

America's Matan Torah

AGE-OLD VALUES
REPURPOSED



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הרה"ת ר' שלום דובער ע"ה
בן הרה"ת ר' יעקב יוסף ע"ה
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נלב"ע ח"י חשוון ה'תשע"ד
וזגתו מרת רבקה ע"ה
בת הרה"ת ר' אברהם ישעי' ע"ה
נלב"ע י"א סיון ה'תשע"ד
תנ"צ'ב'ה'
נדבת משפחתם שיחיו



This month, we mark a historic date.

This Chof-Ches Sivan¹ marks 80 years since the arrival of the Rebbe and Rebbetzin to the shores of the United States. The Rebbe explained that this day commemorates much more than the Rebbe and Rebbetzin's personal deliverance from the hands of the Nazis. It marks the beginning of a new era and a new stage in *hafatzas hamaayanos*.

To get a better grasp on what that means and to understand how it is relevant to us, we sat down for a farbrengen with Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Gourarie of Yeshivas Lubavitch Detroit, and noted author, lecturer and Chabad.org editor, Rabbi Tzvi Freeman.



The New Mission

Rabbi Gourarie: There is an interesting saying that was once popular among Chassidim about the state of spirituality in America:

“*Matan Torah* didn’t occur in *Chatzi Kadur Hatachton*, in the lower hemisphere of the world” (Eretz Yisroel being the center of the upper hemisphere).

The Rebbe repeated this concept on a number of occasions, including in the famous *sicha* of Chof-Ches Sivan 5751.² Among the Rabbeim, it seems to have been first mentioned by the Rebbe Rashab.³

What exactly does this mean? Obviously this is not about the literal location of *Matan Torah*; it clearly means something more than that. It also doesn’t mean that Torah does not reach the Americas and that we are somehow not obligated to fulfill Torah and mitzvos once we cross the Atlantic Ocean. Clearly, there is something far deeper meant.

First, let us examine what *Matan Torah* is all about.

Chassidus tells us that *Matan Torah* is not just the moment we received the Torah. After all, the *Avos* observed Torah as well. Rather, *Matan Torah* was the moment of connection between spirituality and physicality. It was the moment we received the power to draw *Elokus* into this world. To use the most common *mashal*, it gave us the ability to bring holiness into the animal’s skin that is tefillin. This was *Matan Torah*’s accomplishment.

However, there seems to be a caveat: Did *Matan Torah* actually bring *Elokus* everywhere? Did the world reach a state where all the nations serve Hashem? Clearly

not! Had that been the case, Moshiach would have been here long ago.

Obviously, even after the great effect of *Matan Torah*, there is something it did not accomplish. Even though we received the power to draw holiness into this world, it does not compare to the final stage: the actual coming of Moshiach.

To use Kabbalistic terms: At the time of *Matan Torah*, we had elevated 202 *nitzutzos* of the total 288 that we are obligated to collect. In the elapsed time since then, our job has been to finish that process in its entirety and bring *Elokus* everywhere, to every place in the world, and to every person’s state of being — thereby collecting the final 86.

In the millennia since *Matan Torah*, we have had new revelations that brought us closer to that goal. The revelations of Kabbalah by the Arizal, Chassidus by the Baal Shem Tov and Chassidus Chabad by the Alter Rebbe, were all stages in the final revelation — the coming of Moshiach.

The final stage, the Rebbe explained in Basi Legani 5711, is our generation, *Dor Hashvi’i*. Our mission is to complete the *avoda*, to bring the *Shechina* down to the lowest level, and thereby bring Moshiach.

But what exactly is different about our generation’s mission?

Weren’t Chassidim of all generations aware of the goal, as told to the Baal Shem Tov himself — to bring the wellsprings of Chassidus to the furthest *chutza*, and bring Moshiach?

The Final Stage

Interestingly, Chassidim did not always understand *chutza* the way we understand it today.

