

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

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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.ב.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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Rabbi Yosef Y. Shagalov,

Executive Director

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A Terrestrial Encounter

During one of my spiritual journeys I encountered the supernal abode of Moshiach. "When are you going to arrive, master?" I asked him.

Replied King Moshiach: "I shall come when your wellsprings are spread widely abroad."

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov

The dissemination of the Baal Shem Tov's teachings, the "spreading forth of the wellsprings" to which Moshiach referred, primarily began after Rabbi Schneur Zalman's release from Petersburg.

Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch

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In his younger years, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch once had an opportunity to visit the Peter-Paul Fortress (*Petro-pobavelsk'n Krepost*) in Petersburg, the notorious prison in which Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was incarcerated years earlier. When he returned home, his father, Rabbi Shalom DovBer, asked if he had seen the high-security cell designated for the worst of political criminals. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok replied affirmatively.

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“Did you notice the dimensions of the cell?” his father further inquired.

He described the shape and size to the best of his recollection, yet expressed his wonder as to why his father sought to know these trifling details.

“I am curious to know if the cell has enough space for three people to stand comfortably,” Rabbi Shalom DovBer explained, “for it is this very compartment in which the Alter Rebbe was imprisoned for fifty-three days. During this time he was visited by his two saintly guests...”

* * *

Rabbi Shalom DovBer was referring to the following episode:

After days of solitary confinement, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was startled as two men suddenly entered his cell. One of them he immediately identified as his late mentor, Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch. Inasmuch as the Maggid was according honor to his fellow, it was evident that the latter was none other than his own teacher, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.

“How have I sinned? Why must I sit in prison unjustly?” Rabbi Schneur Zalman adjured his holy predecessors.

They informed him that a serious accusation had been brought against him in the Heavenly court. The prosecuting angels had denounced his conduct of imparting the secrets

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of Torah in an uninhibited and publicized manner. “Do not fear, though,” they comforted him, “for in due time you will be acquitted.”

“Shall I then cease to disseminate my teachings?” he asked.

“No,” they responded, “since you have begun, do not stop. Quite the contrary, you should go about spreading the wellsprings even more than you have done until now.”

Indeed, when Rabbi Schneur Zalman was subsequently liberated on the nineteenth of Kislev, he devoted himself to the dissemination of Chassidism like never before, true to his masters’ behest.

* * *

The Lubavitcher Rebbe comments:

It is interesting that Rabbi Shalom DovBer naturally assumed that the otherworldly visitors came not as angelic apparitions, but rather as humans with spatial-temporal bodies. Hence he inquired concerning the size of the room. One may ask, why was this phenomenon necessary? Surely they could have communicated with their imprisoned disciple as wholly spiritual beings. Does this not contradict the maxim of our Sages, “The Almighty does not perform miracles in vain”?¹

1. *Droshas HaRan* (“Homilies of Rabbi Nissim”), first introduction to chapter VII; see Talmud, *Shabbos* 53b.

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The Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid came to bid their successor to continue his life's mission of imparting the teachings of Chassidus to the world. Until this time, the esoteric aspect of Torah had been reserved for a select few – only the most spiritual of ascetics could appreciate the mystic abstractions of Kabbalah. Rabbi Schneur Zalman, on the other hand, sought to achieve the integration of G-dly knowledge and the human intellect, so that the layman could also experience the Divine. Consequently, their sanction of his work constituted a *psak din*, a Halachic ruling, which only a human Rabbi may legislate. As the verse declares, “The Torah is not in the Heavens!”² An angel or a soul cannot decide a Halacha as it pertains to the physical world. Accordingly, this instruction, one that would forever transform the human mind, had to be pronounced via human mouths.

Source:

Told by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, on the 19th of Kislev, 1950.

2. Deuteronomy 30:12.

Food for Thought

Amongst chassidim there is a time-honored tradition to eat *shvartze kashe* – black buckwheat – on the day of Yud Tes Kislev. What is the origin of this peculiar culinary custom? According to some, the story takes us back many years ago, when this most unseemly grain actually saved the life of the Chabad founder...

