

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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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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כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאוד
בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

*For the Mitzvah which I command you
this day... is something that is very
close to you, in your mouth, in your
heart, that you may do it...*

The Long but Short of It

The Talmud¹ relates:

Said Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Chanania: “Once a child got the better of me.”

“I was travelling, and met a child at a crossroads. I asked him, ‘Which way to the city?’ and he answered, ‘This way is short and long, and this way is long and short.’

“I took the ‘short and long’ way. I soon reached the city but found my approach obstructed by gardens and orchards. So I retraced my steps and said to the child: ‘My son, did you not tell me that this is the short way?’ Answered the child: ‘Did I not tell you that it is the long way?’

* * *

¹ Talmud, Eruvin 53b.

Nitzavim / The Long but Short of it

Also in life there is a ‘short but long’ way and a ‘long but short’ way.

In his *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi sets down the fundamentals of the Chabad-chassidic approach to life. On the cover page of this ‘bible of chassidism’ he defines his work as follows:

“Based on the verse, *‘For it [the Torah and its precepts] is something that is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it’* - to explain, with the help of G-d, how it is indeed exceedingly close, in a long and short way.”

The Torah and its *mitzvos* are the Creator’s blueprint for creation, detailing the exact manner in which G-d means life to be lived and His purpose in creation to be fulfilled. But is a life that is every man realistically be expected to conduct his every act, word, and thought in accordance with the Torah’s most demanding directives?

The Torah itself is quite clear on the matter: *“For the mitzvah which I command you this day, it is not beyond you nor is it remote from you. It is not in heaven... nor is it across the sea... Rather, it is something that is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it.”* A Torah-true existence is not an abstract ideal, a point of reference to strive toward, but a practical and attainable goal.

But how? In the *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman develops the Chabad approach, a ‘whole person’ approach to life in

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which the mind plays the leading and pivotal role. First, a person must study, comprehend, and meditate upon the quintessential truths of existence: the all-transcendent, all-embracing, all-pervading reality of G-d; the root and essence of the soul and its intrinsic bond with its Creator; man's mission in life, and the resources and challenges - both external and internal - that are extended to him. Since these concepts are extremely subtle and abstract, one must toil "a toil of the soul and a toil of the flesh" to grasp them and relate to them. Then, because of the innate superiority of the mind over the heart imbued by the Creator into human nature, the understanding and assimilation of these G-dly concepts will unilaterally compel the development of the appropriate emotions in the heart: the love and awe of G-d.

Love for G-d is the unquenchable desire to cleave to Him and be unified with His essence. Awe of G-d elicits utter abhorrence toward anything which violates His will and thus erects barriers between Him and man. So when a person has so oriented his mind and so transformed his heart, his observance of the Torah's precepts becomes a given. He craves the fulfillment of the *mitzvos* with every fiber of his being, since they are the bridge between him and G-d, the means, and only means, by which he can connect to his Creator. And any transgression of G-d's will, no matter how attractive to his material nature, is literally revolting to him, since it disrupts his relationship with G-d and runs contrary to his own true self.

Nitzavim / The Long but Short of it

But a person may argue: Why spend a lifetime pursuing this demanding regimen of mind and heart? Why must I toil to understand and feel? Why not take the direct approach - open the books and follow instructions? I'm a simple Jew, he may maintain, and the attainment of such lofty spiritual states as "comprehension of the Divine", "love of G-d", and "awe of G-d" are way beyond my depth. I know the truth, I know what G-d wants of me - the Torah spells out the dos and don'ts of life quite clearly. I have a material and ego-centric nature. An inborn inclination towards evil and self-destructive desires. I'll control them. My faith, determination, and willpower will do the job.

This, however, is the short but long way. As the most direct and simple line between two points, it is misleadingly the surest way to town; but in truth, the direct approach is a dead end. As with the route which Rabbi Yehoshua first chose, it seems to lead straight to the city - only somehow it never quite makes it. For it is a path of never-ending struggle, the scene of perpetual duel between the self-oriented animal soul of man and his upward-reaching G-dly soul.² True, man has been given free choice and furnished with the necessary fortitude and spiritual staying-power to meet his every moral challenge; but the possibility of failure, G-d forbid, also exists. No matter how many times he will triumph, tomorrow will bring yet another test. On the short and long road one may win battle after battle, but there is never a decisive victory in the war of life.

