

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

Reprinted for Parshat Devarim, Shabbat Chazon, 5786
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5759 ♦ 1999

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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Ungracious Children

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov would often underscore the importance of serving the Almighty with joy. He was once challenged: "‘When the month of Av begins, one must minimize in joy,’ the Talmud declares. Certainly then your rule does not apply."

Replied the Baal Shem Tov, "The Talmud can be read as follows: ‘When the month of Av begins, one must minimize his ego’ – and how is this accomplished? – ‘with joy.’"

Ungracious Children

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, who used to refer to his friend and contemporary, Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, as "the holy Ruzhiner," once related:

The holy Ruzhiner was not wont to tolerate any melancholy or even bitterness. As a result, the behavior of his mirthful chassidim became quite mischievous. One Tisha b'Av they passed the time by tossing burs at one another. After a while they decided to climb atop the roof of the synagogue and lower a noose through an aperture over the main entrance. Whoever walked in could then be lassoed and lifted up onto the roof. This prank proved to be most amusing, until, sure enough, who should walk in but the Rebbe himself! From the rooftop they could not distinguish who their unsuspecting victim was. Only once they had

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begun to hoist him up did they realize their grave mistake. Mortified, they lowered him to the ground at once. The Rebbe showed no signs of annoyance; rather he lifted his eyes heavenward and exclaimed: "Master of the universe! If Your children do not properly observe Your holiday, then take it back from them!"

Source:

Told by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch on Tisha b'Av after the fast, 5741. Printed in *Sefer Haminhogim* ["The Book of Chabad-Lubavitch Customs"] p. 48.

Two-Dimensional Mourning

The Talmud relates:¹

Long ago, as Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar, son of Azaryah, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking down the road, they heard the noise of the multitudes of Rome from a distance of a hundred and twenty *mil* away. They all began to weep, with exception of Rabbi Akiva who laughed. “Why do you laugh?” they asked him in astonishment.

“Why do you weep?” he asked them in return.

“These heathens, who prostrate themselves to idols and burn incense to the stars, live in safety and ease,” they replied indignantly, “whereas our Temple, the ‘Footstool of our God,’ is burnt down by fire! Should we not then shed bitter tears?”

“That is precisely why I laugh,” explained Rabbi Akiva. “If they who transgress His will are thus rewarded, how much more so is He destined to reward those who obey His will!”

1. *Makkos* 24a-b.

Two-Dimensional Mourning

On another occasion the four companions were making pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and rent their clothes when they came to Mount Scopus. Just as they arrived at the Temple Mount, they beheld a fox emerging from within the ruins of the Holy of Holies. They all began to weep, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. "Why do you laugh?" they demanded of him.

"Why do you weep?" asked Rabbi Akiva.

"The holy place, concerning which it is written 'And he who draws near shall die,' has now become overrun by foxes. How can we not weep?"

Replied Rabbi Akiva: "It is for this very reason that I laugh. The verse states: 'And I shall summon faithful witnesses to bear testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah, son of Yeverechiah.'² Now, what historical connection does Uriah share with Zechariah? Uriah lived during the times of the First Temple, whereas the latter lived in the Second Temple era. Rather, the Scripture intends to link the prophecy of Zechariah with the earlier prophecy of Uriah, making one dependent upon the other. For in the days of Uriah it was predicted that 'Zion will be plowed as a field,'³ while Zechariah later foretold that 'Old men and old women shall yet sit in the broad places of Jerusalem.'⁴ So long as Uriah's premonition had not been fulfilled literally, I feared lest

2. Isaiah 8:2.

3. *Michah* 3:12.

4. *Zechariah* 8:4.

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Zechariah's promise might also not come to pass. But now that the first prophecy has been realized, I have no doubt that Zechariah's words are destined to reach fruition."

The Rabbis exclaimed in unison: "Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!"