Following his marriage in 5520,¹ Rabbi Schneur Zalman settled in Vitebsk and resided with his prominent father-in-law, Reb Yehuda Leib Segal. Here the young Rebbe applied himself assiduously to his Talmudic studies, and likewise devoted much time to the study of Kabbalah. Adherent to the discipline of worship delineated by the *Shaloh*,² he spent hours in prayer and silent meditation. However, this conduct was deemed aberrant and outlandish in the eyes of his conventional in-laws. After observing his unusual ways for some time, they concluded that he was mentally unbalanced,³ and insisted that their daughter ask for a divorce.

1. 1760.

2. *Shnei Luchos Habris* ("Two Tablets of the Covenant") by Rabbi Yeshayeh Halevi Horowitz, 1560-1630.

3. See appendix of *Noam Elimelech* by Rabbi Elimelech of Lizyensk: "The impassioned love that a perfect saint experiences in his worship of G-d can superficially resemble dementia, as the verse states: 'You

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Well aware of her husband's piety and brilliance, Rebbetzin Sterna would not hear of it. Reb Yehuda Leib was incensed by her refusal, and endlessly harassed the young couple as a result. At times he deprived them of heat in the winter and candles at night, forcing the Rebbe to conduct his night-long study in the cold darkness. Yet in spite of all the abuse they suffered, the Rebbe did not desist from his Divine service, nor did the Rebbetzin falter in her devotion to her husband.

One peculiarity of the Rebbe's demeanor that was particularly disturbing to his father-in-law were his lengthy prayers on Friday evening. Every Sabbath the Rebbe stood in prayer for many hours, and did not return home from synagogue until well after his in-laws had completed their meal. This was simply inexcusable for Reb Yehuda Leib, who resolved to teach his eccentric son-in-law a lesson once and for all. One Friday eve, he instructed that all the edibles in the house be locked away immediately after the Sabbath dinner. "No food for latecomers!" he imperiously told his daughter. "You had better dine with us tonight, for there will be no wine or *challah* left for your impossible husband." Nevertheless, the Rebbetzin was unshaken by the threat, and patiently awaited her husband's arrival.

Late at night the Rebbe finally concluded his prayers and returned home. Greeted by his faithful wife, he was duly

should be crazy with love for Him' (Mishlei 5:19). Similarly King David 'frolicked and pranced with all his might in front of G-d.' (Shmuel II 6:16), and this can create antagonism..."

Food for Thought

informed of the unfortunate news. Together they searched the entire house for leftover wine, but alas! Not a morsel of food or drink was to be found, and even the dirty dishes had been removed and securely locked up in the kitchen. Yet the Rebbe was not about to forgo the *mitzvah* of *kiddush*⁴ so easily. Knowing that his father-in-law was a dealer of hard liquors, he rummaged through the cellar in hope of finding some whisky, which may be used for kiddush as a secondary alternative to wine. His search proved successful, and an old barrel of alcohol – ninety-six proof – was discovered. Now a second problem arose: all the glasses, cups, and bowls were stored away in cupboards under lock and key. Here also, the Rebbe improvised with an empty milk pail. After filling the voluminous container up to the top – as kiddush should ideally be recited on a full goblet – he held the makeshift kiddush cup in his hand, recited the blessings with profound concentration, and proceeded to drink down its potent contents.

Within a few short moments, he began to choke violently, his face aflame. The Rebbetzin saw that her husband was on the verge of suffocation as a result of the alcohol. In panic she ran to the kitchen in hope of finding water or anything edible with which to revive him. At last she found an old dish that had been carelessly forgotten on the table. All that remained inside was the dried out coating of leftover buckwheat, which she hastily peeled off and fed to the Rebbe. Fortunately the crusty grains provided immediate

4. Sanctification of the Sabbath over a cup of wine.

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relief; the burning sensation in his throat abated, and his breathing resumed.

From then on the Rebbe was known to be particularly fond of buckwheat, the humble food that literally saved his life. Years later his chassidim made a point of eating it every year on Yud Tes Kislev, the anniversary of his liberation from prison. Appropriate for the occasion, the dish is reminiscent of the utmost self-sacrifice one ought to have for the ways and teachings of Chassidism.

Source:

Told by Reb Mendel Morosov of Brooklyn, NY, as heard from Reb Mendel Dubrowsky.

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*.

