

# Rosh Hashana L'Chassidus

**"Gutt Yom Tov! Gutt Yom Tov!"**

**The setting - Lubavitch, the year - 5662.**

Happy voices rang out in the hall of the *yeshiva gedola* of Lubavitch on the night of Yud Tes Kislev, *Rosh HaShana*

*L'Chassidus*, 5662 (1901), that year a Friday night. Candles were lit and tables were royally set, eyes shone and hearts raced, this was a special Yom Tov! A Yom Tov for Chabad *chassidim*, a Yom Tov for *Toras HaChassidus* - a Yom Tov for all of Creation.

The joy reached the heavens; but not many know that this joy almost wasn't ...

Kislev - the Month of Holidays and the Month of Geula.

Historically, *Chassidim* look forward to the *Chag Hageula* of the Alter Rebbe and of the Mittlerer Rebbe. Yud-Tes Kislev was always celebrated in the great hall of the *yeshiva* in Lubavitch with great pomp and joy, the Rebbe Rashab *farbrenging* at the head of the table. Aside from the hundreds of *T'mimim* who learned in the *yeshiva*, hundreds of *chassidim* and *baalei battim* would come from all around to participate in this *farbrengen* with the Rebbe Rashab.

How magnificent was the Rebbe! His face shone with an *Or Eloki*; a light of joy radiating from his pure face. The Rebbe would say a *maamer chassidus* and many *sichos kodesh*, which would warm the heart and feed the *neshama*.

In Cheshvan 5662, the enemies of the Yidden in Russia reared their ugly heads and began persecuting them. In those years, Yidden were only allowed to live in an area called the "Pale of Settlement". The economic conditions in the Pale were very difficult; there was not much opportunity. This, combined with over-crowding, forced many Yidden to find living quarters outside the Pale.

Many of those Yidden received papers stating that they were dentists, a profession that earned them the right to live outside the Pale. Others procured similar documents for other professions, for if one was an "asset to society" they would be allowed to live in the larger cities.

The enemies of the Yidden began a campaign to enact





terrible new decrees against them. Using the excuse that the Yidden were going against the law and had spread beyond the Pale where they were permitted to live, they began stirring the upper echelons of the Russian Government against the Yidden.

In the course of a few days tens of Yidden were arrested. The heads of family were taken to prison and their possessions placed under government seal. (Those affected, including the women and children, amounted close to three hundred souls.)

The community activists wanted to help yet were at a loss as what to. They felt fettered by an overwhelming sentiment of hate towards the Yidden that had spread through the many aristocratic circles and which had affected many government ministers.

The Rebbe Rashab suffered deeply. "A heavy cloud rested upon my father's face," relates the Frierdiker Rebbe in his diary. On Motzei Shabbos 5 Kislev, the Rebbe left Lubavitch, together with the Frierdiker Rebbe. They took the express train to Moscow to begin arranging the release of the imprisoned Yidden and to search for a way to change the government's general attitude towards the Yidden.

To make matters worse, allegations were made that the *Chassid* Reb Mendel Horenstein, brother-in-law of the Rebbe Rashab, burned down his own lumber factory in order to damage lumber belonging to the gentile who shared the

property. The charge was baseless, yet Reb Mendel was imprisoned to await trial.

This is not the place to go into detail on the efforts of the Rebbe Rashab and the Frierdiker Rebbe on behalf of the Jews of Russia, more can be found in the diary of the Frierdiker Rebbe printed as the *hakdama* to *Kuntres U'mayon*. Suffice it to say, that after much effort they succeeded in releasing those imprisoned and began to slowly reverse the Jew-hating trend that had begun to spread amongst the "elite" society.

On Yud Kislev, the Frierdiker Rebbe went back to Lubavitch. On Yud-Tes Kislev, the Rebbe Rashab traveled to Peterburg to; a. secure the release of Reb Mendel Horenstein, b. arrange the return of the confiscated property to their owners, and c. prove the libels to be false and arrange permits to let those imprisoned continue living in the large cities like before.

Let us now return to Lubavitch, and follow the events as they played out in the absence of the Rebbe Rashab.

The trip was sudden and unexpected. Everyone thought the Rebbe would return in time for Yud Tes Kislev, but as days passed, the *chassidim* and *T'mimim* began to doubt whether this would indeed be so.

