

# 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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## Once Upon A Chassid

30:11-14

כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאוד  
בפיך ובלבבך לעשתו

*For the Mitzvah which I command you  
this day... is something that is very  
close to you, in your mouth, in your  
heart, that you may do it...*

### *The Long but Short of It*

The Talmud<sup>1</sup> relates:

Said Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Chanania: “Once a child got the better of me.”

“I was travelling, and met a child at a crossroads. I asked him, ‘Which way to the city?’ and he answered, ‘This way is short and long, and this way is long and short.’

“I took the ‘short and long’ way. I soon reached the city but found my approach obstructed by gardens and orchards. So I retraced my steps and said to the child: ‘My son, did you not tell me that this is the short way?’ Answered the child: ‘Did I not tell you that it is the long way?’

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<sup>1</sup> Talmud, Eruvin 53b.

## Nitzavim / The Long but Short of it

Also in life there is a ‘short but long’ way and a ‘long but short’ way.

In his *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi sets down the fundamentals of the Chabad-chassidic approach to life. On the cover page of this ‘bible of chassidism’ he defines his work as follows:

“Based on the verse, *‘For it [the Torah and its precepts] is something that is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it’* - to explain, with the help of G-d, how it is indeed exceedingly close, in a long and short way.”

The Torah and its *mitzvos* are the Creator’s blueprint for creation, detailing the exact manner in which G-d means life to be lived and His purpose in creation to be fulfilled. But is a life that is every man realistically be expected to conduct his every act, word, and thought in accordance with the Torah’s most demanding directives?

The Torah itself is quite clear on the matter: *“For the mitzvah which I command you this day, it is not beyond you nor is it remote from you. It is not in heaven... nor is it across the sea... Rather, it is something that is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it.”* A Torah-true existence is not an abstract ideal, a point of reference to strive toward, but a practical and attainable goal.

But how? In the *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman develops the Chabad approach, a ‘whole person’ approach to life in

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which the mind plays the leading and pivotal role. First, a person must study, comprehend, and meditate upon the quintessential truths of existence: the all-transcendent, all-embracing, all-pervading reality of G-d; the root and essence of the soul and its intrinsic bond with its Creator; man's mission in life, and the resources and challenges - both external and internal - that are extended to him. Since these concepts are extremely subtle and abstract, one must toil "a toil of the soul and a toil of the flesh" to grasp them and relate to them. Then, because of the innate superiority of the mind over the heart imbued by the Creator into human nature, the understanding and assimilation of these G-dly concepts will unilaterally compel the development of the appropriate emotions in the heart: the love and awe of G-d.

Love for G-d is the unquenchable desire to cleave to Him and be unified with His essence. Awe of G-d elicits utter abhorrence toward anything which violates His will and thus erects barriers between Him and man. So when a person has so oriented his mind and so transformed his heart, his observance of the Torah's precepts becomes a given. He craves the fulfillment of the *mitzvos* with every fiber of his being, since they are the bridge between him and G-d, the means, and only means, by which he can connect to his Creator. And any transgression of G-d's will, no matter how attractive to his material nature, is literally revolting to him, since it disrupts his relationship with G-d and runs contrary to his own true self.

## Nitzavim / The Long but Short of it

But a person may argue: Why spend a lifetime pursuing this demanding regimen of mind and heart? Why must I toil to understand and feel? Why not take the direct approach - open the books and follow instructions? I'm a simple Jew, he may maintain, and the attainment of such lofty spiritual states as "comprehension of the Divine", "love of G-d", and "awe of G-d" are way beyond my depth. I know the truth, I know what G-d wants of me - the Torah spells out the dos and don'ts of life quite clearly. I have a material and ego-centric nature. An inborn inclination towards evil and self-destructive desires. I'll control them. My faith, determination, and willpower will do the job.

This, however, is the short but long way. As the most direct and simple line between two points, it is misleadingly the surest way to town; but in truth, the direct approach is a dead end. As with the route which Rabbi Yehoshua first chose, it seems to lead straight to the city - only somehow it never quite makes it. For it is a path of never-ending struggle, the scene of perpetual duel between the self-oriented animal soul of man and his upward-reaching G-dly soul.<sup>2</sup> True, man has been given free choice and furnished with the necessary fortitude and spiritual staying-power to meet his every moral challenge; but the possibility of failure, G-d forbid, also exists. No matter how many times he will triumph, tomorrow will bring yet another test. On the short and long road one may win battle after battle, but there is never a decisive victory in the war of life.

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2. See vol. II, pg. 23 footnote 5.

