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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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THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

world to come"⁵), when there will be a complete consumption of the fish⁶ (after completion of all the preparations on the eve of Shabbos) "from the flesh⁷ of **Livyosan**," and also the Shor HaBar and Yayin HaMeshumar.

*(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vaeira, 28 Teves,
Blessing of the New Month of Shvat, 5752 (b))*

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** ע"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** ה"ד
Shagalov
Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** ע"ה
Ekman
Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** ע"ה
Marenburg
Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** ע"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** שתחיל
Shagalov
DEDICATED BY
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y. and Gittel Rochel** שיחיי
Shagalov

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Executive Director

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5. *Tamid* at the end.

6. [We may explain the comparison as follows: those who are likened to fish will be rewarded with a festive meal of the great fish, *Levyasan*, in the days of *Moshiach*. Translator's note.]

7. *Bava Basra* 75a.

When it occurs that "one passes away¹ on the eve of Shabbos"² it becomes a "good sign"³ (if there is still any need for "signs") that the Divine service of the emissaries (*shlichus*), to refine and purify secular matters, has already been completed and perfected. This was done in a manner of "a wolf that tears" through "the offspring of Yosef" (my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation) who are compared to fish.⁴ Everything is prepared for the festive meal of the time to come ("a day that is all Shabbos and rest, in the

1. *Kesubos* 103b.

2. The passing of the venerable Chassid Rabbi Moshe Yitzchok Hecht on the eve of this Shabbos. See in the talk at length. (*publisher's note*).

3. When it says "a good sign **for him**," this describes not just a particular individual, but also describes his role as a member of the community of students and emissaries of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation.

4. [This talk was delivered in honor of Rabbi Hecht. The name "Hecht" in Yiddish is the same as the word for fish (specifically, a pike). The Rebbe here discusses the connection between the family name ("Hecht") and eating fish on Shabbos. More precisely, the pike is a "fish that tears" (which is nevertheless kosher). The Talmud teaches that for every creature on dry land there is a corresponding creature in the sea. Thus the "hecht" (pike) corresponds to the wolf, since both are creatures that tear. The tribe of Binyomin is compared to a wolf, and the Rebbe points out that Binyomin tore for kedusha, that is, he "snatched" things from this world and elevated them to kedusha, holiness. The evening before Shabbos is, of course, a time for preparing the Shabbos meal, including fish, which is traditionally eaten on Shabbos. Furthermore, our Sages teach that one should add to the time of Shabbos, both its beginning and its conclusion, from the weekday. In other words, one should tear time from the week for Shabbos, just as a wolf tears. This indicates the conclusion of the Divine service of the six days of work, namely, the purification and elevation of the things of this world so that they will be included in the holiness of Shabbos. Therefore, fish is prepared before Shabbos (and this corresponds to the wolf's (Binyomin's) Divine service of "snatching"). The preparation of the fish before Shabbos (and the "tearing" of time from the week) result in the eating of the fish on Shabbos (the time of rest). Translator's note.]

7:28

ועלו ובאו

*And the river shall swarm with frogs.
They will come up and enter your
home, your bedroom, and your bed ..
your ovens, and your kneading bowls*

Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah¹ learned self-sacrifice from the frogs, who entered the ovens of the Egyptians to carry out the will of G-d.

Talmud, Pesachim 53b

The world maintains that if one cannot go under (circumvent an obstacle) then one is to go over; but I say, to begin with go over.

Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch

“To the Point of Self-sacrifice”

*At a gathering on Tammuz 12 5745 (July 1, 1985)
marking the 105th anniversary of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok*

1. The three who refused to bow to Nebuchadnezer's image, even under the threat of being cast into a fiery furnace (Daniel 3).

Vo'eira / "To the Point of Self-Sacrifice"

Schneerson's birth², the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita related the following incident from the life of his illustrious predecessor:

It was during Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok's younger years, when the czarist regime still ruled the Russian Empire. A new decree against the Jewish community was in the making, aimed at forcing changes in the structure of the rabbinate and Jewish education. Rabbi Sholom DovBer dispatched his son Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok to the Russian capital of Petersburg to prevent the enactment of the decree. When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok asked how long he was to stay in Petersburg, his father replied, "to the point of self-sacrifice."

Upon his arrival in Petersburg, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok learned that the decree had already reached the desk of Stalinin, the interior minister of Russia and arguably the most powerful man in the Russian Empire. The ruling Czar's intelligence (or lack thereof) made him a virtual rubber stamp for whichever minister the prevailing political climate favored; at that particular time, His Highness was led by the nose by Interior Minister Stalinin, a heartless tyrant and rabid anti-Semite who was personally responsible for many of the devastating pogroms which were 'arranged' for the Jews of Russia in those years.

Living in Petersburg was an elderly scholar, a former teacher and mentor of the Interior Minister. Rabbi Yosef

2. The 12th of Tammuz in the Jewish calendar.

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into three periods that parallel the three general periods throughout all the generations (before the giving of the Torah, the giving of the Torah, and the days of Moshiach). These are indicated in the three parshas: Shmos, Vaeira and Bo:

The first period, forty years (5640-5680), was during the leadership of **his father**, when the finishing touches of the process of the spreading of the Wellsprings commenced, particularly through the establishment of the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim (which was administered by his only son). This followed the pattern and is analogous to the Divine service of **the Patriarchs**, who prepared for and introduced the concept of the giving of the Torah.

The second period includes the thirty years of **his leadership** during his lifetime in this world (5680-5710). During this period his unique innovation in his role as the leader of the teachings of Chabad Chassidus was his spreading of the wellsprings outward - outward in the most literal sense - to the extent that during his last ten years (the completion and perfection of his Divine service) the innovation in the spreading of the wellsprings outward reached the lower hemisphere (wherein the giving of the Torah did not occur). This followed the pattern and is analogous to the innovation of the giving of the Torah.