* * *

On Purim of 1943, while European Jewry was up in flames and a spiritual holocaust was concurrently raging in America, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch sat with a handful of chassidim in New York. Yet how could they possibly celebrate? Said the Rebbe: "Now is a time for Rabbi Akiva's laughter. Surely the horrific destruction is a signal that Redemption is near, and that is our only consolation." He then related the following story:

* * *

By the time Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch assumed the mantle of leadership, the influence of Chabad Chassidism had spread far and wide. Jews flocked to Lubavitch by the thousands to seek the Rebbe's counsel and blessing, notwithstanding the long and arduous journey it required. Many even went by foot, occasionally hitching rides with passing carriages from town to town to lighten the trek. Aside for its growing number of adherents, the movement gained quite a few admirers who valued its scholarly doctrines but hesitated to embrace Chassidism as a way of life. One such group of Lithuanian Jews decided to travel to Lubavitch and meet with the Rebbe. Due to his

Two-Dimensional Mourning

busy schedule, the latter was accustomed to receive several guests at a time. When they were finally granted an audience, they confessed to the Rebbe: “We would like to join the chassidic community, but have certain reservations and unresolved questions.”

“You may ask,” replied the Rebbe.

“We personally witnessed one of your eminent followers weeping on Simchas Torah and singing merrily on Tisha b’Av!”

The Rebbe explained: “His singing was not an expression of gladness, nor was his weeping a sign of dejection. Rather his tears were induced by bitterness. On Simchas Torah he contemplated the awe-inspiring nature of the day, in which the Torah shines forth in all her unbridled glory and is verily rejoicing together with him. This reminded him of how far-removed he actually was from the infinitely sublime Torah, and consequently he shed bitter tears. On Tisha b’Av, on the other hand, he experienced the pain of destruction. It is written, however, that ‘In all the sadness there is profit,’⁵ the profit being the joy of Redemption that follows the sadness of exile. As a believer in the coming of Moshiach, he perceived the sorrow as an indication of forthcoming Redemption. Hence he sang a tune of hope and anticipation, an expression of his longing desire to behold G-d’s radiance in the imminent Messianic era.”

Source:

Sefer Hasichos 5703 [Talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch, 1942-43], p. 41.

5. *Mishlei* 14:23.

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The Announcement Of The Redemption

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As was discussed recently on several occasions, all the signs of Redemption point to the fact that "Behold (he) Moshiach is coming"¹ imminently. (The fact that Moshiach has not yet arrived is incomprehensible).

* * *

This concept is all the more powerful now that we are in a threefold house: a house of prayer, a house of Torah study and a house for acts of loving-kindness. Moreover, this is the house of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, the Moses of our generation. This place is thus analogous to and a prelude for the third Holy Temple which also comprises a threefold character: "My house is a house of prayer,"² it is a house of Torah (as it was the location of the Sanhedrin near the Hewn Chamber³), and it is a house for acts of loving-kindness (which were generated through) the offering of sacrifices.⁴

The fact that this is the Shabbos of Tisha B'Av at Mincha time, the birthday of Moshiach, when there is a strengthening of Moshiach's Mazal,⁵ adds even greater significance to the above

1. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8 and *ShirHaShirim Rabbah* on this verse.

2. *Yeshayahu* 56:6.

3. *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Makkos* 2:6. *Mechilta*, end *Parshas Yisro*. *Rashi*, beginning *Parshas Mishpatim*. *Middos* 5:4. *Sanhedrin* 86b (in the *Mishneh*). *Rambam*, *Hilchos Sanhedrin* 14:12.

4. See, at length, the letter of between the 10th of Shevat and the 15th of Shevat 5747. *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 31, P. 235 ff. *Sefer HaSichos* 5747, talk of Shabbos *Parshas Terumah*. See there for cross references.

5. [The term "mazal" has several meanings: luck, star, fortune, fate, etc. In general, it refers to a person's portion from above. Certain dates, such as a birthday, are more propitious for receiving one's "heavenly share," since such dates are also determinative of the nature of one's "portion from above."]

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concept. Additionally, this is the year 5751 whose initials stand for "It will be a year of wonders I shall show him," including the wonders associated with the true and complete Redemption, concerning which it says "as in the days of our departure from Egypt, I will show him wonders."⁶

From all of the above it is clear that the present time and the present location is most appropriate for Moshiach's coming.