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The Announcement Of The Redemption

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The "deeds and Divine service" of all the Jewish people throughout the generations brought about the culmination and perfection of all aspects of refinement to the world, **within the parameters of the world**, as my sainted father-in-law was able to publicize that all aspects of the Divine service have been completed. This includes "polishing the buttons," and everything is ready for the coming of Moshiach.

In particular, this process was effected by the revelation of the teachings of Chassidus on the 19th of Kislev, which was the principal beginning of "your wellsprings will spread farther outward.")¹ From that time onward, the dissemination has progressively increased through our Rabbeim and leaders from generation to generation until the leadership of my sainted father-in-law, through whom the wellsprings spread to the farthest corner of the world.

It follows then that now, as long as our righteous Moshiach delays his coming (for utterly incomprehensible reasons), our Divine service is no longer one of "refinement" (since we have already concluded and perfected the service of refinement), but one unique to bringing the revelation into reality in the world.

The uniqueness of our generation is alluded to in the Haftarah of Parshas Vayishlach - "And² the house of Yaakov will be a fire and the house of Yosef a flame and the house of Eisav straw... and the inhabitants of the South will inherit the mountain of Eisav... and the exiled... until **Tzarfaz**... will inherit the cities of the South. And the

1. See *Sefer HaSichos Toras Shalom* end of p. 112 ff.

2. *Ovadyah* 1:18 ff.

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saviors will ascend Har Tzion [Mount Zion] to judge Har Eisav [the mountain of Eisav]."

The "House of Yosef of our generation (my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation whose first name was yosef) distinguishes itself in comparison to former generations, even that of the Alter Rebbe ("The House of Jacob.")³ The innovation of our Yosef is that through him the wellsprings spread to the farthest ends of the world, beyond which there is nothing further, as the country of **Tzarfas** (France). The times of the Alter Rebbe (and also in the times of our Rebbeim and leaders that followed) the revelation of the wellsprings of the Torah of Chassidus was not so well established in France due to its lowly state (to such an extent that the Alter Rebbe feared it might be victorious...⁴). Precisely in our generation, through "the House of Yosef," the wellsprings were revealed and spread even into France, through the establishment there of the Yeshiva "Tomchei Temimim," as in the city of Lubavitch. Therefore, we have actually reached the time of "they will inherit the cities of the South" and "the saviors will ascend to Har Tzion to judge Har Eisav."

This can be expanded and elucidated through an allusion:

"Tzarfas" in Gematria is seven hundred and seventy (770).⁵ This is the perfection of the number seven, since it includes ten sevens (70) and a hundred sevens (700) and both of them together (770).

3. The particular connection between the Alter Rebbe and Yaakov (see at length *Ma'ayanei HaYeshua* (Kehot 5748 p. 101 ff.) should be noted.

4. See *Sefer HaToldos Admur HaZakein* (Kehos 5736) p. 259 ff. And elsewhere. [During the Napoleonic Wars, the Alter Rebbe was a vehement antagonist to Napoleon and the so-called "Enlightenment" he brought with him. Translator's note.]

5. [The number 10 represents completeness, and thus 100 perfection. Here, we have the completeness and perfection of the number 7, which represents the physical world (seven days of Creation, etc. Translator's note.)]

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It may be said that herein is an allusion that in the refinement of France (Tzarfas) lies the overall completion and perfection of the world, which was created in the seven days of building, with all its myriad details.

It should be noted that the refinement of "Tzarfas" which has the numerical value of "770" was accomplished through ("the flame" that is ignited from) "the house of Yosef." This refers to the house of Yosef in its simplest sense, the house which my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, chose and bought and lived in for the last ten years of his life in this world. From there he continued and extended (in an "ever increasing measure") the Divine service of "the house of Yosef - whose number is (the house number in the obvious sense) is "770."

On a deeper level, the letters of "Tzarfas" are the same as "U'faratzta." This implies that the revelation and spreading of the wellsprings are "Tarfaz" (breaks through all barriers⁶). The wellsprings not only penetrate to even the lowest possible level (because the barriers of the wellsprings were breached) but this [occurs] from **the perspective of the nether regions**, exemplified by the correspondence of the letters of "Tzarfas" with those of "U'faratzta." Through this is accomplished, "You have broken through⁷ for yourself," and "This is Moshiach, as it says,⁸ "The

6. [The root letters for "Tzarfas" (south, France), "U'faratzta" (spread forth) and Pritzas (breaking through) are the same: Pey, Reish, Tzadik. Thus, the etymological connection indicates a deeper significance. Translator's note.]

