

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

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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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)

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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.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

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We have already mentioned many times the words of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, that aside from the fact that already "all the appointed times have passed,"¹ the Jewish people have already done teshuvah and already everything is completed, even including "polishing the buttons." We only need G-d to open the eyes of the Jewish people so that they should see that the true and complete Redemption already exists, and we are sitting already by the prepared table at the festive meal of Livyosan, Shor HaBor,² etc.

Therefore it's understood... in this generation and at this time, after every requirement has been accomplished (as mentioned above), one has the complete assurance in the Torah that there will certainly be "(You will remember the day of your exodus from the land of Egypt) all the days of your life... to bring about the days of Moshiach."³

There is no need for any interruption, G-d Forbid, between "all the days of your life" and "the days of Moshiach" (which has been the situation for the Jewish people in all the generations **before** our generation). Rather, "all the days of your life" for every Jew, living physically as a soul in a body, includes in the simple sense (also) "the days of Moshiach." This is without an interruption, since the Redemption is actually coming imminently and immediately at this instant and in this place (even if the condition is one of night, "coming to Egypt"). Thus the last moment of exile and the very last instant of exile become the first moment and the very first instant of Redemption.

1. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

2. See *Bava Basra* 74b ff. *Pesachim* 119b and in other places.

3. *Brochos* 12b.

BESURAS HAGEULO

And from "the days of your life" at this time and in this place, without any interruption whatsoever, G-d Forbid, (even if he is already older than seventy years, etc.) every Jew will go immediately - totally and completely, "Reuven and Shimon descended, Reuven and Shimon arose,"⁴ - into the continuation of "all the days of your life.," into the days of Moshiach and the eternal life that then will be.

Practically, this means that the Divine service of the Jewish people now must be "to bring about the days of Moshiach." We must reveal that the situation of "coming to Egypt" in exile is in truth a situation of the "Redemption of Israel." [This is achieved] through his preparation of himself and others for the situation of "the days of Moshiach."

The above includes (particularly in conjunction with the day of passing of the Rambam⁵) strengthening and increasing the study of the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, especially the Laws of King Moshiach,⁶ in the last two chapters of the "Laws of Kings" which conclude the *Mishneh Torah*.

In addition to one's own study of this, one should also influence other Jews around him (men, women and children) in a manner of "raising many disciples,"⁷ and many more will see and emulate them.

May it be G-d's Will, that through the resolution itself will come imminently and immediately the reward, the actual fulfillment of the Rambam's words at the conclusion of his work,⁸ that after there

4. *Vayikra Rabba*, chapter 32:5. See there for cross references.

5. [*The Rambam passed away on 20 Teves. Translator's note.*]

6. This is how it is titled in the Venice edition of 5284 and 5310.

7. *Avos*, chapter 1, *Mishneh* 1.

8. *Laws of Kings*, end of chapter 11.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

already exists "a king from the House of Dovid, expert in the Torah and involved in mitzvos like Dovid his father... and he will compel all Israel to walk in [the ways of Torah], strengthen its breeches and fight the wars of G-d" - who is the "presumed Moshiach" [b'chezkas Moshiach] - there will already be immediately the "confirmed Moshiach" [Moshiach vadai], who "does all the above and succeeds, builds the Temple in its place and gathers the dispersed of Israel... He will then improve the whole world so that it serves G-d in unity,..."

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Shmos, 21 Teves 5752)

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Rabbi **Benyomin Daniel (Brad)** ben Reb **Ephraim** ע"ה **Hoffman**
Passed away on 24 Tamuz, 5783

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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