Doubt became certainty following a committee meeting of *T'mimim* with the Frierdiker Rebbe, *menahel* of the *yeshiva*, officially informing them of the improbability of his father's celebration with the *yeshiva*. The *menahel* told the *talmidim* to celebrate on Yud-Tes Kislev according to the seder set for them by the *Vaad of Mashpe'im and Mashgichim*: students of the *yeshiva gavoha* and *yeshiva ketana* and the *chadorim* would eat together with the Frierdiker Rebbe and *mashpiim*, *mashgichim*, *roshei yeshiva*, *magidei shiurim*, and even those who worked in the *yeshiva* offices.

Both the meals of Friday Night and the meal of Motzei Shabbos would be eaten, everyone together, in the spacious *yeshiva* hall, as opposed to the *yeshiva* dining room where the students usually ate. On Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup> of Kislev, there would be a *Farbrengen* in the house of the Frierdiker Rebbe and the members of the *Vaad* were to choose which of *bachrim* would join.

However, when the committee, composed of the oldest and most serious *bochrim* in the *yeshiva*, heard what the Frierdiker Rebbe had said, they were stunned. They all yearned to be with the Rebbe Rashab at this *farbrengen*, to see him and to hear every word he uttered, and now...



For the rest of the week preceding Yud-Tes Kislev, preparations went on as usual with the hope and faith that perhaps the Rebbe would return to Lubavitch after all. A special committee of *bochrim* was established to organize the *farbrengens* and festivities. Many guests streamed to Lubavitch for the big day, among them famous *ziknei ha'chassidim*, such as R' Dovid Tzvi Chein from Chernigov (the Radatz), and the outstanding *chassid* Rav Dov Zev Koznikov, the *Rav* of Yekaterinaslav. People were full of anticipation, for who knew? Just maybe...

The *yeshiva's* *hanhala* convened to discuss the upcoming event, deciding that although the Rebbe wouldn't be there, everything would carry on as planned. The *mashpiim* also agreed that the *T'mimim* from other cities, who had already received permission to come to Lubavitch for Yud-Tes Kislev to be with the Rebbe, should still come.

Thursday, the 17th of Kislev. The grand *farbrengen* would be taking place the following evening. Although little time remained, *chassidim* still hoped the Rebbe would make a last-minute appearance, but as time passed, "the cloud of gloom intensified," as the Frierdiker Rebbe put it.

At 8:00 a.m., before Shachris, the two great *chassidim*, the Radatz and Rav Dov Zev, met in shul and in the course of their discussion two courses of action came up. Either they would ask the Rebbe to come back especially for Yud-Tes Kislev, or they were going to travel to him in Moscow. However, travel to Moscow required permits, which no one had, so what would be the answer...? And from hour to hour everyone's sadness grew and the mood became progressively darker.

(The Chassidim were especially looking forward to this Yud -Tes Kislev because the year before (5661) the Rebbe Rashab had not been in Lubavitch.)

In the early evening the Radatz and Rav Dov Zev went to Rebbetzin Rivka, the Rebbe Rashab's mother, with the request that she ask the Rebbe to come to Lubavitch, if only for one day.

The Rebbetzin answered, "I am certain that if he could come, he would certainly do so." Then she added, "I cannot ask of him something which his holy *daas* doesn't agree with." The two *Chassidim* left, heavy hearted.

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At 8:30 p.m. on Thursday, a letter arrived. A holy letter from the Rebbe Rashab dated Yom Reviei, the 16<sup>th</sup> of Kislev.

The Frierdiker Rebbe rejoiced. At 9:30 he went to the hall of the *yeshiva gedola*, went up to the podium, and in the presence of the *mashgichim*, *mashpiim*, and guests he joyfully announced: "We have just merited a holy letter from my holy father, my



teacher and Rebbe. The letter explains the significance of the upcoming holy day. With Hashem's help, tomorrow night at the *farbrengen*, the letter will be read to everyone."

Although nothing could replace the Rebbe's holy presence, the news of the arrival of a letter from the Rebbe Rashab and that it explained the underlying theme of Yud-Tes Kislev, uplifted everyone's spirits and the great sadness lessened. They eagerly anticipated the contents of the letter, for the Frierdiker Rebbe didn't show it to anyone, even the *mashgichim* for Chassidus.

The members of the committee worked around the clock to ensure that everything would be ready before Shabbos. The *yeshiva's* hall was washed and decorated. Long tables and hundreds of chairs were arranged. Beautiful vessels were brought from the home of the Rebbe Rashab and placed on the tables.

