

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 Behar-Bechukotai, 5783
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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
 ה. 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

25:42

כי עבדי הם אשר הוצאתי אתם מארץ
מצרים לא ימכרו ממכרת עבד
*For they [the Jewish people] are my
servants, whom I have taken out from
the land of Egypt - they cannot be sold
into slavery*

My deed of ownership precedes and voids
any other.

Rashi's commentary

In redeeming us from Egypt the Almighty made
us subject to Him alone, and thus inherently and
eternally free: no force or law on earth has any
jurisdiction over the Jew.

Rabbi Yehudah Lowe of Prague (the 'Maharal')

Highly Connected

The *mikveh* (ritual bathhouse) in Primishlan, home to
Rabbi Meir'1 Primishlaner, was located at the foot of a steep
hill. Even under the best of conditions it was a precarious
climb down to the bathhouse and back up to town. But
during the winter months, when the hill was covered with
ice, the slope was altogether impassable, and even the most
agile and daring of the young men were forced to give up

B'har / Highly Connected

after the first few steps. From the first freeze to the spring thaw, the townspeople were forced to take a long, round-about route to the *mikveh*.

All but one. The elderly rebbe of Primishlan would walk down the icy slope every morning to immerse himself before praying. Straight as a rod, he would make his unflinching way to the bathhouse and back.

One day, two young skeptics set out to prove that there was nothing extraordinary about Rabbi Meir's daily trip. But their attempt met with dismal failure: bruised, bloodied, and with half a dozen broken bones between them, they walked *nowhere* for a good few weeks. Later, one of them asked Rabbi Meir, "How do you do it?"

Said the Primishlaner: "When one is connected above, one does not fall below. Meir'l is connected above, so he does not fall below."

Source:

Likkutei Dibburim (Collected Talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch), vol. 11*, p. 542.

*. Correction: Vol. 2.

Once Upon A Chassid

26:3

אם בחקתי תלכו ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם
If you follow My statutes and keep My commandments.... I will give you your rains in their time, the land will yield its crop, and the tree of the field, its fruit

"If you follow My statutes" - the word "if" is to be understood as a plea on the part of G-d: "If only you would follow my statutes..."

Talmud, Avodah Zoro 5a

Spiked Chassidus

The Russian winter may be long and cold, but every Saturday night the central *Beit Midrash* (study hall and synagogue) in the town of Dokshits was a warm and merry place. A samovar of *panes*, a hot drink made with boiling water, vodka and sugar, was set up, and everyone warmed their bones. The renowned chassid Rabbi Aharon ('Areh') of Dokshits would then teach a class in chassidic thought.

Once a year, Reb Areh would travel to Lubavitch to the Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch. On the Saturday nights following his return, the weekly *chassidish panes* ritual

B'chukosai / Spiked Chassidus

would swing into high gear: an extra-large batch of *panes* was concocted and Reb Areh, fresh from a month of spiritual refueling in Lubavitch, would review the discourses of chassidic teaching which he had heard from the Rebbe during his stay.

Once, when Reb Areh was in Lubavitch, Rabbi Shmuel said to him: "I hear that in Dokshits they study chassidus with *panes*. Tell me, what connection is there between the teachings of chassidism and a samovar of *panes* ... ?!"

So when Reb Areh came home, he put a stop to the refreshment stand: henceforth, the after-Shabbos session would be a *chassidus* only affair. But on the following week, the crowd of participants was perceptibly smaller, and it continued to dwindle throughout the winter. So when Reb Areh was back in Lubavitch and the Rebbe asked "What's doing in Dokshits?", he was forced to report that the chassidus class now attracted a fraction of the crowd it had pulled back in its 'drink and learn' days.

"Nu," said the Rebbe, "so bring back the *panes*. *Abi men zol lernen chassidus* - so long as they study *chassidus*."

Source:

Shmu'os V'sipurim ["Sayings and Stories"] by Rabbi Rephael Nachman Kahan, vol. 11*, p. 50.

