

# The 18<sup>th</sup> of Nissan

Birthday of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson

## INTRODUCTION

The Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, was born in Homel, Russia, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, 5638 (1878). He served as the Rav of Yekatrinsk (today, Dnepropetrovsk) for many years and was widely respected for his great piety, modesty and phenomenal mastery of all areas of Torah, including, and particularly, *Kabbalah*.

His staunch and fearless position to maintain uncompromised Torah observance, despite great opposition from the Communist regime, eventually resulted in harsh imprisonment and bitter exile for him.

On a Pesach-related note, Reb Levi Yitzchak achieved the seemingly impossible goal of persuading the highest echelons of government to forgo their plans of allowing only government-produced *matzos*. Instead, he received permission to secure kosher *matzos* of the maximum standard for the entire Russia, the supervision of which he personally controlled.

## JOYFUL FARBRENGEN

- It is fitting to hold a joyous *farbrengen* on this day, the birthday of the Rebbe's father.<sup>29</sup>

### 29. Significance of Chai Nissan

... On the 18<sup>th</sup> of Nissan (*Chai Nissan*), there is an augmentation of spiritual vitality (*chayus*) in all aspects of Nissan, whose central theme is the festival of Pesach.

Further, the 18<sup>th</sup> of Nissan carries an additional factor, of particular significance to myself, [i.e., the Rebbe,] being the firstborn son of my father, master and teacher, of blessed memory, who was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> of Nissan...

Of late, we have generated a great commotion (Yiddish: *tumul*) in an effort to have each Jew celebrate his or her birthday by holding a *farbrengen* and so on.

We should *certainly* do so on the birthday of a Jew who sacrificed his life for [the sake of maintaining] Torah and *mitzvos* [across Russia]. Moreover, he did so at great personal cost, to the extent that he remained in ... harsh exile until his dying day. And even following his passing, his body nevertheless remained buried in his place of exile, [Alma Ata, Russia]. However, now is not the appropriate time to dwell upon matters that do not generate great joy... (Nights of Pesach, 5748; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 90).

# a CALL to ACTION

SHABBOS HAGADOL  
THE 11<sup>TH</sup>, 13<sup>TH</sup>, 14<sup>TH</sup>, 18<sup>TH</sup> OF NISSAN  
THE SEDER NIGHT

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION  
FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE REBBE  
5748-5752

A PROJECT OF  
HaMaaseh Hu HaIkar

## Foreword

We are pleased to bring you a newly revised edition of *a CALL to ACTION*. This selection is a preview of a book that we are in the process of bringing to publication. Translated from its Hebrew counterpart, *HaMaaseh Hu Halkar*, this presentation is a collection of practical instruction pertaining to our bolstered ability and paralleled obligations, surrounding the month of Nissan.

*HaMaaseh Hu Halkar* is a compilation of *Hora'os* (directives) culled from the Rebbe's talks in the years 5748 to 5752 (1988-1992), from both edited and unedited sources ("*Muga*" and "*Bilti Muga*"). The text was translated into English by **Rabbi Yaakov Paley** and edited by **Rochel Chana Riven**.

At this time, when Moshiach's arrival is imminent, the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, has emphasized the primacy of action. We are now beginning to experience the era when we will fully appreciate "the superiority of deed" above scholarship. May this take place completely and immediately!

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## NO GEBRACHTS, EVEN FOR CHILDREN

- For the first seven days of Pesach, we are exceedingly careful to avoid all *gebrachts*: *matzos* that have become wet. We go so far as to: a) cover the *matzos* that are on the table so that no water will fall on them; and at the same time, b) we cover the water so that no crumbs of *matzah* will fall into it.<sup>27</sup>
- Children should also observe these stringent practices; it is a matter of proper training so that they, too, will be taught to refrain from *gebrachts*.<sup>28</sup>

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"vessels" (framework) of the very limitations it defies. [Therefore, we celebrate the unrestrained G-dly revelations of the night of Pesach specifically] through observing the many precise details of the *Leil HaSeder* ["Night of the '*Seder*,'"] meaning "order": exactly three *matzos*, four cups of wine, and so on.