Many *talmidim* worked for hours setting up rows upon rows of candles on the walls. A grand 1,668 candles were set up to correspond to the words "*Chag Rabbeinu ha'gadol v'ha'kadosh nishmaso Eden*." The hall was flooded with light, a marvelous sight to behold.

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The Shabbos Queen spread her wings over Lubavitch. It seemed as though, that not only had an extra *neshamas* descended upon the hundreds of *talmidim* and guests,

but it was a double and redoubled *neshamah* - double for Shabbos and redoubled for the *Chag HaChagim*, Yud-Tes Kislev.

Everyone gathered in the *yeshiva*. The Frierdiker Rebbe instructed the *talmidim* to sit in their usual places for a seder *Chassidus*. The *mashgichim*, *mashpim*, and honored guests sat with the Frierdiker Rebbe at a special table. The hundreds of *talmidim* sat and learned with vigor. The sound of Torah echoed loudly, extending far beyond the windows of the *zal*.

After an hour and a half of learning, the *gabbai* announced a break for *Kabbalas Shabbos*. When *davening* was over, the *gabbai* announced that the Rebbe's letter would now be read.

With measured steps, the Frierdiker Rebbe walked over to the podium flanked by the two *mashgichim* (of the *sidrei chassidus* and *sidrei nigleh*) at his right and left. The sight was reminiscent of the Rebbe's *t'kias shofar*, when the Rebbe stood at the lectern surrounded by *chassidim*. All rose, as is appropriate for *chassidim* being addressed by their Rebbe.

The anticipation was palpable and the inner joy was heightened. Silence reigned; only the sound of the rustling letter could be heard. The Frierdiker Rebbe began reading aloud; each word golden, each letter a sparkling jewel. "My children, *sh'yichyu*," he began, and the loving voice of a father could be heard throughout the hall.

***B"H. Yom Dalet, 16 Kislev 5662 Moscow***

***My sons, gather together on Yud-Tes Kislev, which comes upon us for good - those who learn, their leaders and their teachers and their mashgichim - and rejoice with the joy of the holiday which redeemed our souls in peace, and the light and life of our souls was given to us. This day is the Rosh HaShana for chassidus that our holy fathers bequeathed to us, and this is the Torah of the Baal Shem Tov, z'l.***

***This day is the beginning of Your work, the completion of the true intention of the creation of man on earth, to further draw down the revelation of the inner light of our holy Torah, which was drawn down on this day in a general way for the entire year. We must arouse our hearts on this day with desire, and inner, essential will with the true [innermost] point of our hearts, which will illuminate our souls with the light of the inner part of His Torah.***

***From the depths I call out to You, Hashem, to draw the aspect of the depth and pnimiyus of Toras Hashem and the mitzvos of Hashem from the aspect of the innermost and essential Ohr Ein Sof Boruch Hu, so that it illumine the inner part of our souls, so that our entire essence (i.e., our entire beings, the essence and its expressions, etc.) will be [directed] to Him, blessed is He, alone - so that He banish from us every evil***

***and disgusting trait of the natural traits, so that all our deeds and affairs (whether in avoda, i.e., t'filla, Torah and mitzvos, or in matters of the world which are necessary to sustain the body) are in accordance with the true intention, for the sake of Heaven, as per the desire of Hashem, etc. May Hashem, Father of Mercy, have mercy on us and enliven us in the proper and straight path; forthwith they shall see His countenance, etc.***

This was the first time the *chassidim* merited to hear the unique term with which the Rebbe Rashab had used in his holy letter when describing Yud-Tes Kislev, calling it "*Rosh HaShana L'Chassidus*".

Upon conclusion of the reading, all the students sat and sang an old *chassidishe* niggun, a niggun that pierces the heart and reaches to the *neshamah*. The rapturous notes of the *niggun* flowed from the mouths of hundreds of *talmidim*, washing across the room in great waves of song.

At 6:45 p.m., Reb Dov Zev rose to relate the story of the Arrest and *Geula*. In vivid tones he described the pain experienced by the *chassidim* when the Alter Rebbe was taken from them; the agony, the sorrow, the tears. He recounted the entire story up until the release of the Alter Rebbe from jail. He described how the *chassidim* had been somersaulting in the snowy streets of Petersburg, and the tremendous joy they all felt.

