

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

Reprinted for Parshat Eikev, 5786
(Vol. 47)



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Vaad L'hafotzas Sichos

788 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213
Tel. (718) 774-7200 - Fax. (718) 774-7494

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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Rabbi Yosef Y. Shagalov,
Executive Director

Printed in the U.S.A.

8:3

ויענך וירעבך... למען הודיעך

*He afflicted you, He hungered you...
in order to let you know..*

Days of Light

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch writes:

My imprisonment [in 5687]¹ was my seventh - I was imprisoned five times in the days of the old [czarist] regime and twice in the days of the new [communist] regime.

The first imprisonment took place in the Lubavitch of my childhood in 5651 [1891] when I was eleven years old. That year, I had begun - on the advice and instruction of my teacher, Rabbi Nissan - to submit my memoirs to writing. I recorded this incident in my journal of 5653 [1892-93].²

The second imprisonment took place in Lubavitch, in Iyar of 5662 [May-June 1902], when the teachers from the school of the 'Enlightenment' movement in Lubavitch informed against me.

The third imprisonment took place in Lubavitch, in Teves of 5666 [January 1 906], as a result of the participa-

1. 1927.

2. See *A Boy and a Calf*, vol. II, pg. 160.

Eikev / Days of Light

tion of members of the 'Workers of Zion' party in a riot against the Lubavitch police.

The fourth imprisonment took place in Petersburg, in Teves of 5670 [December 1909-January 1910], when I was informed against by the Jewish scholar K.

The fifth imprisonment took place in Petersburg, in Shevat of 5676 [January-February 1916], because of my efforts to obtain legal material concerning the exemption of religious functionaries from military service.

The sixth imprisonment was in Tamuz of 5680 [June-July 1920] in Rostov, because I was informed against by D., the *Yevsektzia*³ head of Rostov.⁴

All these, however, were imprisonment's of but hours; but this, the seventh, is the most distinguished of them all.

As is the nature of things, the metaphor is more trivial than the subject and the subject more formidable than the metaphor. If confinement in a prison of wood and stone is an affliction, how much greater is the suffering of the G-dly Soul in the imprisonment of the body and the Animal Soul.⁵ *Men bedarf zich in dem batifen* ('One must think deeply into this').

3. 'Jewish Section' of the Communist Party.

4. See *The Intimidating Toy*, vol.I. pg. 120.

5. See vol. II, pg. 23, footnote 5.

Once Upon A Chassid

I will not deny that, at times, this seventh imprisonment causes me great pleasure, as is evident by the fact that now, some seven years after the event, I occasionally take the time to seclude myself and envision the encounters and discussions, the visions and the dreams, which I heard, saw, and dreamt in those days.

Aside from the set life-periods of man - childhood, youth, his single and married days, maturity, and old age; aside from the talents granted him, be they average and ordinary or brilliant and phenomenal, and his temperament, whether shy and melancholy or joyous and exuberant; aside from all this, Divine Providence grants him special moments in his life which may transform his nature, develop his faculties, and set him upon a higher plateau from which he may behold the purpose of the life of man upon earth.

The period which most profoundly affects the course of a person's soul and the development of his faculties, is that period which is rich with pain and persecution for his diligent and passionate work for an ideal; in particular, when he is struggling with and battling his persecutors and oppressors to uphold and strengthen his faith.

Such an experience, though fraught with pain of the body and agony of the soul, is rich with powerful impressions. These are the days of light in the life of man.

Each and every event of such a period is extremely significant and distinguished, particularly in the case of arrest

Eikev / Days of Light

and imprisonment. Because of their great spiritual value, not only the days and nights, but also the hours and minutes are worthy of note. For every hour and moment of pain, affliction, and suffering brings tremendous rewards and infinite fortitude of mind - the most feeble of men is transformed into the mightiest of the mighty.

This last imprisonment began at 2:45 a.m. early Wednesday morning, 15 Sivan 5687 [June 15, 1927], and lasted until 1:30 p.m. Sunday the 3rd of Tammuz [July 3], in the city of Leningrad-Petersburg.

Eighteen days, eleven hours, and fifteen minutes.

That Sunday at 8:30 p.m. in the evening, after approximately six hours at home, I left by the train that goes to the city of Kastrama. I arrived there on the next day, Monday the 4th of Tammuz, and I remained in exile until 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, the 13th of Tammuz.

Nine days and seventeen hours...

Source:

From a letter by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch to "one of his sons-in-law," dated Wednesday, Iyar 17 5694 (May 2, 1934). Printed in Igros Kodesh Vol. III, p. 79.

Once Upon A Chassid

8:3

כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם

כי על כל מוצא פי ה' יחיה האדם

*Not on bread alone lives man, but on
the utterance of the mouth of G-d
does man live*

At the core of every existence is a 'Divine utterance' which constitutes its 'soul' - its essence and purpose. This 'Divine utterance' are the Divine 'words' of creation ("Let there be light", "Let the earth sprout forth vegetation", etc.) which express G-d's desire that a specific thing exist and its function within His overall purpose of creation. It is this 'Divine utterance' which was the original instrument of its creation, and which remains nestled within it to continuously supply it with being and life.

The soul of man descends into the trappings and trials of physical life in order to gain access to these 'sparks of holiness'. By investing itself within a physical body which will eat, wear clothes, and otherwise make use of the objects and forces of the physical existence, the soul can redeem the Divine utterances which they incorporate. For when man utilizes something, directly or indirectly, to serve his Creator, he penetrates its shell of mundanely, revealing and realizing its Divine essence and purpose.