In the Rebbe Rashab’s *sichos*, *chutza* refers to *sechel enoshi*, the human intellect. The concept of *hafatzas hamaayanos* was seen in terms of the human experience. A person’s heart might be warm to Yiddishkeit but his cold and dry intellect can be very distant, and the goal of Chassidus Chabad is to infiltrate this last stand in the human being and conquer it for *Elokus*.⁴

In describing the new stage that began upon his arrival, the Rebbe used the words “tenufah chadasha.” These words indicate that an entirely new stage had begun.

From that perspective, even a G-d-fearing Jew who doesn't learn Chassidus is the greatest *chutza* possible! But from the beginning of the Rebbe's *nesius*, he demanded that we reach a much farther *chutza*, bringing *Elokus* to every corner of the world, to Jew and non-Jew alike.

America, especially 80 years ago, was not only distant from Yiddishkeit due to its location. America had a unique *kelipa*; the state of Yiddishkeit was far worse than in the old country. So, the *chiddush* of our generation is that we, in the final stage before Moshiach, bring the *Shechina* into the lower hemisphere, both in concept and in location.

The connection between this *avoda* and the coming of Moshiach is quite obvious. The idea of Moshiach, as Chassidus explains, is to make the world a dwelling place for Hashem. As the Navi says, וראו כל בשר יחדיו⁵ בשר יחדיו, all people of the world will serve Hashem in unison.

In the first *maamar*, Basi Legani, the Rebbe made it very clear that this was exactly our mission. Until that moment, while much of the work had been done, *Elokus* still had not reached the lowest level, the lowly *aretz*. This was the unique mission of *Dor Hashvi'i*.

But this did not exactly begin on Yud Shevat.

The Revolution

If we go back to *Matan Torah* for a moment, you will see that it also took place in stages.

Before *Matan Torah*, the early *tzaddikim* mentioned in Basi Legani brought *Elokus* "*lemata*," closer and closer to the world. True, it remained in spiritual form — Yaakov's *maklos* didn't become holy like *tefillin* — but they did bring down the *Shechina* to a certain extent. At the same time, after *Matan Torah* the Yidden still lived in the desert and there were a variety of mitzvos that they could not fulfill until they reached Eretz Yisroel. In other words, the main event of *Matan Torah* did not take place in a vacuum; it was accompanied by 'before' and 'after' stages.

It is fair to say that the same is true for the *Matan Torah* of the lower hemisphere. There were many significant moments throughout the generations of Chassidus and in *Dor Hashvi'i* in particular, but they were all parts of the process. The main event was Chof-Ches Sivan.

In describing the new stage that began upon his arrival, the Rebbe used the words "*tenufah chadasha*."⁶ These words indicate that an entirely new stage had begun. Indeed, shortly after the Rebbe's arrival, the Friediker Rebbe instructed him to lead the three new institutions, Merkos, Machane Yisrael and Kehos, which revolutionized the way *hafatzas hamaayanos* is viewed.

Until that day, the focus was limited to establishing yeshivos to draw in Jewish children. But the Rebbe initiated activities that reached much further. The Rebbe's initiatives were directed towards Jewish children who were not going to attend Jewish day schools. Talks & Tales⁷ and Mesibos Shabbos⁸ were among many activities directed to individuals who were much further from Yiddishkeit. As the years progressed, the Rebbe began more and more initiatives that reached beyond the Jewish world. Examples like Sheva Mitzvos,⁹ Moment of Silence, and many other initiatives, focused on the furthest *chutza* imaginable. And that all began on Chof-Ches Sivan.

In the Lion's Mouth

Rabbi Freeman: There was once a lion who had a thorn stuck in his throat. Knowing that the animals of the jungle feared him, he announced that whoever pulled it out would be handsomely rewarded. A bird with a long beak plucked up the courage, stuck her head into the lion's throat and pulled it out.

"What is my reward?" she asked the lion.