*. Correction: Vol. 2.

27:2-3

בערכך נפשת לה'

If a man make a vow to give to G-d the estimated values of persons, the estimation shall be as follows: For a male from twenty to sixty years old, the estimation shall be thirty shekels of silver

The Prodigy Under the Bed

Rabbi Hiliel of Paritch was one of the many great scholars of his day to join the Chabad chassidic movement. For many years, he was a devoted disciple and follower of the second and third rebbes of Chabad, Rabbi DovBer and Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch.

As a young man, Rabbi Hiliel heard of the founder of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, and sought to meet with him. But the opportunity seemed to forever elude the young prodigy: no sooner did he arrive in a town that Rabbi Schneur Zalman was visiting, that he was informed that the Rebbe had just left. Finally, he managed to locate Rabbi Schneur Zalman's lodgings before the Rebbe was due to arrive. In order to ensure that he would not, once again, somehow miss his opportunity, Rabbi Hillel crept into Rabbi Schneur Zalman's appointed room and hid under the bed, determined, at last, to make the acquaintance of the great Rebbe.

B'chukosai / The Prodigy Linder the Bed

In anticipation of his encounter with Rabbi Schneur Zalman, Rabbi Hillel had “armed” himself with some of his achievements in talmudic study. At that time, the young scholar was studying the tractate *Erchin*, or “Appraisals”, the section of the Talmud which deals with the laws of how to appraise the value of one’s pledges to charity. Rabbi Hillel had an insightful question on the subject which he had diligently rehearsed in order to discuss it with the Rebbe.

From his hiding place, Rabbi Hiliel heard the Rebbe enter the room. But before he could make a move, he heard Rabbi Schneur Zalman exclaim: “If a young man has a question regarding *Appraisals*, he had best first evaluate himself.”

The prodigy under the bed fainted on the spot. When he came to, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was gone...

* * *

Said the Lubavitcher Rebbe *shlitah*: How are we to apply this story to our lives?

The tractate of *Appraisals* discusses the laws presented in chapter 27 of Leviticus: if a person pledges to give to charity, but instead of citing a sum he says “I promise to give the value of this individual,” we are to follow a fixed rate table set by the Torah, in which each age and gender group is assigned a certain “value.”

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But why employ a flat rate which lumps together so many diverse individuals? Should not an accomplished scholar be considered more valuable than a simple laborer? The Torah states that we all stand equally before G-d, "*from your heads, the leaders of your tribes, your elders... to your wood choppers and water carriers.*"¹ But can a person truly view his fellow as his equal when he is so obviously superior to him in talent and achievement?

This is the gist of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's remark: If you have a question regarding "Appraisals", if you find it difficult to relate to the Torah's evaluation of human worth, you had best take a long, hard look at yourself. An honest evaluation of your own character and behavior will show how much you can learn from every man, how much there is for you to emulate in those who are supposedly 'inferior' to yourself.

Source:

Likkutei Sichos [The Collected Talks of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita], vol. 11,*p. 400.

1. Deuteronomy 29:9.

*. Correction: Vol. 2.

27:33

ולא ימירנו

He shall not exchange it...

Lost Souls

A wealthy businessman and his coachman arrived in a city one Friday afternoon. After the rich man had settled in at the best hotel in town, the coachman went off to his humble lodgings.

Both washed and dressed for Shabbos, and then set out for the synagogue for the evening prayers. On his way to shul, the businessman came across a large wagon which had swerved off the road and was stuck in a ditch. Rushing to help a fellow in need, the businessman climbed down into the ditch and began pushing and pulling at the wagon together with its hapless driver. But for all his good intentions, and for all his finesse at handling the most challenging of business deals, when it came to extracting a wagon and a team of horses from a muddy ditch our businessman was hopelessly out of his depth. After struggling for an hour in the knee-deep mud, he succeeded only in ruining his best suit of Shabbos clothes, amassing a most impressive collection of cuts and bruises, and getting the wagon even more deeply imbedded in the mud. Finally, he dragged his limping body to the synagogue, arriving a scant minute before the start of Shabbos.