7. Vayeishev 38:29. [The Hebrew emphasizes the concept by repeating the word as both verb and noun: "Paratzta alecha paretz," literally, "you have breeched for yourself a barrier." (Note that the f-sound and the p-sound are physiologically related, i.e., made by a closure of the lips. In Hebrew, the same letter is used for both; they are differentiated by an indicator of stress, called a dagesh. Translator's note.)]

8. Micha 2:13.

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breaker [HaPoretz] has gone up before them."⁹

...In these days we really only need to open the eyes and to see the existence in actual reality¹⁰ - that we are sitting together with the Holy One, Blessed be He ("Israel and the Holy One Blessed be He are altogether one"¹¹) at the "Prepared Table" for the wedding feast, the feast of Livyosan, Shor HaBor and Yayin Meshumar.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vayishlach, 16 Kislev 5752)

9. *Aggados Bereishis*, end of chapter 63. And see *Bereishis Rabba* end of chapter 85 and in the commentary of Rashi.

10. That is to say, not only is the Divine service completed and the revelation needs to be brought into the world (as mentioned above), but more than this, that it already is actually revealed. All that is needed is to open the eyes, because **already (in the past) "He gave to you... eyes to see."**

11. See *Zohar* Vol. 3 73a.

The unique advantage of the 19th of Kislev of this year is that it occurs after the completion of the **eighty-ninth** year, in Gematria "**Redeem**."¹ The Redemption from every thing that obstructed and hindered the coming of Dovid the King Moshiach, "who reviled the footsteps of your Moshiach," (as Psalm Redeem-89 [PaDaH--Pey-Tes] concludes) has been completed. We find ourselves already in the **ninetieth** [Tzaddik] year, connected with the third Redemption and the third Temple.

...In these times - **the days of Moshiach** - in which we now find ourselves,² we only need "to open the eyes." Then we will see that the true and complete Redemption already exists, in the simple sense. All the Jewish people, "with our youth and our aged, etc., with our sons and our daughters,"³ are prepared, in every single, last detail, "to approach and sit at the table," the table prepared with every delicacy and delight, beginning with those of the Redemption, Livyosan, Shor HaBor⁴ and Yayin Meshumar.⁵ Also, [the Jewish people are ready for] the most important thing, "to know G-d,"⁶ "the world will be filled with knowledge of the L-rd

1. [This address was given in the Rebbe's 90th year. The Hebrew letters for "89" are "Pey, Tes." The Hebrew word for "Redeem" is spelled "Pey, Daled, Hey." The letter "Tes" has the numerical equivalent of 9; the letter "Daled" has the value of 5 and the letter "Hey" the value of 4. Thus, the word "PaDaH" (Redeem) is numerically equivalent to and therefore connected with the number Pey-Tes (89). Translator's note.]

2. As mentioned many times by the leader of our generation, my sainted father-in-law, that already much earlier all the appointed times have passed, and all aspects and preparations have been completed, including the buttons, etc.

3. Bo 10:9.

4. See Bava Basra 75:a. Vayikra Rabba chapter 13:3, and in other places.

5. Brochos 34:2. And in other places.

6. Rambam at the conclusion of his work the Mishneh Torah.

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as the waters cover the ocean bed."⁷

*(From the talk of the end of 19 - beginning of 20 Kislev 5752
- in a group private audience)*

7. *Yeshayahu* 11:9.

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In all that has been said this year, what requires the most emphasis is what the times require: the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. As has been said frequently of late, all the requirements have already been completed and we only need to greet our righteous Moshiach in actual reality. This will be hastened even more through learning Torah in general, and in particular through learning all of the Talmud as divided on Yud Tes Kislev, when the inner teachings of Torah were given. For through "engaging in Torah study, etc."¹ one realizes "Redeem my soul in peace"² - "A Redemption for me and my children from the nations of the world,"³ through the true and complete emancipation and Redemption.

*(Pamphlet on the occasion of the completion of the division of the Talmud
for study, 19 Kislev - Sefer HaSichos 5752, p. 491)*

1. *Brochos* 8a.
2. *Tehillim* 55:19.
3. *Brochos* 8a.

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