Therein lies a deeper meaning to the verse:
"The hungry and the thirsty, in them does their

Eikev / The Horse's Mind

*soul wrap itself.*¹ A person may desire food and sense only his body's hunger, but in truth, his physical craving is but the expression and external packaging of a deeper yen - his soul's craving for the sparks of holiness which are the object of her mission in physical life.²

Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch

The Horse's Mind

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch was once asked by one of his young daughters: how does one explain the existence of angels and other spiritual existences? After all, no one has ever seen an angel...

Said Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok: "We are now riding in a coach discussing angels, and to us, this is a most befitting accomplishment of our trip. But the horses pulling the coach believe that the purpose of the expedition consists entirely of the oats awaiting them at the journey's end. And

1. Psalms 107:5.

2. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi applies this same concept to explain a most puzzling fact of life: how is it that man, the highest form of life, derives life and sustenance from the lower tiers of creation the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds? But it is "not on bread alone that man lives": the life-sustaining quality of the bread is but an expression of its essence and soul - the "utterance of the mouth of G-d."

Once Upon A Chassid

in the eyes of the coachman, the purpose lies in the wages he will earn to feed his family. So we have three perceptions, three perspectives on the same reality,

“Now tell me,” concluded the Rebbe, “just because the horses are thinking ‘oats’ does that in any way lessen the significance of our discussion of angels...?”

Source:

Sefer Hasichos 5701 [The Talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch, 1940-41], p. 130.

9:3

כי ה' אלקיך... אש אכלה הוא

For G-d your G-d... is a consuming fire

Between coldness and heresy stands an extremely thin wall. It is written: "For G-d your G-d is a consuming fire" - G-dliness is a blazing flame. Torah study and prayer require a flaming heart, so that "all my bones should proclaim" the words of G-d.¹

Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch

Cold Feet

Rabbi Nechemia of Dubrovna told:

I once saw a Russian soldier being whipped. His crime? While standing watch on a winter night, his feet had frozen in his boots, "Had you remembered the oath you took to serve the czar," his commander berated him, "the memory would have kept you warm."

"For 25 years," concluded Reb Nechemia, "this incident inspired my service of the Almighty."

Source:

Shmu'os V'sipurim ("Sayings and Stories") by
Rabbi Rephael Nachman Kahan, Vol. III, p. 226.

1. Psalms 35:10.

Once Upon A Chassid

11:13

לאהבה את ה' אלקיכם

ולעבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם

*To love the Lord your G-d and to serve
Him with all your hearts*

What is the service of the heart? This is prayer.

Talmud, Taanis 2a

A Tale of Two Cities

When Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi neared his twentieth year, he decided - with the consent of his wife, Rebbetzin Sterna - to travel to a center of Torah learning and service of G-d.

At that time (circa 5524 [1764]) Vilna and Mezeritch were the great Jewish capitals of Eastern Europe. Vilna was the seat of Rabbi Eliyahu, the famed Gaon of Vilna, and Mezeritch was the home- town of Rabbi DovBer (the 'Maggid'), leader of the chassidic movement.

Related Rabbi Schneur Zalman: "I debated as to where I should go. I knew that in Vilna one was taught how to study, and that in Mezeritch one could learn how to pray. To study

Eikev / A Tale of Two Cities

I was somewhat able, but of prayer I knew very little. So I went to Mezeritch.

“The Almighty blessed me with making the right choice. I became a devoted chassid of the Rebbe’s and, upon my return to Vitebsk, I guided my disciples in the teachings of chassidism, which were well received by them.”

Source:

Likkutei Dibburim [Collected Talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch], Vol. 111*, P. 966.

*. Correction: Vol. 3.

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

35

The timely theme now is the true and complete Redemption. As discussed several times, especially most recently, since one must "await his coming every day"¹ and all of the signs indicate that "behold, he (Moshiach) is coming"² we therefore continuously think and speak of the Redemption. We also make every effort to connect all matters of current concern with the Redemption. Our service now as Jews is to hasten the Redemption.

...It has been discussed many times that my sainted father-in-law testified and proclaimed that we have already completed all that was needed, including the "polishing of the buttons." The only thing left is the one simple gesture on G-d's part to take the Jews out of exile and to bring them to the Holy Land... Thus, Jews implore and cry out, time and again - and now with much more intensity than previously - "how much longer?!"...

...A Jew not only has the capacity to awaken himself and other Jews, but also to "arouse" G-d, as it were, to "come and let us calculate the calculations of the world."³ According to all calculations (which G-d had indicated in His Torah and in the miracles He wrought in the world), G-d should long ago have brought the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. [This should have happened] particularly in this year, which according to all of the calculations and the signs is "the year when King Moshiach will be revealed,"⁴ as was discussed several

1. The text of "Ani Ma'amin" published in prayer books etc. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 23, p. 394.

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

3. Talmudic expression, *Bava Basra* 78b.

4. *Yalkut Shimoni* 499.

BESURAS HAGEULO

times in recent months.

A Jew acquires (in this place and time) the most potent energies as well as the greatest privilege and responsibility to implore and cry out to G-d: "How much longer"?!...

* * *

Since we have already completed all the requirements of "our deeds and efforts,"⁵ which is why we cry out and demand "how much longer" (as was discussed earlier), the raging question remains the same: Since we have already accomplished everything, how is it that our righteous Moshiach has not yet arrived?!...

*(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Ekev, 23 Menachem Av,
Mevorchim Hachodesh Elul, 5751)*

5. See *Tanya*, beginning of ch. 37.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. Roneete Mona Mina bas Reb Zev Kurtzman
Passed away on 9 Cheshvan, 5783

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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