"Go tell all the other animals," the lion replied, "that you stuck your head into the throat of the lion and came out alive. That will be your reward."¹⁰

This is a famous parable about the various exiles the Jewish people have undergone. Despite the persecutions, we've



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always come out stronger. In fact, according to Chassidus, we are *mevarer* the specific character of that country and we adopt it for *kedusha*. Chassidus explains on the verse “*Vayehi beshalach Pharaoh,*” that when we left Mitzrayim, we took its strength along with us. That is our task in every *galus* — to capture the power of that place and to elevate it. America is the Mitzrayim, the superpower of our day, and our job is to transform that power and to raise it to *kedusha*.

Eighty years ago, this continent was known as a place of assimilation, where Jews flung off the yoke of Torah and mitzvos. After two or three generations, Jewish children would have absolutely no knowledge of their Yiddishkeit. They literally entered the lion’s mouth. On the other hand, America was known as a place to get things done. In Europe, people feel much more limited by convention; they aren’t as quick to change existing methods. In America, you have the freedom to do whatever you want, and people are open to change.

On Chof-Ches Sivan, the Rebbe set out to harness the very power of America and use it to bring holiness to America itself— and by extension to the whole world.

The Rebbe would always say that Moshiach should come “*lemata me’asarah tefachim*—under ten handbreadths.” In other words, Moshiach needs to be a literal reality; it needs to become a part of our lowly world. In Kabbalah terms, in order to reach *atik*, you need to go down to *malchus sheb’malchus*. To bring Moshiach, you need *hisyashvus*. Torah and mitzvos need to become normal in the reality that we live in and it shouldn’t seem like a foreign import. True *dirah betachtonim* is when Torah and mitzvos have a “native” feel to themselves

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— it should smell, look and feel like it is “made in America.”

Yiddishkeit, Made in America

The Rebbe could have easily created a small corner in America where we would daven the entire day and ignore the rest of society, by transplanting and recreating an exact replica of Chassidus in Europe. Instead the Rebbe took the American attitude and incorporated it. The goal wasn't to recreate a replica of the town of Lubavitch in America. It was to reapply the core principles of Lubavitch in America. As the Rebbe would quote the Midrash, “When you come to a town, follow its custom.”¹¹ Do it the American way. And indeed, the resulting expansion was incomparable to what was accomplished in Europe.

Many of the *mitzvoim* express this exact idea. The Rebbe's Lag Bomer parades and public *mitzvoim* had a very clear function — to demonstrate to America that you could be Jewish and unafraid, and be unabashed about your Yiddishkeit on the street. Go light a big Menorah in front of city hall. Not only is it totally normal, it's even part of what America stands for — as a country founded on the belief in Hashem.

Another example where we see an expression of ‘transformation’ in America is evident in the fact that the Rebbe chose to send shlichim from America to Eretz Yisroel. He didn't take Israelis who had spent years in 770; it was specifically American born kids — not because they were bigger *talmidei chachomim* but because they knew how to get things done in the American style, and indeed, they were very successful.

In general, the Rebbe always insisted that matters of *hafatza* be big and beautiful. In one *sicha* at a Purim farbrengen, the Rebbe said that the lesson from Achashverosh's *seudah* is that when you need to do something, you need to do it big and grand. That is definitely an “American *birur*.”

Some of these concepts don't seem so unique in our day, but somehow, they

weren't possible in previous generations. In earlier times, although Yiddishkeit was taken for granted within the *shtetl* of the Jewish community, it didn't reach out beyond their borders. Specifically in our generation, where we've been pushed out of the *shtetl* and forced to rethink the way we approach everything, we are able to go back to the very essence of Chassidus and live according to its most profound ideals — while also bringing it to the entire world. This is the ultimate *chutza*.

In Our Own Lives

This concept is not only about where we bring Chassidus, but also *how* we bring Chassidus.