This even applies to the fifth cup, Eliyahu's Cup: On the one hand, it represents a [G-dly] level beyond the entire system of restriction presented by all of Creation, [both physical and spiritual] ... which is why we do not drink the wine in this cup but merely gaze at it.... On the other hand, we pour the wine back into the wine bottle at the conclusion of the *Seder* ... which indicates that even this level is being drawn into, [i.e., contained and expressed within the framework, or] "vessels," [of this physical world] (*ibid.*, p. 8).

### Why do we sing as we pour the wine back into its bottle?

Regarding pouring the wine from Eliyahu's Cup back into the wine bottle: As explained earlier, it alludes to the elicitation of "The fifth portion which belongs to Pharaoh" and its containment in physical "vessels."

This is accomplished in a manner of song and melody – amidst joy – for we are taught that "joy breaks through all restricting boundaries."

### Why the melody of Keili Atah?

Further, the tune sung while the wine is being returned to the bottle is set to the words [from *Tehillim* 118:28], *Keili Atah*, "You are my G-d...." This indicates that *Atah* ("You"); i.e., the Essence of G-d Himself, becomes *Keili* ("my G-d"). [In other words, the loftiest levels of G-dliness are now absorbed within the person, to the extent that they become part of himself.]

### Why wait until now to return the wine?

[As the Rebbe explains, we pour the wine back into the bottle at the end of the *Seder*, after reciting "Next year in Jerusalem!" since the concept of bringing this lofty level into the "vessels" of this world is predominantly an accomplishment of the future Redemption] (*ibid.*, p. 13, fn. 126).

27. Last Day of Pesach, 5748; *Hisvaadyos*, p. 171.

28. Nights of Pesach, 5748, fn. 258; *Hisvaadyos*, p. 111.

before *Birchas HaMazon* only on specific occasions.<sup>23</sup> Lately, however, it has become customary to *always* pour this cup before *Birchas HaMazon*.<sup>24</sup>

#### POUR IT BACK WITH SONG

• At the conclusion of the *Seder*, after declaring, “*LeShanah HaBaah B’Yerushalayim*” (“Next year in Jerusalem!”), we then return the wine from Eliyahu’s Cup back into the wine bottle.<sup>25</sup> While this is being done, all present should sing the Alter Rebbe’s melody, *Keili Atah*.<sup>26</sup>

23. [Unlike the common custom quoted in the Rebbe’s *Haggadah*, whereby Eliyahu’s Cup is only poured *after Birchas HaMazon*.]

24. *Parshas Metzora*, 5749, subnote to fn. 78; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 8.

#### Symbolizing extreme proximity to the Redemption

[As the Rebbe explains (*ibid.*), the first two cups of the *Seder* represent our redemption from Egypt while the last two cups represent our future Redemption through Moshiach.

Although Eliyahu’s Cup represents the future Redemption, when the world will reach a state of perfection, it is nevertheless poured *before* reciting “Pour out Your wrath...” (a declaration which indicates that there is still a need to refine the world). This is done to indicate that even before the culmination of the exile, and while it is still in its final phase, we can nevertheless sample a “taste” of the imminent Redemption.]

25. **Intense G-dliness flows into our world**

The fifth cup, Eliyahu’s Cup, represents the supreme spiritual level alluded to in the verse, “The fifth portion [of grain] belongs to Pharaoh” (*Bereishis* 47:24). [To explain: There are five soul levels, the fifth and highest being the *Yechidah*, or essence, of the soul. The four lower levels reflect the four levels of G-dly manifestation, while the fifth, the *Yechidah*, represents G-d’s Essence. Evil, too, has five levels, and Pharaoh represents its fifth: the essence of evil. On this night, we pour five cups to symbolize our liberation from the five levels of evil and our “acquisition” of the levels of G-dliness.]

Pouring the wine from the fifth cup into a wine bottle symbolizes that even the most superior G-dly level is elicited and encloded within the “vessels,” [i.e., the parameters of our physical world], represented here by the bottle that contains the wine (*ibid.*, p. 8).

26. *Ibid.*, fn. 79.

#### Limitless light into finite physicality

Pesach [literally means and also represents] the theme of “skipping over”; i.e., an exodus from every limit, restriction and boundary, [i.e., *mitzarim*, a word closely related to *Mitzrayim*, “Egypt”].