In the third period, the continuation of the leadership after his elevation from the physical (from the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the eleventh year (5711⁷), the spreading of the wellsprings outward increased, with greater strength and greater vigor, into all corners of the world, until the Divine service was completed and perfected. Everything is already prepared for the festive meal of the future - the days of Moshiach.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vaeira, 28 Teves, Blessing of the New Month of Shvat, 5752 (a))

7. See the pamphlet from the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vaeira 5750, note 99 (*Sefer HaSichos* 5750, vol. 1, p. 255-56.)

The tenth of Shvat ("the tenth is holy,"¹ in every month, and all the more so the tenth day of the eleventh month²) is the day of passing of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation.

The concept of a day of *hilulo*³ is explained by the Alter Rebbe in Tanya:⁴ "all his deeds, his Torah and his Divine service that he performed throughout his life... reveals itself and shines in a revelation from above to below... affecting salvation in the midst of the land." Further and fundamental, this includes giving strength for a continued **growth** with greater force and greater vigor after his passing, as a result of his **sowing** "all his deeds and Torah and Divine service that he performed throughout his life."⁵ [This continues] until the flowering of the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach in this generation (the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption), according to the testimony of the leader of our generation that all the appointed times have already passed, and all is ready for the festive meal of the future, a table prepared with the festive meal of Livyosan, Shor HaBar and Yayin HaMeshumar.

One might say that the era that commenced with the day of *hilulo*, the tenth of Shvat (the seventy years of life he lived in this world, and continuing for more than forty years⁶) can be divided

1. *Bechukosai* 27:32.

2. [See below #65 for the significance of the eleventh month. Translator's note.]

3. [*Hilulo* literally means "wedding," and is used to refer to the reunion of a soul with its Maker. Translator's note.]

4. *Iggeres HaKodesh*, sections 27 and 28.

5. See *Iggeres HaKodesh* there: "And in the *chakal tapuchin kadishin* ["orchard of the holy apples," i.e., the Garden of Eden] **are implanted** most sublime lights... growths in the second degree."

6. For then "a person reaches the level of his teacher" (*Avodah Zara* 5, beginning of second side) because "G-d gave you a heart to understand, eyes to see and ears to hear" (*Tavo* 29:3).

Yitzchok succeeded in befriending this man, who was greatly impressed by the scope and depth of the young chassid's knowledge. For many an evening the two would sit and talk in the old man's study.

One day, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok told his new friend the purpose of his stay in Petersburg and pleaded with him to assist him in reaching the Interior Minister. The old scholar replied: "To speak with him would be useless. The man has a cruel and malicious heart, and I severed all contact with this vile creature many years ago. But there is one thing I can do for you. Because of my status as Stalinin's mentor, I have been granted a permanent entry pass into the offices of the interior ministry. I need not explain to you the consequences, for both of us, if you are found out. But I have come to respect you and what you stand for, and I have decided to help you."

When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok presented the pass at the interior ministry, the guard on duty was stupefied: few were the cabinet-level ministers granted such a privilege, and here stood a young chassid, complete with beard, sidelocks, chassidic garb and Yiddish accent, at a time when to even reside in Petersburg was forbidden to Jews. But the pass was in order, so he waved him through.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok entered the building and proceeded to look for Stalinin's office. Those whom he asked for directions could only stare at the strange apparition confidently striding the corridors of the interior ministry. Soon

he located the minister's office at the far end of a commanding hallway on the fourth floor of the building.

As Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok walked toward the office, the door opened and Stalinin himself walked out and closed the door behind him. The rebbe's son and the interior minister passed within a few feet of each other. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok made straight for the office, opened the door, and walked in.

After a quick search, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok located the documents pertaining to the decree in Stalinin's desk. On the desk sat two inkstamps, one bearing the word 'APPROVED' and the other 'REJECTED' both with the minister's signature and seal. Quickly, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok stamped the proposed decree 'REJECTED' and inserted the papers into a pile of vetoed documents which sat in a tray on the desk. He then left the room, closed the door behind him, and walked out of the building.

Source:

Hisvaaduyos 5745 [Transcript of the farbrengens of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita, 1984-85] vol. IV p. 2457. See also Kfar Chabad Magazine, Chukas issue, 1985.

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In times like these, when the nations are in conflict with one another, the Jewish people have the special assurance from the A-mighty that, "My children, have no fear, all that I have done, I have done solely for your sake,"¹ - in addition to the multitude of promises mentioned in the Torah to the effect that "Behold, He does not sleep nor slumber, the guardian of Israel"² and that "I am with him in distress,"³ and "G-d will redeem Israel from all of its distress,"⁴ (and only after that "He will redeem Israel from all of their sins"⁵) **etc. etc.**

It is a certainty that "He will not sleep nor slumber, the Guardian of Israel," wherever Jews may be situated - even in the Diaspora, and all the more so in the Holy Land, characterized by our Holy and true Torah as, "A land which G-d our G-d's eyes watch over from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."⁶

...And as was stated, the A-mighty notifies and proclaims to Jews wherever they are situated, particularly in the Holy Land, "My children, have no fear."

(From the talks of Shabbos Parshas Vo'eira, 26 Teves, Mevorchim Shvat [Blessing of the month of Shvat], 5751)

1. *Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu, Remez 499.*

2. *Tehillim 121:4.*

3. *loc. cit. 91:14.*

4. *loc. cit. 25:22.*

5. *loc. cit. 130:8. [This is a reference to the fact that G-d will bring the Redemption even before we fully atone for our sins. Translator's note.]*

6. *Ekev 11:12.*