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Meanwhile, the coachman arrived early to the synagogue and sat down to recite a few chapters of Psalms. At the synagogue he found a group of wandering paupers, and being blessed with a most generous nature, the coachman invited them *all* to share his meal. When the synagogue sexton approached the poor and homeless to arrange meal placements for them with the town's householders, as is customary in Jewish communities, he received the same reply from them all: "Thank you, but I have already been invited for the Shabbos meal."

Unfortunately, however, the coachman's budget was scarcely equal to his generous heart. It would be most difficult to believe that his dozen guests left his table with more than a shadow of a meal in their hungry stomachs.

Thus the coachman, with his twenty years of experience in extracting wagons from mudholes, took it upon himself to feed a small army, while the wealthy businessman, whose Shabbos meal leftovers could easily have fed every hungry man within a ten mile radius, floundered about in a ditch.

"Every soul," explained Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch, "is entrusted with a mission unique to her alone, and is granted the specific aptitudes, talents and resources necessary to excel in her ordained role. One must take care not to become one of those 'lost souls' who wander haplessly through life, trying their hand at every field of endeavor except for what is truly and inherently their own."

Source:

Sefer Hasichos 5704 [Talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch, 1943-44] p. 154.

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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With respect to Gideon, we find that: "In his days¹ the Jewish people were in distress. The Holy One, Blessed be He, sought a person who would find merit in them. When He found Gideon to be meritorious, because he found merit in them, an angel immediately appeared to him, as it says: "And the angel of G-d appeared to him and said to him, 'Go with this power, with **the power of the merit you have found in my children.**" "Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, it is within your capacity to find a defense for Israel. **In your merit they shall be redeemed.**"²

...The merit which will hasten the Redemption is the following:

Even in the Talmudic era it has been said that "all the deadlines have passed."³ Certainly now that we have endured a lengthy and arduous exile, the duration of which has exceeded 1,900 years, **and he has still not arrived...** And in regard to Teshuvah ("It depends only on Teshuvah³) [repentance, return, a prerequisite for Redemption], they have already done Teshuvah. Indeed, there is no Jewish person who has not entertained a thought of Teshuvah, (not just once, but) several times in the course of his lifetime. This [thought of Teshuvah] can transform "instantaneously"⁴ a perfectly wicked person into a perfectly righteous individual, in accordance with the Talmudic ruling⁵ that one who would betroth a woman "stipulating that I am a (perfectly⁶) righteous individual, even if he

1. *Tanchuma, Shoftim 4.*

2. *Yalkut Shimoni, Shoftim 62.*

3. *Sanhedrin 97b.*

4. *Zohar I, 129, end side a.*

5. *Kiddushin 49b. Rambam, Hilchos Ishus, 8:5. Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Even HoEzer, 38:31.*

6. Based on the version cited on *Or Zarua 112.*

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

were previously a perfectly wicked person, she is betrothed, for perhaps he had a thought of teshuvah."

Considering the above, it is with utmost certainty that our righteous Moshiach must arrive **here and now, immediately, [mamosh] in the most literal sense.**

Now, this exercise of finding merit⁷ in and of itself should suffice to bring about the Redemption. Moreover, in addition to the finding of merit, the imminence of Moshiach's arrival constitutes a **definitive ruling issued by many rabbis and halachic authorities.** Further, since Torah "is not in heaven,"⁸ this ruling issued by the earthly courts "obligates," so to speak, and affords a unique privilege to, the heavenly courts. **And so it will be confirmed!**

* * *

In our day and age, after G-d has vented His rage with the destruction of the Holy Temple, and after all of "our deeds and actions throughout the duration of exile,"⁹ and after all the decrees of oppression and persecution - may Hashem, indeed, shield us and protect us from them - the Jewish people have endured throughout the protracted and arduous final exile, particularly the Holocaust of the very last generation, the process of refinement and purification has, without any doubt, been achieved in full, "enough and even too much." Consequently, the [current¹⁰] "siege of the Babylonian

7. [i.e., that we have already passed all the deadlines as well as satisfying the condition of Teshuvah. Translator's note.]

