

Derher**Editorial**

“A suggestion:

“It would be the greatest zechus for the neshama [of the Rebbetzin]; in connection with her neshama and its elevation, we should institute that all Yidden begin celebrating their birthdays...” (25 Adar 5748).

It was merely a few days after the conclusion of the *shloshim* following the Rebbetzin's passing when the Rebbe asked for this new initiative to be implemented in her *zechus*.

As we commemorated the Rebbetzin's 30th *yahrtzeit* last month, we now mark 30 years since the Rebbe launched the “birthday campaign” in Adar 5748.

A full overview on the beginnings of this custom and how it evolved over the generations is presented in this magazine.

In the *sichos* about the significance of a birthday, the Rebbe also explained that *galus* is compared to pregnancy, and *geulah* to birth. By each and every individual properly celebrating his or her own birthday, we will merit the ultimate “birth” of all of *klal Yisrael*, with the *geulah shleima*.

With blessings for a *freilichen Purim*,

The Editors

ר"ה לאילנות, ט"ו בשבט, ה'תשע"ח

לזכות
הרה"ת הרה"ח ר' דוד הלוי שיחי'
לרגל מלאות שלושים שנה להולדתו
כ"ה אדר ה'תשמ"ח - ה'תשע"ח
שיתברך בשנת הצלחה וברכה בגור'
בכל אשר יפנו

ולזכת זוגתו מרת ליפשא ובניהם
ובנותיהם
שמואל הלוי, לוי הלוי, הינדא מאטל,
יוסף הלוי שיחיו
ויסמן



MIVTZA YOM HULEDES

A historically private observance
becomes a minhag for klal Yisrael.

Secrecy

A birthday is a time for reflection, rejoicing, and thanksgiving. It is considered a personal Rosh Hashanah and there are various *minhagim* associated with this special milestone.

This was not always the case throughout Jewish history.

Chazal make various references to the significance of a birthday. The *chanukas hamishkan* was postponed to the month of Nissan to coincide with the birthday of Yitzchak Avinu,¹ and the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu's birthday on 7 Adar caused the miraculous *v'nahafoch hu* of the Purim story.²

There are several recorded instances of *gedolei Yisroel* hosting a *seudas mitzvah* in honor of a milestone birthday, and the idea that one's *mazal* is especially strong on a birthday is sourced in the *Talmud Yerushalmi*.³

Nevertheless, the concept of celebrating a birthday annually, let



THE REBBE CELEBRATES HIS SEVENTIETH YOM HULEDES WITH CHASSIDIM, YUD-ALEF NISSAN 5732.

alone attributing much significance to it, was virtually unheard of for millennia.

Chassidus revealed an entirely new dimension of a *yom huledes*.⁴ The Baal Shem Tov observed the day of Chai Elul as a day of *simcha* with a special *seudas mitzvah* for select *talmidim*.⁵ Although all the Rebbeim observed their birthdays, it was always very private and only known to a select few.

The Rebbe Rashab would say a *maamar* on his birthday, Chof Cheshvan each year. If it was Shabbos, the *maamar* was said publicly (as was customary every Shabbos). On a weekday, the *maamar* was said only in the presence of the Frierdiker Rebbe.⁶

The significance of a *yom huledes* and how unknown it was to Chassidim is evident from the following story:

One year during the Frierdiker Rebbe's youth, on Yud-Beis Tammuz, he mentioned to his teacher, the Rashbatz, that it was his *yom huledes*.

The Rashbatz responded, "Since when is a *yom huledes* so special? The Gemara⁷ states that it would be more pleasant for man had he not been created!"

At dinner that evening, the Frierdiker Rebbe shared this conversation with his father, the Rebbe Rashab. The Rebbe Rashab responded, "He (the Rashbatz) does not know everything. A *yom huledes* is indeed very special."⁸

Minhagei Anash

In the later years of the Frierdiker Rebbe's *nesius*, he revealed that the Rebbeim would observe their birthdays, and encouraged Chassidim to do so as well.