In the *maamar* of *V'tah Tetzaveh*, the Rebbe draws a distinction between the *avoda* of previous generations and the *avoda* of our times. Many of our grandparents in Russia lived a life of utter self-sacrifice, where every mitzvah was a struggle. It was a revelation of the *etzem hanefesh*. However, there was one shortcoming: It wasn't *b'hisyashvuv*, it wasn't accomplished in a settled way. The Rebbe pointed out that when many of the Russian Chassidim settled in America, their *mesiras nefesh* evaporated. Our task, the Rebbe explained, is to bring *Elokus* downwards, in a settled and permanent way.

In my reading, that means “making Chassidus seem normal.” It should be seamless. The *darkei haChassidus* should seem expected to be a part of our life in this society. That means we cannot just transplant Chassidus from a previous generation; it needs to be tailored for the needs and styles of the new one.

The Mitteler Rebbe explains in *Toras Chaim*¹² that the children born in each country receive their vitality through the *sar* of the country. Chazal famously said¹³ that Hashem spread us among the nations “*kidei lehosif aleihem geirim*—in order to bring in new converts.” But how many new converts have we brought in? The Mitteler Rebbe explains that the children born in the new country, being that they receive the *shefa* of that land, are considered *geirim*.

So the unique *avoda* of each country is different, and with it, the method of education. This is especially true of the *chatzi kadur hatachton*, the lower hemisphere. The fact that it is an entirely different hemisphere indicates that it is profoundly different from the upper one. So we definitely can't bring up our children in the same fashion as the old country.

American culture is profoundly different from the culture among Chassidim in Eastern Europe. As the Friediker Rebbe once told Rabbi Sholom Ber Gordon, "You can't tell American Jews to do anything, but you can teach them everything."

Take *kabbolas ol* for an example.

Let's say a Chossid comes from Russia and tries to raise his children with the Russian method. If the child will ask, "Why should I do x, y, and z?" the Chossid will answer, "Because you must."

Obviously, that answer won't go over very well in America. In a different culture, questions may have been unthinkable, but in America, you won't be able to get away with pushing away someone's questions just by asserting your position. In truth, this change has been evident for several generations, going back even 100 years, but in our days it is even more evident.

In a previous generation, *kabbolas ol* was a punchline of a bigger story. A child grew up in an atmosphere of Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. Yiddishkeit was considered life itself. But, the *mashpia* would tell the student, don't do your *avoda* only because you enjoy it; do it with *kabbolas ol*.

In today's America, *kabbolas ol* has a very different connotation. A kid might want to watch TV, play video games, be involved in sports and sit on his smartphone all day. But the parent or teacher tells him, no. You can't do all those things. Why, you ask? Don't ask questions. Do it with *kabbolas ol*.

The terminology is the same — *kabbolas ol*. But the actual implementation — and impact — is profoundly different.

Kabbalos ol needs to be presented as a life-mission. It's the message that you do not live to fulfill your own selfish needs,

Chassidus is telling the person: You are in full control over your mind. You can decide what enters and what doesn't.

rather, you were placed in this world with a much broader mission. Hashem gave you a *neshamah* and has a mission for you to fulfill to change the world for the good.

This is not a boring and meaningless answer. It actually provides meaning in the context it is being used. The questioner will now be more enthusiastic about the pursuit to be a true Chossid.

This was the Rebbe's approach with Tzivos Hashem. When faced with a question, "How do we instill *kabbolas ol* within American children?" the answer wasn't, "Just tell them they need to do it." The answer was, instill them with a sense of pride, a sense of purpose, and make it belong to them. When a child is instilled with a mission and with the knowledge that he is part of an army with a broader mission, it gives him a whole new sense of purpose.

Take another example: Imagine a young *bochur* coming to his *mashpia* with questions that are bothering him, and the *mashpia* answers, "What you need is *hesech hadaas*. Just ignore those questions and they will go away."

Today, the whole world is out to grab your mind. They give you free stuff in return for open access to your mind to manipulate what you're thinking about. If a *bochur* complains that he cannot concentrate, the answer cannot simply be *hesech hadaas*.