Nevertheless, this transcendent mode of conduct is specifically revealed within the

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# Shabbos HaGadol

The Shabbos before Pesach

## INTRODUCTION

The Shabbos immediately prior to Pesach is called Shabbos HaGadol (“the Great Shabbos”), to commemorate a great miracle that took place on our behalf:

In anticipation of their Exodus from Egypt, the Jews were commanded to select a lamb for a Pesach sacrifice. They were to bring the animal into their homes on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan in readiness for the final plague – the death of the Egyptians’ firstborn sons – that would occur on the 15<sup>th</sup> and result in their liberation.

Since the Egyptians worshiped sheep, they wanted to know why [all the Jews were busying themselves with the object of the Egyptians’ idolatry]. Far from being intimidated, the Jews answered them openly and with great conviction, displaying absolute faith in the upcoming plague and subsequent redemption.

Miraculously, no Jew was harmed for obeying G-d’s command. In fact, the firstborn of Egypt were so influenced by this display of conviction that they led a revolt against Pharaoh, fighting to free the Jews and avert the plague. Many Egyptians were killed in the civil war that ensued.

This event is indicated in the verse, “He smote the Egyptians with their [very own] firstborn” (*Tehillim* 136:10).

So even before the actual Exodus took place, and while the Jews were yet enduring the final phase of their exile, the redemption had already begun – and the very forces of exile (i.e., the firstborn, considered the “strength” of

them articles of great spiritual value.<sup>18</sup>

## PUBLIC SEDARIM ON BOTH NIGHTS

- In some places where a community *Seder* has been scheduled, the organizers have planned to hold a *Seder* on only one of the first two nights of Pesach due to lack of funds or similar reasons. It is most urgent, and certainly worthwhile, that [they alter their plans, so that] a community *Seder* is held on *both* nights of Pesach, even if it means dividing their [already limited] funds between the two nights.<sup>19</sup>

## RECITE THE HAGGADAH JOYFULLY

- It is customary<sup>20</sup> to recite the main body of the *Haggadah* – the section entitled “Maggid,” which begins with the Four Questions – in a happy tune.<sup>21</sup>

## POUR ELIYAHU’S CUP BEFORE BENTCHING

- In the past,<sup>22</sup> “Eliyahu’s Cup” (*Kos Shel Eliyahu*) was poured

18. *Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei* 5748; *Hisvaaduyos* p. 480.

19. ... But certainly they will not need to resort to this, since G-d will surely bless those organizing the *Seder*, providing them with all that they require, and even more (*Parshas Tzav*, 5751; *Hisvaaduyos*, pp. 443-444).

20. **Do everything joyfully**

On Pesach, all of one’s affairs ... are specifically accomplished with joy (19 Nissan, 5749, during an address to children of Tzivos Hashem; *Hisvaaduyos*, pp. 443-444).

21. **Ingredients of intoxicating joy**

... Further, [our Sages state that] “joy comes only with wine,” which in this case refers to the joy that comes with drinking the cup of wine used to recite Kiddush [at the beginning of the *Seder*], and then drinking another three cups [throughout the *Seder*].

So in addition to the mandated rejoicing on every festival – for as the Torah states, they are “festivals for rejoicing” (*moadim lesimcha*) – [we also have the combined effects of the heightened joy of Pesach and the joy of the four cups]. Taken together, these factors create an exceedingly *great* joy (*ibid.*).

22. [In his *Haggadah*, the Rebbe makes reference to the conduct of the Previous Rebbe during the Pesach *Sedarim* of the year 5703 (1943). The Rebbeim of Chabad would personally pour Eliyahu’s Cup and later return it to the bottle. Notably, in the year 5703, the Previous Rebbe poured the wine back *before Birchas HaMazon*.]

# The Seder Night

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The many Chabad customs pertaining to Pesach and the *Seder* nights have been published in detail in the Rebbe's *Haggadah* and numerous subsequent publications.

Below are a few additional instructions that the Rebbe introduced or emphasized in the years 5748-5751 (1988-1991).

