose yahrtzeit is the 20th of Av, a day blessed from this Sabbath). Additionally, they will be convening in Moscow, the capital of Russia, to discuss and consult with one another ("Each man will assist his fellow,"³ imbued with the spirit of love and unity, "as one person with one heart"⁴), and to pass resolutions to increase with greater intensity and vigor in the dissemination of Torah and Judaism and the wellsprings of Torah to

1. *Yalkut Shimoni* 499.

2. See *Sefer HaSichos*, 5750, vol. 1, p. 254. See there for cross references.

3. *Yeshayahu* 41:6.

4. *Rashi*, *Yisro* 19:2.

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the farthest reaches of that country and the entire world. May it be G-d's will that the convention should be blessed with outstanding success, endowed with an exponential increase⁵ of infinite proportions. That this country that waged an incessant struggle against the activities of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of this generation (as well as the activities of my father, whose yahrtzeit is the 20th of Av) to disseminate Torah and the wellsprings of Torah, should now host and honor his disciples and emissaries and those who follow in his path in the dissemination of Torah and the wellsprings of Torah to the remotest reaches, must be classified as a "wonder."

These "wonders" awaken us and underscore that imminently we will see the greatest wonder, the true and complete Redemption, "As in the days of your departure from Egypt I will show him wonders."⁶ This will be a "wonder" even in comparison with the events of the Exodus from Egypt.⁷

In practical terms:

Since we are standing on the threshold of the true and complete Redemption where everything will manifest itself in an unbounded manner, one must have a "foretaste" (as is the custom to "taste a little of every dish"⁸ on the eve of Sabbath) of the infinite nature of the revelations of Redemption, by a commensurate unrestrained increase in matters of Torah and Mitzvos.

More specifically, there should be an increase in the study of Torah (to "augment the nights to the days in the preoccupation with

5. "One who increases, shall be increased" - *Ta'anis*, at the end.

6. Michah 7:15.

7. See *Or HaTorah*, Nach on this verse (p. 487). See there for cross references.

8. *Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe, Orach Chaim*, end of sec. 250

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Torah⁹). This includes both the revealed as well as the inner dimensions of Torah, including the study of Ein Ya'akov, an anthology of the Aggadic¹⁰ parts of Torah, in which "the majority of the Torah's secrets are hidden."¹¹ The greatest emphasis should be placed on the study of the inner dimension of Torah, in accordance with the teaching of the Arizal (whose yahrtzeit is on the fifth of Menachem-Av) that "in these later generations, it is permissible and even mandatory that we reveal this [esoteric] wisdom."¹² This is particularly true now that once these heretofore-secret teachings were elucidated and made accessible to each and every Jew in the teachings of Chassidus.

There should be an even greater emphasis on an increase in the study of matters concerning **the Redemption**, in both the revealed parts of the Torah, especially Rambam's work which comprises all the laws relating to Redemption, e.g., the laws of the Temple (which is studied currently in the period of the Three Weeks) as well as the laws of The Kings and their Wars and the King Moshiach - and the inner dimension of Torah. Study of the inner dimension of Torah in general hastens the Redemption: "With this work of yours (the teachings of R. Shimon Bar Yochai - the author of the *Zohar*)... they will emerge from exile with mercy."¹³ However, study of the inner dimension of Torah's treatment of Redemption has an added advantage.

Ideally, these learning sessions should be conducted in a manner of "Ten people (a quorum) sitting (i.e., they are established)

9. *Rashi*, end of *Ta'anis*.

10. [*Aggadah is the non-legal, inspirational portions of the Talmud. Translator's note.*]

11. *Tanya, Igeres HaKodesh*, sec. 23.

12. *Op cit.*, sec. 26 (142).

13. *Zohar III*, 124b, in *Raya Mehemna*, cited and elucidated in *Igeres Hakodesh*, *ibid*.

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preoccupied (in a manner of one conducting "business") in the study of Torah."¹⁴

...An additional lesson and directive concerning Redemption can be derived also from the beginning of the **third** chapter of Pirkei Avos: "Look at **three** things:"

The term "three things" standing by itself can be a suggestion of the third Redemption and the third Holy Temple, a threefold Redemption and a threefold Holy Temple, because they comprise the virtues of both the first Redemption and the second, the first Temple and the second. Furthermore, the twosome features will be combined as one.

The imperative, "look," implies gazing intently, by deeply reflecting and contemplating¹⁵ matters concerning the third Redemption and the third Beis Hamikdash ("three things"), imbued with feelings of anticipation and exceptional yearning, "I anticipate his coming every day,"¹⁶ implying that he will come every day, this day, literally. How much more so, now that we stand on the threshold of Redemption, that the gazing at these three matters is increased and done with more vigor.

The suggestion can be made that the one's reflection on matters of the third Redemption and third Holy Temple ("three matters") has the capacity to effect completeness to all of our efforts within the "three pillars" - the three modes of expression, Torah, service (prayer) and loving-kindness¹⁷ whose fulfillment is through the

14. *Avos* 3:6.

15 See *Shulcahn Aruch, Admor Hazaken, Orach Chaim*, sec. 128:36, and in other places.

16. The text of "Ani Ma'amin" published in prayer books etc. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 23, p. 394.

17. *Avos* 1:2.

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three "garments" of the soul, thought, speech and action. When one's thoughts are directed towards the three redemptions one's Divine service is unbounded and therefore beyond division. Without the limits and boundaries which delineate and divide, one attains perfection in all of the three modes.¹⁸

*(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vo'eschanan,
Shabbos Nachamu, 16 Menachem Av, 5751)*

18. In a similar vein, with regard to "keeping from evil" one is precluded from evil, as a matter of course, without a need to actively engage in negating evil, as the Mishneh continues: "And you will not come to the hands of sin." The expression "**and you will not come**" implies that it will not take effort. The usage of the term "**hands of sin**," implies further, that even matters that are not inherently sinful, but could lead to sin (such as satisfying permissible desires), are automatically dismissed because of one's reflection on matters of Redemption. This is analogous to the way things will be in the Messianic Era. As the Rambam rules (in the end and seal of his work "Mishneh Torah") that "in that time ... all delights will be as abundant as the dust of the earth." His choice of the word "dust" implies that it will have no significance to us, inasmuch as "all of the preoccupation of the world will be exclusively to know G-d."

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Reb Moshe Boruch ben Reb **Yakov** ע"ה **Fishman**

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei, 27 Adar, 5777

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Reb Elon Menachem ben Reb **Zev** ע"ה **Kurtzman**

Passed away on 12 Tamuz, 5778

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

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DEDICATED BY HIS CHILDREN שיחיו

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Reb **Aharon** ben Reb **Yitzchok** ע"ה **Nassy**
Passed away on 10 Adar, 5778

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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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 - א"תבלחט

Mrs. **Elka** bas **Raizel** שתיח' **Caplan**

May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah and *mitzvot*.

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mr. **Yaakov (Gerald)** ben Reb **Meir** ע"ה **Goldstein**
Passed away on 21 Menachem-Av, 5774

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

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