

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 Pesach Sheni & Lag B'Omer, 5783
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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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It's Never Too Late

Elazar ben Durdaya was a notorious sinner. There was no harlot whom he had not visited. Once, while preparing to commit an immoral act, he heard a voice saying, "The Heaven will never accept Elazar ben Durdaya's penitence." Greatly disturbed, he wandered off to a secluded valley nestled between two mountains and sat down. He entreated the ministering angels to invoke Divine mercy on his behalf, yet they all refused. Seeing that no one would plead his case, he lowered his head between his knees, and wept until his soul departed. At that moment a Heavenly voice proclaimed: "Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya has merited eternal life in the World to Come."

Rabbi Yehudah haNassi cried and exclaimed: "Some people earn their share in the World to Come after many years, yet some secure their portion in one moment! Not only is their penitence accepted, they are even bestowed the title 'Rabbi!'"

Talmud, Avodah Zarah 17a

It's Never Too Late

Shortly after Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch assumed the mantle of leadership, he was approached by a man beset with serious troubles. The latter requested the Rebbe's blessing for a miraculous salvation.

"I am sorry," the Rebbe apologized, "but there really is nothing I can do to help you."

Once Upon A Chassid

As soon as the man exited the yechidus¹ chamber, he began to weep bitterly. His despondent cries were so loud that they caught the attention of Reb Zalman Aharon Schneersohn, the Rebbe's older brother. Upon hearing the man's sorrowful plight, he entered his brother's room. "Is this the way to treat a Jew?" Reb Zalman asked. "He has turned to you for your blessing, yet you dismiss him, refusing to offer him any assistance. Now he stands outside your office in tears!"

The Rebbe immediately donned his *gartel*² and motioned that the man should return. When he entered, the Rebbe gave him a blessing that all will be well. Indeed, the blessing subsequently materialized in the fullest sense.

* * *

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained:

Initially Rabbi Shalom DovBer was in fact unable to help him. Due to the man's unseemly conduct and lowly spiritual station, he was not worthy of receiving a blessing of such magnitude. After the Rebbe refused to bless him, he had no other alternative but to turn his tearful eyes heavenward and weep. Transformed by his broken heart, he now became a deserving recipient of G-d's blessing.

Source:

Likkutei Sichos [The Collected Talks of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe], vol. XV, p. 126

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1. Private audience.
 2. Ritual belt worn for prayer.

Fertile Pastures

It is customary to take children out to the field on Lag B'Omer and treat them to sweet snacks, while telling them stories of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. In fact, this conduct does not pertain solely to children; indeed, scholars and saints of the past were wont to interrupt their studies and venture out to the fields. Likewise, the holy Ari, in his yearly pilgrimage to Miron on Lag B'Omer, took leave of his daily activities and traversed the fields and forests to reach his destination. The Rebbes of Chabad often observed this tradition as well. In our present generation, we must see to it that every Jewish child participates in a Lag B'Omer day parade. The celebrations should preferably be held outside in public places, in order that the great outdoors be illuminated with the joy of the wondrous day.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Fertile Pastures

In the year 5574,¹ soon after Rabbi DovBer settled in Lubavitch, he reinstated the time-honored custom of celebrating Lag B'Omer in the field. Together with his chasidim he hiked out to a meadow on the outskirts of town

1. 1814.

Once Upon A Chassid

where a small repast was prepared. Hard-boiled eggs were served as customary, but the Rebbe did not wash his hands for breaking bread. Amidst elated spirits, they sang, danced, and merrily toasted *l'chayim*. Although doctors had forbade him for health purposes, the Rebbe made an exception and partook of vodka as well. After he taught a discourse of profound chassidic thought, the Rebbe turned to a chassid, Reb Eliezer Chaim of Zhlobin, and said: "Let us sing the melody of my father,² and we shall then truly be together with him." Subsequently, he bid the elder chassidim to share their recollections from the past. Even after the Rebbe traveled back to town, the crowd remained and festivities continued until evening.

Throughout the year the Rebbe had no time for questions with regard to material matters. Despite the poverty and illness prevalent in his times, not to mention the indigence of his own household, he concerned himself primarily with the spiritual needs of his chassidim. He deferred all those who solicited his blessings for material well-being to his brother, Reb Chaim Avraham. Although the latter was a brilliant scholar and devoted chassid of his brother, he was an unpretentious householder and certainly did not regard himself as a wonder-worker of sorts. Whenever the Rebbe directed people to him, he momentarily donned the Rebbe's *shtreime*³ and responded with a blessing or advice.

2. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.

3. Regal fur hat traditionally worn by the Rebbes of Chabad.

Fertile Pastures

On Lag B'Omer, however, the Rebbe's conduct was entirely different. Many great wonders were seen at that time, most of them involving the blessing of children for childless couples. As a result of blessings that he personally gave, many babies were born during the ensuing year who grew up to be fine chassidim. Needless to say, people looked forward to this propitious occasion all year long.

One year, during the annual Lag B'Omer celebration, a barren woman approached the Rebbe and expressed her deep longing to be blessed with a child. "Have a bite to eat every morning immediately upon rising," the Rebbe instructed her, "and you will conceive." A year later the woman gave birth to twins. When the Rebbe was notified, he amusingly remarked: "She probably took an extra bite!"

Source:

Based on *Hayom Yom* calendar, quotation for Lag B'Omer; *Likkutei Dibburim*, p. 1045-46; Reshimos #8 p.7-8; *Reshimas Devarim*, vol. III, p. 109; *Shmu'os V'sipurim*, vol. III, p. 167.

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** שתחיל **Caplan**

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

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

24

The simple lesson regarding the actions which a Jew must do to further hasten the Redemption is:

In addition to the activities in his part of the world, until it includes the whole world, to reveal that G-d is the Master¹ of the world - in the world and in every part of the world, particularly through making use of all aspects of the world "for the sake of heaven"² and in "knowing Him,"³ so that everything in the world reveals "the glory" of G-d,

There must also be a specific increase in studying and learning the Torah - particularly the inner teachings of the Torah as revealed in the teachings of Chassidus, in a manner of comprehension and perception, in wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

And also, to have influence on others around him - through spreading Torah and Judaism, and the spreading of the wellsprings.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Emor, 20 Iyar 5751)

1. *[The Hebrew word for "Master" used here is also the name of the first letter of the alphabet, and indicates unity and oneness. Translator's note.]*

2. *Avos* chapter 2 mishneh 12. And see Rambam, *Hilchos Deos*, end of chapter 3. *Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, section 231.

3. *Mishlei* 3:6. And see *Rambam* and *Tur Shulchan Aruch* there.

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