## GIVE EVERY CHILD HIS OR HER OWN HAGGADAH

• Every child (and indeed, every adult as well) should have his or her own *tzedakah* box, *Siddur*, *Chumash* and similar holy books, including a *Pesach Haggadah*.<sup>15</sup> This will generate greater excitement and enthusiasm to actually put these articles to use.<sup>16</sup>

## NEW SIDDIR BEFORE YOM TOV

• Ideally, children should receive a brand new *Siddur* and the like before the festival. If, [for the sake of increasing their *yom tov* joy,] we are instructed<sup>17</sup> to buy them nosh and the like – items containing no essential holiness – we should certainly buy

### 15. With pictures

... To end [this *farbrengen*] with a new “decree”: In the past, we have discussed the necessity of every child owning a personal *Siddur*, *Chumash*, and *tzedakah* box. Since it is now thirty days before Pesach, it would be very desirable to prepare *Haggados* for each child. Obviously, they should be attractively made, with pictures, etc., in order to attract the children. In this way, they will not only know the Four Questions, but will be able to answer them....

May it be G-d's will that even before the time comes for them to ask and answer these questions on Pesach, that our biggest question will be answered – the inexplicable continuation of the exile – with the arrival of Moshiach and the complete Redemption (Purim, 5747; *Sichos In English*, vol. 35).

16. *Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei*, 5748; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 480.

17. [See the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* 529:7.]

Egypt, were passionately fighting for the Jews' redemption.<sup>1</sup>

## REVIEW THE HAGGADAH WITH CHILDREN

• The obligations of Pesach place specific focus on children.<sup>2</sup> This also extends to Shabbos HaGadol, the Shabbos before Pesach, as it is written, “It is customary to have the children read through the *Haggadah* on Shabbos HaGadol, in order to familiarize them with the text, thus enabling them, when the time comes, to understand the procedure of the *Seder* night, ask the Four Questions, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

I have not actually seen this done [in Chabad]. Nevertheless, such a case could well be included in our Sages' teaching,<sup>4</sup> that “not seeing is not a proof that it did not occur....”<sup>5</sup>

## INCREASE PESACH PREPARATIONS

• On Shabbos HaGadol, the “Great Shabbos,” we should increase in all matters pertaining to Pesach – doing so in a manner of “greatness” (*gadlus*):

1. See the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 430:1. See also below, fn. 6.

### 2. Keep the kids up

It is because of this directive to transmit the story of the Exodus to the children that the Sages instituted a number of measures designed to prevent them from falling asleep at the *Seder* (Shabbos HaGadol, 5748, fn. 67; *Hisvaaduyos*, pp. 515-516).

### Review the Haggadah

On the days between Shabbos HaGadol and Pesach, we should again increase in, and complete, all that is necessary to prepare ourselves for Pesach.

Even on Shabbos HaGadol, while it is still Shabbos, we should begin with those preparations that are permissible on Shabbos, such as prepping our children for the *Seder* night. We should make sure they know the Four Questions and the rest of the *Seder* procedure, enabling us to fulfill the Torah's command, “You shall tell your child [the story of the Exodus]” on the night of Pesach (*Parshas Metzora*, 5749; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 15).

3. [Sources given in the *sichah* (*ibid.*) are: ראב"ה סימן תכ"ה, רע"ב, רע"ג, רע"ד.]

4. *Mishnah Ediyos* 2:2. [When something usually performed out of the public eye is not witnessed, we cannot claim that it did not happen.]

5. *Parshas Metzora*, 5749; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 15.

We should add – expending far greater energy than we have until now – in our Pesach preparations, our study of the Pesach laws, and our donations to *Maos Chitim* (supplying Pesach requirements to the needy).<sup>6</sup>

#### SHABBOS OF GREAT JOY

- On Shabbos HaGadol, we should experience *great* joy – as was clearly the case during the original Shabbos HaGadol; i.e., in Egypt, when the “great miracle” that was the “start of the redemption and its many miracles,” transpired.

[We should emulate] the Jews of that time [who] were in a state of *great* joy.<sup>7</sup>

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#### 6. The Shabbos that enables Pesach

It is now the last Shabbos before Pesach, known as “Shabbos HaGadol.” We should therefore infuse a measure of “greatness” into all aspects of Pesach, for, [since the blessings for each week are elicited on the preceding Shabbos,] it is on this Shabbos that all aspects of Pesach are blessed.