We need to go back and remember the core meaning of *hesech hadaas*. Termed better, it means, "Fill your mind with *osios*." Make sure that there are Torah concepts that you understand and know by heart, whether a *perek Tanya*, *Mishnayos*, a *maamar*, or anything for that matter, "so that at all times and in all places he will be able to think and utter the holy letters of

Torah,” as Hayom Yom says. *Hesech hadaas* means that you learn to take control of what is in your mind and use your brain to its true capacity.

Now, that is a much more empowering message than “ignore it.” Chassidus is telling the person: You are in full control over your mind. You can decide what enters and what doesn’t. Create for yourself an arsenal of equipment — *Torah baal peh* — that will allow you to assert yourself in your own brain.

There can be three impediments to carrying this out. One, if you don’t understand what is going on in your mind. Two, if you don’t understand the power that you have. And three — if you have nothing to think about!

I once spoke to *semicha bochurim* about this, and one fellow blurted out, “You can’t control what you think!” Chassidus doesn’t agree; it really does provide the tools to control your thought.

Bittul is a similar issue. A Chossid has to learn *bittul*. So a *bochur* sits at a *farbrengen* and the *mashpia* tells him, “*Du bist gurnisht!* You are nothing! The world is not about you!”

In America, we’re speaking to a 15-year-old kid whose major concern in life is the acne on his face and how he can get the *chevra* to believe that, nevertheless, he’s a cool dude. Because he’s sure that he’s not. He doesn’t feel successful in learning Gemara, he’s not the ultimate Chassidische *bochur*, and so he feels he must be really rotten.

Obviously, by telling him, “*Du bist gurnisht!*,” we’re not being helpful.

So, in a beautiful *maamar*, one of the last to be *mugah*, V’Dovid Avdi 5732, the Rebbe explains *bittul*. *Bittul* is the capacity to get beyond yourself, to transcend yourself. And it’s rooted in the very core of the soul. Because you are a *real something*—you’re not just *about something*—therefore you have the capacity to get beyond yourself.

That’s magnificent. It’s uplifting and encouraging. Who wouldn’t want to achieve that?

In other words, the teachings of Chassidus are timeless. However, they need to be applied within the context of each situation. If the *kelipa* of America is different from Russia, we need to strip away the layers covering those concepts and return to the core idea. And when we do that, the results are much richer.

A Loftier Generation

Rabbi Gourarie: In many of the Rebbe’s *sichos*, it is clear that he saw our generation in a unique light; as a generation with special spiritual *koach*.

For example, the Rebbe once repeated the famous story of the Rebbe Rashab, where he cried to the Tzemach Tzedek that he doesn’t see a revelation of *Elokus* like Avraham Avinu. The Rebbe said on that occasion that in our day, we can raise a child in such a holy manner that he will cry for not seeing *Elokus*. He will consider it more important than *gashmius*.¹⁴

Think about that for a moment. The Rambam writes that we educate children with candy, because they are too young to appreciate spirituality. But the Rebbe said that the nature of people has changed. In the days of the Rambam, children were closer to materialism. But in our generation, a child is naturally inclined to *ruchnius*, and if he doesn’t receive his *ruchnius*, he cries.

How does our *teva* suddenly change? Why are children suddenly different from previous generations? In the Rebbe’s own words, “This story revealed a new level in *chinuch*, especially after it was retold by the [Friediker] Rebbe.” In other words, the *Shechina* has arrived down here, in our world, and who brought it here? The *tzaddik* of the generation — the Rebbe.

The Rebbe spoke about another similar point on Chanukah 5746*. At that *farbrengen*, the Rebbe spoke about the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching that Hashem constantly recreates everything in the world,¹⁵ and explained that it is essentially already written in Rambam: In the first *halacha*, he writes that Hashem is “*mamtzi*

kol nimtza—he creates all creations” — in present tense!¹⁶

The point the Rambam makes is that every person in our generation has the ability and the obligation to see Hashem’s hand in everything, to see “*koach hapoel binifal*,” because it is a *halacha* of Torah which applies to all equally, not only to those who learn Tanya or are followers of the Baal Shem Tov. The Rebbe showed how this concept is clearly understood from within the words of the Rambam. That is a revolutionary idea.