At this point Reb Dov Zev took a *Tanya* and taught the famous letter the Alter Rebbe wrote after the *Geula* entitled "*Katonti*." The *talmidim* leaned over the volumes of *Tanya* in front of them, reading the holy letters, learning from the teachings of the *Baal HaGeula*. All listened in utter silence; the only sound that could be heard was the sputtering of the thousands of candles.

When the learning was concluded, an elder *chassid* by the name of Reb Shmuel Betzalel (the Rashbatz) stood up. He had seen many Yud-Tes Kislevs in his time, but this was the first time he heard the extraordinary phrase the Rebbe Rashab wrote designating this day as "*Rosh HaShana L'Chassidus*", elevating it above the other holidays.

The Rashbatz raised a cup for *l'chaim*; the *talmidim* listened in awe to this elder *Chossid* that had merited seeing the Tzemach Tzedek.

"Our day of celebration is exceptionally lofty," the Rashbatz began and his voice shook with emotion, "If not for this day, the day of redemption and freedom of our great and holy Rebbe, we wouldn't know Hashem, Who gave the Torah, for *Rabbeinu HaKadosh* taught us to know Hashem, our Maker. We ought to rejoice on this day of light, and included in this are the words of our luminary the Rebbe *shlita*, that this day is the Rosh HaShana for *chassidus* and the day of revelation of *pnimiyus ha'Torah*. We

must offer thanks and praise to Hashem, who did not deprive us of descendants of *Rabbeinu HaGadol*, the Alter Rebbe.

"*T'mimim!* We have the Rebbe, who stands and serves before Hashem to teach knowledge of Torah and Hashem, Who gave the Torah, - our Nasi and teacher, the crown of our glory, who shows us wonders like in the days of the Alter Rebbe, returning the hearts of beloved children to their Father in Heaven. I raise my cup to the life of our Rebbe, and with all the strength of my soul I call out: "*Yechi Rabbeinu l'olam!* May Hashem bolster his strength and power to carry the tower of light to illuminate the earth and its inhabitants upon it, until the coming of Moshiach!"

A resounding of voices could be heard from one end of the hall to the other: "*Amen! Amen! Yechi Rabbeinu L'olam!* May the members of Tomchei T'mimim and all its administrators live forever!"

These were special moments, not just for the younger *chassidim*, but also for the elder *Chassidim* who sat at the head table. They all raised cups of *l'chaim* and wished each other heartfelt *brachos* for the New Year, the New Year for *chassidus* for all the Jewish people, for good and for blessing.

After a brief break, the meal began, which continued until 2:00 a.m. It was a royal feast befitting the Holiday of Holidays, Yud-Tes Kislev. At the end of the meal, everyone danced, and Lubavitch was filled with "*ora v'simcha v'sason v'yikar.*"

At 3:00 a.m., the Frierdiker Rebbe rose, blessed all present, and with great love he stood to leave the guests and *talmidim*. He turned to leave; the *talmidim* preceded him, standing in the doorway of the building in two long, straight rows. As he walked out they began singing, "*Ki b'simcha tzeitzeiu u'v'shalom tuvalun,*" and they accompanied the Frierdiker Rebbe to his home.

"All the invited guests took enormous pleasure from the splendid celebration, and their hearts rejoiced... The *talmidim* were positively affected by this celebration, for they were brought close to *avodas Hashem*, and they increased their diligence in the study of Torah with faith and sincerity."

With these lines Rabbi Moshe Rosenblum, secretary to the Frierdiker Rebbe, concludes his account of the events.

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The reaction to this Letter was not long in coming. On the





22<sup>nd</sup> of Teves the Frierdiker Rebbe writes in his diary, how many letters had arrived demanding a copy of the Letter, now termed "The Maamar of Rosh Hashanah of Chassidus". Over one thousand copies were immediately made and sent out to the various communities.

By 7 Nissan, about four thousand, seven hundred and fifty copies had been transcribed and sent out. The Frierdiker Rebbe lists three types of responses that the Mazkirus received in connection to this letter:

1) Twenty-three letters speaking about the great effect 'The Letter' had. They complain that they hadn't been sent The Letter right when it had come out; and (some begging, some rebuking) they assert that had they received the letter in time for Chanuka they would have made another Yom Tov.