In other words: In addition to our having been preoccupied with Pesach preparations thirty days in advance, and having steadily increased these activities from Rosh Chodesh Nissan onward ... still, when Shabbos HaGadol arrives, we should again increase – and do so in a manner of “greatness,” [i.e., magnitude].

... This way, we will cause a “great miracle” to occur for us as well, in the spirit of the verse, “He smote Egypt with their firstborn.” That is to say, G-d will cause the contemporary “Egyptian firstborn”; i.e., the evil forces’ bastion of might, to itself demand and wage battle in order to secure the Redemption of the Jewish people from this final exile (Shabbos HaGadol, 5748; *Hisvaaduyos*, pp. 515-516).

#### 7. Day of great joy

One of the fundamental aspects of Shabbos observance is experiencing joy, as our Sages state: “The verse ‘And in the days of your rejoicing...’ refers to the day of Shabbos.”

How much more so on Shabbos HaGadol, the *Great* Shabbos! We should certainly experience *great* joy (*Parshas Metzora*, 5749; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 15).

#### INTRODUCTION

In commemoration of the fact that G-d spared the Jewish firstborn when he smote the firstborn of the Egyptians, all firstborn Jewish men and boys fast on *erev* Pesach.

It is customary to arrange a *Siyum*, a ceremony where a tractate of *Talmud* is publicly completed, attended by firstborn men and boys. The ceremony is considered a *seudas mitzvah*, at which one should eat, and they are then exempt from fasting the rest of the day.

#### NO KNOWLEDGE NEEDED

- Young children (either biologically young or those who are “young” in their Torah knowledge) should also participate in the *Siyum*, despite their inability to comprehend the material.<sup>13</sup>

#### LAST MINUTE MAOS CHITIM

- Just before Pesach, we should again increase and complete our efforts at providing the needy with all that they require, and doing so with alacrity.<sup>14</sup>

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13. *Parshas Matos-Masei*, 5751; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 80.

14. 11 Nissan, 5748; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 50.

מוקדש לב"ק אדמו"ר מלך המשיח



יחי אדוננו מורנו ורבינו מלך המשיח לעולם ועד

increase all aspects of Judaism – Torah and *mitzvos* – in each location. In addition to promoting the study of all other Torah works, we should place particular emphasis on the study of *Rambam*.<sup>10</sup>

#### LARGE FARBRENGEN CLOSE TO EREV PESACH

- We should hold a *farbrengen* in an atmosphere charged with the joy that stems from Judaism – Torah, and *mitzvos*. The *farbrengen* should draw the participation of many men, women and children.<sup>11</sup>
- Clearly, *erev* Pesach is not a conducive time for large gatherings. We should therefore hold the *farbrengen* in proximity to *erev* Pesach.<sup>11</sup>
- However, since the *farbrengen* will not be held on the date of the birthday itself, we should put a far greater effort into promoting it.<sup>12</sup>

10. *Parshas Tzav*, 5748; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 518.

##### **Birthday of a Leader of Jewry**

Earlier, [see above in the section on 25 Adar entitled, “Birthdays,”] we discussed the Birthday Customs that we propose each Jew observe on his or her own birthday. They include making positive resolutions to increase in all areas of Judaism – Torah and *mitzvos* – amid a joyful *farbrengen*, and so on. We should certainly conduct ourselves thus (and with even greater energy) on the birthdays of *tzaddikim* and leaders of Jewry.

Needless to say, this includes the birthday of *Rambam* (on *erev* Pesach), the day when his *mazal* is at the peak of its strength.

We should therefore utilize this auspicious occasion ... through holding great gatherings at a time which best fits local conditions and the like; either on *erev* Pesach itself or on an adjoining date (*ibid.*, pp. 517-518).

11. 11 Nissan, 5748; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 38.

12. *Ibid.*

##### **Wrong date requires extra boost**

... In a manner similar to the reading of the *Megillah* on Purim, the law stipulates that, “When reading the *Megillah* on the correct date, even an individual can read it on his own and thus fulfill his obligation. However, when reading it on a different date, [as explained in the laws of Purim,] then it requires a *minyan* of ten Jews” (*ibid.*, fn. 23).