A third such concept was our relationship to *gashmius*. The Rambam famously says in the final *halacha* that when Moshiach comes, there will be “*ma’adanim metzeyim Kafar*—delicacies will be available like dirt.” The Rebbe explained that we will view those *ma’adanim* like dirt; they will be meaningless to us.¹⁷

The Rebbe also said that it is possible to live on that level today. It’s a *darga* of Moshiach’s times, but the Rebbe demanded it from us in this generation.

Now, it could seem that the Rebbe is speaking of high spiritual levels while we are stuck far below in our own materialism. But if you think this means that you are not capable of reaching this level, you should know that there is a precedent.

Imagine the morning after *Matan Torah*. Moshe tells the Yidden to slaughter an animal and fashion tefillin. No doubt, it sounds crazy. Of course, they thought to themselves, holiness is meant to envelop the physical world as well, but now we are going to skin an animal for it? *Matan Torah* is a nice ideal, but “Rabbi, don’t go overboard...”

In other words, this is definitely within our reach, so nobody should disregard it as impractical. This is our mission as *dor hashvi’i*. We need to become Chassidische Yidden who see *koach hapoel binifal*, who view *ma’adanim* like *afar*, and who bring this to others as well.

Our job is to bring the *maayan* itself to the furthest *chutza*. In previous times, these ideas were the purview of a select few. But today, this is meant for every person, Jew



and non-Jew. May Hashem help us that from this Chof-Ches Sivan, we reach the final goal, and merit the literal coming of Moshiach, speedily in our day. 7

1. A *Chassidisher Derher* has covered the topic of the Rebbe’s arrival extensively. To read about this special day, see the following articles:

- The story of the Rebbe’s escape: “The complete story of Chof-Ches Sivan,” Sivan 5777.
 - A short overview: “A timeline of the escape of the Rebbe and the Rebbetzin,” Sivan 5775.
 - The Rebbe and Rebbetzin’s sea voyage: “Serpa Pinto,” Weekly Newsletter, Korach 5771.
 - The Rebbe’s revolution through Merkos, Machane and Kehos: “The New World,” Sivan 5778.
 - The Rebbe’s first farbrengen in America: “Boki in Likkutei Dibburim,” Weekly Newsletter, Chukas 5773.
 - A *yoman* of Chof-Ches Sivan 5751: “Kovetz Chof-Ches Sivan,” Tammuz 5772.
 - Moshiach article: “Impacting the World — Bottom-Up,” Sivan 5776.
2. Sefer Hasichos 5751 vol. 2 pg. 651.
 3. Igros Kodesh Admur Harashab vol. 1 pg. 161.
 4. Toras Shalom pg. 112
 5. Yishaya 40:5.
 6. Shabbos Shelach 5746. Likkutei Sichos vol. 33 pg. 274.
 7. See “Talks and Tales,” Derher Teves 5781.
 8. See Derher Teves 5778 pg. 48.
 9. See “Light Unto the Nations,” Derher Shevat 5777.
 10. Bereishis Rabba 64:10.
 11. Shemos Rabbah, Ki Sisa 47.
 12. Maamar Tzidkas Pirzono, Toras Chaim, Shemos II pg. 221d.
 13. Pesachim 87b.
 14. Likkutei Sichos vol. 20 pg. 66.
 15. Shaar Hayichud V’haemunah *perek alef*.
 16. Motzei Zos Chanukah 5746. Toras Menachem 5746 vol. 2 pg. 243
 17. Hadran on Rambam, 11 Nissan 5745. Likkutei Sichos vol. 27 pg. 237.