2) Twelve letters written with great passion pouring out their wrath on the Mazkirus. One: you who work in the office of Tomchei Temimim are holding back our sustenance. Another reads as follows: this *rishus* to restrain this wonderful light and life, can only be found in someone born in Lubavitch. Koppel (one of the Mazkirim), you remember what the Rebbe [Maharash] said Chanuka 5641 regarding the Lubavitcher *yungerleit*, that *leben yam is truken* (near the sea the land is dry). A third: one who is full and satisfied cannot feel another's hunger, if only you had also lived between those swollen with *nachas* over their *bletter* (pages of) Gemara learned *lishma*, would you then understand the great need, in general for a *Chassidishe vort*, and especially for a Holy Letter from the Rebbe.

3) Nine letters describing the Seudas Mitzva they had made upon the arrival of the Letter, where they had re-celebrated the Yom Tov and blessed the Rebbe.

4) Four letters that are in a category of their own.

a. The *Chassidim* who lived in Brisk received the letter from the Rebbe Rashab making Yud-Tes Kislev into a *chassidic* Rosh HaShana, and they wanted to establish a day of joy on Purim Katan as a substitute for the previous Yud-Tes Kislev. When R' Chaim Brisker heard about this he said, "Don't mix one *simcha* with another. The *Yom Tov* of Yud-Tes Kislev is deserving of a *Yom Tov* in its own right, and specifically in light of this new Letter".

b. The *Chassidim* in Kremenchug established three days of *simcha* (the 16th, 17th and 18th of Shvat), and even the *Poilshe rabbanim*, such as R' Yisroel Yaakov and Rabbi Terechinski, danced without jackets saying, "Chabad, *Baruch Hashem*, lives. May Hashem make that *Chagas* (*chassidim* of Poland) live, too."

c. The *Chassidim* in Vilna had a huge *seuda* as soon as they

received the letter. One of the rabbis in Vilna heard about the meal the *Chassidim* were making and how they regarded Yud-Tes Kislev as Rosh HaShana. He reported this to R' Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, mocking the *chassidim* by quoting the *Mishna* that lists only four Roshei HaShana, while by the *chassidim*, they now had five. The *gaon* (himself bothered by this rabbi's laxity in fasting BHa"b and the observances of *Yom Kippur Koton*) responded: "They are adding – while we are diminishing."

d. A letter from Petersburg telling the following story: The chossid Reb Bentzion Otievsky had come for business purposes to the city. While visiting with his relative Mr. Yakov Otievsky he had showed him the new letter regarding Yud-Tes Kislev. Mr. Yakov, although he was a loose man (not frum), was filled with memories of his Chassidic youth and became inspired to join a Chassidishe farbrengen. He told Reb Bentzion that he wished to host the *seuda yomtov* that would surely be held in the coming days.

On that Thursday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Shvat, they celebrated the second *Yomtov* of Yud-Tes Kislev with much gladness and joy. Being that Mr. Yakov's house was not kosher, they brought the food from another Chasid who operated a public kosher kitchen in his guest-house.

After many hours and many more Lechayims, Reb Yakov became very inspired and swore that from that day on he would keep a kosher home by eating only kosher and observing the Shabbos. The very next day he broke his non-kosher dishes and bought new cookware and cutlery; and on Shabbos Shira Reb Yakov closed his business for the first time in 19 years.

Come and see the awesome power *Chassidim* by a chasidishe farbrengen carry. When enthused with the words of their Rebbe they can bring back a nineteen-year-old *oichel treifos* and *mechalel Shabbos*. *Chassidim* underestimate their *ruchniyus'dike* powers.

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Since Kislev 5662, the *chassidim* began calling Yud-Tes Kislev "*Rosh HaShana L'Chassidus*." The *HaYom Yom* begins and ends with Yud-Tes Kislev, as the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote, "Based on the holy letter of the Rebbe [Rashab] about the *Chag HaChagim*, which is the *Rosh HaShana l'Toras Chassidus Chabad*." (In a copy of the manuscript of the *HaYom Yom*, the Rebbe wrote "*Gutt Yom Tov*," and the Frierdiker Rebbe added in his own handwriting, "for a good year in learning *chassidus* and the ways of *chassidus*.")

גוט יום טוב. לשנה טובה, בלימוד החסידות ובדרכי החסידות, תכתבו ותחתימו"

Sources: *Hakdama Kuntres U'mayon* p. 7, 14; *Seifer HaToldos Admur HaRashab*, pp. 752; *Kerem Chabad*, Vol. 3, pp. 45