# The 11<sup>th</sup> of Nissan

## The Rebbe’s Birthday

### INTRODUCTION

The Rebbe was born in Nikolayev, Russia, on *Yud-Alef* (the 11<sup>th</sup> of) Nissan, 5662 (1902), and was named after the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Lubavitcher Rebbe).

Notably, the first time that the importance of a birthday was made known to the public – and indeed, publicized as an instruction for all to follow – was the Rebbe’s entry for 11 Nissan, in *HaYom Yom*:

“On a birthday, one should spend time in seclusion. He should recall his experiences [of the past year] and contemplate them deeply. He should then repent and correct whatever requires repentance and correction.”

Clearly, being the birthday of the Leader of our Generation, the 11<sup>th</sup> of Nissan is a significant day for all Jews.<sup>21</sup>

### SPIRITUAL: TORAH, MITZVOS, FESTIVE FARBRENGEN

- We should utilize this special day in a manner that will cause an increase in all matters of Torah and *mitzvos*, amidst joy.
- This is accomplished by holding a joyful *farbrengen*, attended by many Jewish men, women and children (obviously with a *mechitzah* [partition] in accordance with *Shulchan Aruch*).<sup>22</sup>
- The atmosphere should be charged with a joy that stems from

21. See the Rebbe’s discussion of this *HaYom Yom* on 11 Nissan, 5748 (1988), *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 36.

22. **To distinguish between diverse forces of holiness**

... The *mechitzah* is a “barrier” that stems from holiness, from the Torah, and it serves to emphasize the unique qualities of the people on either of the two sides. A *mechitzah* announces that those on either side of it carry an advantage which those of the other side do not possess (11 Nissan, 5748; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 38, fn. 16).

Torah and *mitzvos*.<sup>23</sup>

#### PHYSICAL: GOOD FOOD AND DRINK AT FARBRENGEN

• We should also make the *farbrengen* joyful in a physical sense, by providing food and drink:<sup>24</sup> “bread that satiates the heart of man,” and especially the kind of food and drink that naturally causes joy.

#### GREAT JOY, LITTLE MASHKEH

• Needless to say, the participants of these *farbrengens* should drink within the established limit of four shot glasses [of alcoholic beverage] – *small* shot glasses at that – and even this amount should not be drunk if it will “go to your head.”<sup>25</sup>

#### STUDY THE REBBE’S KAPITL WITH CHASSIDUS

• Many follow the custom of studying the chapter of *Tehillim*<sup>26</sup>

23. *Ibid*, p. 38.

24. **Why stress physical food in a spiritual celebration?**

[*Chassidus* explains that it is specifically the greatest of spiritual rungs which are able to manifest themselves within the most mundane realms. In this case] the *mazal*, the supernal source of the Jewish soul [which is most effective on one’s birthday,] is so extremely lofty, that it can even be elicited and revealed [and yet retain its spiritual potency] in the very lowest of levels and matters that concern one’s corporeal body, [imbuing even physical food and drink with sanctity] (*ibid.*, fn. 17).

25. **Not more than four**

There is no need to elaborate on a matter that is straightforward and understood even by the most simple-minded, who, [were they not specifically informed,] may have otherwise assumed that things should be done differently; [i.e., that it is permissible to drink in excess of the Rebbe’s “decree” of not drinking more than four shot glasses].

**Don’t be more righteous than the Rebbe**

[They would have justified their drinking, claiming that drinking more than four shot glasses was necessary] to indicate their participation in *simchah shel mitzvah*, “the joy of a *mitzvah*,” which they are ready to celebrate to an immeasurably greater extent than that which they were instructed by Chassidic elders (*Ziknei HaMashpiim*) – even “outdoing” the clear and explicit instruction of the Leader of this Generation [not to drink more than four shots]... (*ibid.*, fn. 19).