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

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On the other hand, the long but short way is winding, steep, tedious, and long as life itself. It is full of ups and downs, setbacks and frustrations. It demands every ounce of intellectual and emotional stamina the human being can muster. But it is a road that leads, steadily and surely, to the aspired-to destination. When one *does* finally acquire an aptitude and intellectual taste for the G-dly, when one *does* develop a desire for good and abhorrence for evil, the war has been won. The person has transformed himself into someone whose every thought, deed, and act is *naturally* attuned to his quintessential self and purpose in life.³

Source:

Based on an address by Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shlita, delivered on December 1, 1958,

3. A classic example of the 'short but long way' can be seen in the story *Who's Boss* recounted, vol. II, pg. 191. Contrast this with the 'long but short' life described in *Catch-30* vol. II, pg. 203.

It is important to note that the Chabad-chassidic approach to life does not preclude the short but long way - obviously, doing good and resisting evil cannot wait until the last curve in the long but short road has been turned. Unlike the metaphorical traveler through physical space, who can only follow a single road at a time, our spiritual journey calls for us to follow both routes simultaneously. In the journey of life, the choice at the cross-roads is not an either/or decision but a question of priority and emphasis.

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

2

We can all see (in this year of miracles) how the signs of Redemption mentioned by our Sages have been fulfilled. This includes the sign cited in *Yalkut Shimoni*¹ (which has been mentioned recently several times):

"In the year the King Moshiach will be revealed, the kings of all the nations of the world will struggle with each other... the king of Persia will provoke the Arabian king; the Arabian king will [then] go to *Aram*² for advice... All the nations of the world will be in turmoil and terror... And (G-d) will say to them (Israel), "My children, do not be afraid, all that I have done I have done only for your sake... Do not fear, the time for your Redemption has arrived!..."

The *Yalkut* then continues:

When the King Moshiach comes he will stand on the roof of the Beis HaMikdash [Holy Temple] and will proclaim to Israel, 'Humble ones, the time for your Redemption has arrived!'"

*(From the talk of Wednesday, Parshas Netzavim-Vayeilech,
22 Elul, 5750)*

1. *Yeshayahu*, remez 499; Also in *P'sikta Rabasi*, 37 (s.v. *kumi ori*).
2. In the *Pesikta* there [the version is] "to Edom."

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

3

May it be G-d's Will - and this is the essential point - that each and every one of us should become a "shaliach" (a messenger) to inform oneself, one's family, and all the Jews around him or her that: **"Here he [Moshiach] comes."**¹ and "Behold, this is our G-d... this is the L-rd for whom we hoped."²

(Note that the word "this" [indicating a clear recognition] is mentioned twice.)³ and "Behold, David the Anointed King" [is here] - and therefore *Eliyahu HaNavi* [the prophet] already appeared a day earlier in T'verya [Tiberius]⁴ to announce the arrival of our righteous Moshiach.

It may be suggested that, since Moshiach can come any day - "I await his coming **every day**"⁵ - and since *Eliyahu HaNavi* must announce Moshiach's arrival the day before, that therefore *Eliyahu HaNavi* **actually comes every day** to T'verya and announces the coming of Moshiach. The announcement is directed particularly to those who put themselves in a position of "I await his coming every day," even though (as is the custom of *Chabad*)⁶ they do not actually articulate this verbally, but only think about it. [The announcement is made specifically to us] when we recite [this year],⁷ from the well-known Psalm, the verse: "I have found My

1. Expression used in *Shir HaShirim* [Song of Songs], 2:8.

2. *Yeshayahu [Isaiah]*, 25:9. See end of [tractate] *Ta'anis*.

3. *Shemos Rabbah*, end of chapter 23.

4. See *Eiruvim* 43b: Eliyahu has arrived yesterday... to the Great Court." In turn, the Great Court will first be restored in T'verya [Tiberius]" Rambam, *Hilchos Sanhedrin*, end of chapter 14.

5. Twelfth of the "Thirteen Principles of Faith."

6. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. IX, p. 282 ff.

7. [It is a Chassidic custom to recite Psalms corresponding to one's age as

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servant David, I have anointed him with My holy oil."⁸

...Added emphasis should be placed on all of the above this year, for two reasons. First, this year it is customary to recite the Psalm, which makes reference to the coming of *Moshiach*, when it states: "I have found my servant David, I have anointed him with my holy oil." In addition, this year we have reached the milestone of forty years since the passing of the Previous Rebbe, at which time "G-d has given you a heart to know and eyes to see and ears to hear."⁹ These [being a "*shaliach*" to announce "Behold he comes" and hearing Eliyahu's pronouncement because "I await him every day"] become even more significant since seven days have already passed since we entered into the year [57]51 - תשנ"א which Jews have designated and disseminated as the year in which אראנו נפלאות - Avenu Niflaos - I will show him wonders, following the initials of the year.

(From the talk of Wednesday, Parshas Beracha, 7 Tishrei 5751)

well the Psalm corresponding to the Rebbe's age. This sicha was said during the Rebbe's 89th year. Translator's note.]

8. 89:21.

9. Tavo 29:3.

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

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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