This means that a Jew believes with perfect faith that our righteous Moshiach, "a king from the House of David, who meditates on Torah and is preoccupied with the Commandments,"⁷ who subsequently becomes the "certain Moshiach" (by fulfilling [all the requirements to be "presumed Moshiach"], succeeding [as "presumed Moshiach"] and [then] building the Holy Temple on its site and gathering the dispersed of Israel"⁸), will literally now enter this synagogue and will arrive, liberate us and lead us proudly to our Land. He will lead each and every Jew to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem, to the Temple Mount - to the third Holy Temple.

* * *

This is the most fitting time for Redemption, since we are now living in the "afternoon" of the sixth millennium, after the year 5,500,⁹ after the passing of the various deadlines, such as the year

Traditionally, Tisha B'Av, the day of the destruction of both Temples, is also the birth date of Moshiach. Translator's note.]

6. *Michah* 7:15.

7. Rambam, *Hilchos Melachim*, 11:4.

8. *Ibid.* [According to Rambam, there are two stages to Moshiach: the "presumed Moshiach," who can be identified as a "a king from the House of David, who meditates on Torah and is preoccupied with the Commandments," etc., and a certain or established Moshiach who has fulfilled all of the requirements of the "presumed Moshiach" and in addition rebuilds the Holy Temple and gathers the dispersed of Israel. Translator's note.]

9. See *Sefer HaSichos*, 5750, vol. 1, p. 254 ff.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

5,608¹⁰ and 5,666,¹¹ have passed, and after the declaration of the leader of our generation that "Teshuvah now, Redemption now" (in the years 5,701-3¹²). During these subsequent years there has been an increase of the revelation of the inner dimension of Torah. Over the years this revelation has increased more and more, to the point where the fountains have been disseminated to the farthest reaches of the world, even the most remote location. And not only has the results extended to these remote regions, but the actual fountains of knowledge have been introduced there.

...We have already completed everything; the Holy Temple is complete, standing ready in Heaven. Similarly, in all other respects, "all is prepared for the banquet." Everything is complete and contained, as it were, in a closed box, which has been given - along with its key - to every Jew.¹³

The only thing left to wait for is for a Jew to cry out once more, with one more request, demand and another reminder: "how long?!...

And when one does so, he will cause our righteous Moshiach to enter this synagogue and take all of the Jews who are here, along with all other Jews, to our Holy Land, to our Holy City Jerusalem, to our Holy Mountain, to the third Holy Temple.

*(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Devarim, Shabbos Chazon, (postponed)
Tisha B'Av, and from the talk of 10 Av (before evening service)
and the 11th of Av, 5751)*

10. See *Sefer HaSichos-Toras Sholom*, p. 237. *Igros Kodesh, Admor MaHaRayatz*, vol. 1, p. 485.

11. See talk of the Last Day of Passover, 5730 (published in the addendum to the series of 5666. *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 209).

12. "Proclamation" in "*Hakeriah v'hakedushah*" 5701-5703 (*Igros Kodesh, Admor MaHaRayatz*, vol. 5, p. 361 ff. p. 377 ff. p. 408 ff. vol. 6, p. 430 ff.)

13. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 28, p. 289. See there for cross references.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FREIND
Reb **Yosef Yisroel** ben Reb **Sholom** ע"ה **Rosner**
On the occasion of his 9th yahrtzeit, 7 Menachem-Av, 5786
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

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Mr. & Mrs. **Gershon** and **Leah** שיחי **Wolf**
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי **Shagalov**
* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR FRIEND
Mrs. **Esther (Monique)** bas Reb **Shmuel** ע"ה **Mariani**
Passed away on 8 Cheshvan, 5786
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

DEDICATED BY HER FRIENDS תחיינה
* * *

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR MOTHER IN LAW & MOTHER
Mrs. **Rivkah (Rozanne)** bas Reb **Chaim** ע"ה **Stekler**
Passed away on 13 Kislev, 5786
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

DEDICATED BY HER SON-IN-LAW AND DAUGHTER
Mr. & Mrs. **Yehuda (Jerry)** and **Avigail (Allison)** שיחי **Elfassy**

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