26. **A psalm a day**

[There is a custom, passed down from the Baal Shem Tov, for each person to recite each day, the chapter of *Tehillim* corresponding to his or her age [plus one:

# The 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan

Birthday of the Rambam

#### BRIEF HISTORY

*Rambam* (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon) was born in Cordova, Spain, on the 14th of Nissan, 4895 (1135). In addition to his fame as an outstanding Jewish leader and sage, esteemed by rulers and a top physician in his days, *Rambam* authored many important and unparalleled Torah works.<sup>8</sup>

In 5744 (1984), the Rebbe initiated a daily study cycle of *Rambam’s Mishneh Torah*, which enables the reader to have a basic knowledge of all the Torah’s laws (or *Sefer HaMitzvos*, outlining all of the Torah’s commandments). The goal of this project is to bring the entire Torah within the reach of each Jew.

#### PROMOTE DAILY STUDY OF RAMBAM

- On *Rambam’s* birthday, we should first and foremost seize the opportunity to promote the daily study cycles of *Rambam*.
- These cycles are gradated according to ability: [Preferably, one should study] three chapters of *Mishneh Torah* a day; or, [if that is not feasible, he should study] one chapter a day; or [if this too is not possible, there is the daily study of] *Sefer HaMitzvos*.<sup>9</sup>

#### SPREAD JUDAISM EVERYWHERE

- We should utilize this auspicious day, when *Rambam’s mazal* (the supernal source of his soul) is most effective to generate a great “clamor” (in a holy sense, that is). Our goal should be to further

8. [They include: *Mishneh Torah* (which codified all of Jewish law), *The Thirteen Principles of Faith*, *Pirush HaMishnayos* (Commentary to the Mishnah), *Sefer HaMitzvos* (Listing the 613 Commandments with their Scriptural sources), *Moreh Nevuchim* (Guide to the Perplexed).]

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44. See also Night of 13 Nissan, 5751; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 48.



Pesach, and then continue to the rest of his works on the Written and Oral Torah.

#### STUDY TEACHINGS OF OTHER REBBEIM

- We should include in our study the innovative Torah teachings of recent generations up until the times of the Tzemach Tzedek, as well as the teachings of his successors, the subsequent Rebbeim of Chabad – including the teachings of the Rebbe, Leader of our Generation.<sup>31</sup>

#### TOPICS OF THEIR MAIN CONCERN

- We should particularly focus on studying topics that our own Rebbe, as well as the Tzemach Tzedek – and also *Rambam*, whose birthday is *erev* Pesach – set as their main preoccupation.<sup>32</sup>

#### TZEDAKAH AND MAOS CHITIM

- We should increase in giving *tzedakah*, for it “hastens the Redemption”; as our Sages state, “The Jews will be redeemed only in the merit of *tzedakah*.” We should especially focus on an extremely timely cause: *Maos Chitim* (supplying Pesach requirements for the needy).<sup>33</sup>

31. ... [i.e., the Previous Rebbe] whose first name, [Yosef.] means “addition” – alluding to an increase in all matters of Torah and *mitzvos* (*ibid.*).

32. [Yiddish: *In vas zei haben zich mer gekacht* (*ibid.*).]

##### Personal area of Torah

... After all, every Jew, and certainly the great personalities and Leaders of Jewry, have a part of Torah that is unique to them; as we recite in our daily prayers [at the conclusion of the *Amidah*], “And grant us *our* portion in Your Torah.”

Now, although [the majority of Jews] do not know [where their unique “portion” is to be found], the unique “portions” of the Leaders of Jewry are known from the directives they issue and their actual conduct; i.e., those matters in which they were most preoccupied (*ibid.*).

33. *Parshas Tzav*, 5750; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 29.

– the psalms written by [King David,] the “sweet singer of Israel” – which we begin reciting daily [on the Rebbe’s birthday; i.e., corresponding to the Rebbe’s new age,] along with its Chassidic explanations. This material has been published [in the annual *Kovetz Yud-Alef Nissan*].<sup>27</sup>

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e.g., if one is celebrating his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, he begins saying *kapitle* 41]. According to Chabad custom, one also recites the chapter that corresponds to the Rebbe’s age. This year, beginning with the Rebbe’s 106<sup>th</sup> birthday (11 Nissan, 5768 / April 16, 2008), we will begin reciting Psalm 107 – *Hodu Ladoshem Ki Tov* (the Psalm of Thanksgiving).]