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On the other hand, the long but short way is winding, steep, tedious, and long as life itself. It is full of ups and downs, setbacks and frustrations. It demands every ounce of intellectual and emotional stamina the human being can muster. But it is a road that leads, steadily and surely, to the aspired-to destination. When one *does* finally acquire an aptitude and intellectual taste for the G-dly, when one *does* develop a desire for good and abhorrence for evil, the war has been won. The person has transformed himself into someone whose every thought, deed, and act is *naturally* attuned to his quintessential self and purpose in life.<sup>3</sup>

### Source:

Based on an address by Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita, delivered on December 1, 1958,

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3. A classic example of the 'short but long way' can be seen in the story *Who's Boss* recounted, vol. II, pg. 191. Contrast this with the 'long but short' life described in *Catch-30* vol. II, pg. 203.

It is important to note that the Chabad-chassidic approach to life does not preclude the short but long way - obviously, doing good and resisting evil cannot wait until the last curve in the long but short road has been turned. Unlike the metaphorical traveler through physical space, who can only follow a single road at a time, our spiritual journey calls for us to follow both routes simultaneously. In the journey of life, the choice at the cross-roads is not an either/or decision but a question of priority and emphasis.

# BESURAS HAGEULO

## The Announcement Of The Redemption

### 2

We can all see (in this year of miracles) how the signs of Redemption mentioned by our Sages have been fulfilled. This includes the sign cited in *Yalkut Shimoni*<sup>1</sup> (which has been mentioned recently several times):

"In the year the King Moshiach will be revealed, the kings of all the nations of the world will struggle with each other... the king of Persia will provoke the Arabian king; the Arabian king will [then] go to *Aram*<sup>2</sup> for advice... All the nations of the world will be in turmoil and terror... And (G-d) will say to them (Israel), "My children, do not be afraid, all that I have done I have done only for your sake... Do not fear, the time for your Redemption has arrived!..."

The *Yalkut* then continues:

When the King Moshiach comes he will stand on the roof of the Beis HaMikdash [Holy Temple] and will proclaim to Israel, 'Humble ones, the time for your Redemption has arrived!'"

*(From the talk of Wednesday, Parshas Netzavim-Vayeilech,  
22 Elul, 5750)*

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1. *Yeshayahu*, remez 499; Also in *P'sikta Rabasi*, 37 (s.v. *kumi ori*).  
2. In the *Pesikta* there [the version is] "to Edom."



## THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

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The most essential matter is: the true and complete Redemption, truly immediately!

Several signs indicate the imminence of the Redemption, primarily the statement of our Sages<sup>1</sup> many generations ago that: "All the deadlines have passed, and the matter depends solely on Teshuvah [repentance, return]." My sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation clarified that Teshuvah had already been achieved, and that we "all stand ready,"<sup>2</sup> and we have been ready for quite some time.

*(The blessing of the Rebbe Shlita, after the Annulment of the Vows,  
Erev Rosh Hashanah, 5752)*

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1. *Sanhedrin* 97:2.

2. The expression of my Sainted father-in-law in his letter of 26 Adar I 5698 - [published in] his *Igros Kodesh* vol. 4, p. 279. And see *HaYom Yom* 15 Teves.

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The most essential matter is that "so shall it be for us, in actuality." Moreover, indeed, it has already been, in the past tense. In particular, our Rebbes and leaders have revealed to us that the publication of the coming of Moshiach is in the newspapers.<sup>1</sup> This has actually occurred in recent times, as several newspapers throughout the world have publicized (and we should increase the publicity) that "**Behold, he (Melech HaMoshiach) is coming.**"<sup>2</sup> Immediately and literally speaking, **he should have already come**, below ten handbreadths<sup>3</sup> and in a manner that is manifest for the entire world to see, and especially "for the eyes of all of Israel."<sup>4</sup> And may this occur in actuality, immediately!

*(from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Netzavim 5751, Second day of Rosh Hashanah, and Shabbos Parshas Vayelech, 6 Tishrei, 5752)*

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1. See *Sefer HaSichos Toras Shalom*, p. 12: "The Rebbe (the Alter Rebbe) has said that Moshiach will appear in the gazettin (newspapers) ... all the Jews will be ready for the coming of Moshiach as if the newspapers reported that he is coming..."

2. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8. And in *Shir HaShirim Rabba* on the verse.

3. [*An expression frequently used by the Rebbe to denote that what will occur is not just a metaphor or even a spiritual reality, but that it will be so in the domain that we inhabit, within the confines of the physical world. Translator's note.*]

4. End of Parshas *Brocha*.

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FRIEND**  
**Horav Avrohom Aharon ben Reb Yitzchok ע"ה**  
**Plotkin**

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Nasso, 14 Sivan, 5780

**ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.**

\*

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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** שחח'י **Caplan**

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

\* \* \*

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Reb **Asher Zelig (George)** ben Reb **Baruch** ע"ה **Weiss**

Passed away on 30 Kislev, First day of Rosh Chodesh Tevet, 5781

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF HIS WIFE - שתבלחט"א

Mrs. **Gittel (Gisele)** bas **Malka** שחח'י **Weiss**

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

\*

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