8. Netzavim, 30:12. See Bava Metzia 59b.

9. Tanya, beginning of chapter 37.

10. [The Hebrew term Samach, which means "besieged," can also be rendered "supported." This talk was delivered on the fast day Asara b'Teves (the Tenth of the month of Teves), the anniversary of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king. The Rebbe here is alluding to the threats of the modern day Babylonian dictator, which are actually the events which serve as preludes to the Redemption. Translator's note.]

BESURAS HAGEULO

king"¹¹ has acquired an exclusively **positive** connotation, one that is **visibly and manifestly good, even to eyes of flesh**. In the words of our sages:¹² The Holy One Blessed be He says to Israel, "My children have no fear. All that I have done¹³ I have done exclusively for you... the time of your Redemption has arrived."

The emphasis of this generation - particularly this year, the year designated as "It shall be a year of wonders I will show him" - should be placed on the concept of G-d's support of those who have fallen,¹⁴ to strengthen and encourage the Jewish people, emphasizing particularly the support and encouragement acquired through faith in the coming of Moshiach and the implicit trust that "behold he (our righteous Moshiach) is coming."¹⁵ This should be accompanied with enhanced preparation for his arrival by way of teshuvah [repentance, return] and observance of Torah and mitzvos. In the words of the pronouncement of my sainted father-in-law - the leader of our generation: "immediate Teshuvah, immediate Redemption."¹⁶ "Return, O, Israel, unto G-d your G-d; prepare yourselves and your family to greet our righteous Moshiach, who shall arrive soon, in the most literal sense."¹⁷

*(From the talks of Shabbos Parshas Vayechi
(and Asara b'Teves, may it be transformed into joy) 5751)*

11. *Yechezkal* 24:2.

12. *Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu* 499.

13. This includes the efforts of the Babylonian King, who is merely an ax in the hands of the one who chops with it. [i.e. He is G-d's instrument.]

14. [The phrase *סומך נופלים* - "supports the falling" - is similar to the expression mentioned before - *בבל מלך מלך* - the Babylonian King besieged," which the Rebbe interpreted in a positive vein to mean that "he supported." Translator's note.]

15. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8. See *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on this verse (2:8(b)).

16. In his *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 5, end of p. 361 ff., 377 ff., 408 ff. and in other places.

17. *Hayom Yom* - 15 Teves.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

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Our generation is the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption, as proclaimed and announced by my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, the Yosef of our generation (named after the first Yosef who proclaimed and announced that "G-d will surely remember you and bring you up from this land to the land that was sworn to Avraham, to Yitzchak and the Yaakov"¹). For all our deeds and Divine service have already been completed, all appointed times have already passed, teshuvah has already been done, and all the preparations have already been finished In a manner of "great preparation," all is ready for the festive meal² of the time to come, Livyosan, Shor Habor³ and Yayin Meshumar.⁴

(From the talk of the 10th of Teves (may it be transformed into rejoicing), and Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, 14 Teves 5752)

1. Our Parsha 50:24.

2. Based on the expression of our Sages, of blessed memory - Avos, chapter 3, Mishneh 16. Sanhedrin 38a and Rashi's commentary.

3. See *Bava Basra* 75a. And *Vayikra Rabba* chapter 13:3.

4. *Brochos* 34:b. See there for cross 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** שתי' **Caplan**

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

* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. **Rina** bat Reb **Moshe Yosef** ע"ה **Aaron**
Passed away on Lag B'Omer - 18 Iyar, 5775

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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