27. Night of 13 Nissan, 5751, fn. 77; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 48.

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# The 13<sup>th</sup> of Nissan

Yahrtzeit of the Tzemach Tzedek

## INTRODUCTION

The Tzemach Tzedek (the third Lubavitcher Rebbe) passed away in Lubavitch, Russia, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, 5626 (1866).

## STUDY HIS TEACHINGS

• We should make certain to utilize this propitious day, along with its adjoining days, to add in our study of the Tzemach Tzedek's works; both his books on the revealed parts of Torah, entitled *Tzemach Tzedek*, and particularly, his works on the inner teachings of Torah; i.e., *Kabbalah* and *Chassidus*, beginning with his notes on *Likkutei Torah*.<sup>28</sup>

## THREE TIMES ON THE YAHRTZEIT

• Ideally, we should study from the teachings of the Tzemach Tzedek on at least three occasions during the twenty-four hours of his *yahrtzeit* – the more, the better!<sup>28</sup>

## HIS TEACHINGS ON RAMBAM

• Preferably, we should link the Tzemach Tzedek's *yahrtzeit* (on the 13th of Nissan) with *Rambam's* birthday (on the 14th of Nissan). This is done by studying the Tzemach Tzedek's

28. Night of 13 Nissan, 5751, *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 48; and *Parshas Tzav*, 5750; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 29.

### Bring Moshiach through study

We should increase those aspects of our Divine service that have the particular ability to hasten and actually bring the Redemption ... with special focus on timely themes ... [such as our service related to] the *yahrtzeit* of the Tzemach Tzedek.

In his Torah teachings, as is known, the Tzemach Tzedek put extraordinary effort into unifying the inner and revealed teachings of Torah. This is something that brings the true and complete Redemption led by Moshiach, who is referred to, [among his many other names and titles,] as both "Tzemach" and "Tzedek." Therefore, we should make certain to utilize this propitious day ... to add in our study of the Tzemach Tzedek's works (*Parshas Tzav*, 5750; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 29).

explanations of *Rambam's* works, as well as the Chassidic explanations of the topics written in the beginning of *Rambam's Mishneh Torah*.<sup>29</sup>

## FOLLOW HIS DIRECTIVES

• We should add in our observance of the directives of the Tzemach Tzedek: instructions that are recorded in his works, as well as directives that have been transmitted orally. This is especially pertinent to our generation, which has merited [access to] the prolific publication of his many teachings, including his numerous directives.<sup>30</sup>

## HIS TEACHINGS ON NISSAN AND PESACH

• We should begin with the Tzemach Tzedek's teachings and directives pertaining to the month of Nissan and the festival of

### 29. G-d's Unity

We should promote the study of *Rambam*, beginning with the daily study cycles.

Ideally, we should "combine" *Rambam's* birthday with the Tzemach Tzedek's *yahrtzeit* by studying the Tzemach Tzedek's explanations of *Rambam's* works, as well as the Chassidic explanations of the topics written in the beginning of *Rambam's* [*Mishneh Torah*]: "To know that there is a Primordial Being ... and that all existence ... exists only within the truth of His existence."

[Note that the Rebbe's birthday (the 11<sup>th</sup> of Nissan) is also in close proximity to the *Rambam's* birthday, and the Rebbe likewise has many explanations of *Rambam* in general, and especially on the beginning of *Mishneh Torah*.]

### First study laws, then discover secrets

We should also study those topics to which the *Rambam* merely hinted, in keeping with the verse, "Give [a hint] to the wise and he will become even wiser." The way to study *Rambam*, as is known, is to first study the plain meaning of the laws, which he set down – [to quote his own description of his work] – "using clear terminology" but "in a concise manner."

Following this, we should scrutinize *Rambam's* brief statements (written "in a concise manner") to discover the great breadth that these statements contain.

We can also derive matters that *Rambam* himself never even (consciously) had in mind when composing his work. Such matters were [certainly present, but were] concealed and merely alluded to, even within the *Rambam's* own mind .... These were later brought to light and innovated by future veteran scholars.

It is worth adding that the ability for a veteran scholar to introduce such innovations is actually within the grasp of each and every Jew... (Night of 13 Nissan, 5751; *Hisvaaduyos*, pp. 48-49).

30. Erev Pesach, 5750; *Hisvaaduyos*, p. 44.