The first time the concept of observing a birthday became an official instruction to Chassidim was with the publication of the Hayom Yom by the Rebbe. The entry for Yud-Alef Nissan (the Rebbe's *yom*

"Since when is a *yom huledes* so special? The Gemara states that it would be more pleasant for man had he not been created!"

huledes—although this was unknown to the public at the time) states: On a birthday, one should spend time in seclusion. He should recall his experiences and think deeply into them. He should then repent and correct those (of his past deeds) that need correction and repentance.

On Yud-Alef Nissan 5709 (the last Yud-Alef Nissan before the Frierdiker Rebbe's *histalkus*), the Frierdiker Rebbe said a short *sicha*, which was published in the *Kuntres Maamarim* of Pesach that year.⁹

During the Rebbe's *nesius*, the Rebbe observed Yud-Alef Nissan (and Chof-Hei Adar—the Rebbetzin's birthday) as a special day every year by going to the Ohel. In 5712 (the Rebbe's fiftieth birthday), the Rebbe said a *maamar* to a group of Chassidim, and in 5722 (the Rebbe's sixtieth birthday) the Rebbe held a special *farbrengen*. From 5731 onwards, the Rebbe held a *farbrengen* or said a *sicha* each year in connection with Yud-Alef Nissan.

With the onset of the Rebbe's *nesius*, it was established that *bochurim* would be admitted for *yechidus* every year in connection with their *yom huledes*, in contrast to previous generations, when *bochurim* rarely merited *yechidus*.¹⁰

The birthday *yechidus* was also for *anash*, and many of the *minhagim* of *yom huledes* were revealed and clarified during these *yechidusen*. Over time it became a regular occurrence for Chassidim to mention their upcoming birthdays in their letters

The Rebbe read through the *tzetel* and wondered aloud “Vov? Zayin?”

to the Rebbe and the Rebbe would respond with special *brachos* and instructions to observe the *minhagim* of *yom huledes*.

It is interesting to note that in many of these letters the Rebbe refers to these observances as “*minhag anash* of recent years.” The *minhagim* include increased *limud haTorah* and *tzedaka*, and receiving an *aliya* the Shabbos before the birthday—as well as on the day of the birthday when applicable. These *minhagim* apply to men and women¹¹ and were published in *Sefer Haminhagim*.¹²

When Rabbi Berel Baumgarten was in *yechidus* for his birthday in the summer of 5714, the Rebbe asked him if he had received an *aliya* on Shabbos. When he answered in the negative, the Rebbe asked, “Why not? I thought everyone was aware of my request [to do so]!”

In later years, Chassidim would come to the Rebbe for dollars in

connection with their *yom huledes*. On such occasions, they would receive an additional dollar and a *bracha* for a *shnas hatzlacha*.”

CHILD'S FIRST BIRTHDAY

On a child's first birthday, it is appropriate for parents to observe the customs of *yom huledes* on behalf of the child, increasing in Torah learning and giving *tzedaka*. Also, and primarily, they are to contemplate on the great merit granted to them by Hashem, entrusting them with a beautiful *neshama* and their obligation to educate the child properly.¹³

Rabbi Alexander Namdar relates: On our son's first birthday, shortly after arriving to Sweden on *shlichus*, we put a pen in his hand and wrote a birthday *pan* to the Rebbe. We sent it together with a letter regarding a timely issue in our *shlichus*.

The Rebbe responded: מנהגי יום – Observe the *minhagim* of a birthday for your son, *sheyichye*.

The Exact Date

Since birthday observance is a fairly new phenomenon in Jewish tradition, many people were unaware of the exact date of their birthday.

Reb Avraham Dunin, a”h, was in *yechidus* for his birthday. In his *tzetel* he asked for a *bracha* for his birthday, which would be taking place on Vov Cheshvan. The Rebbe read through the *tzetel* and wondered aloud “Vov? Zayin?” The Rebbe concluded the *yechidus* with a *bracha*. As he was leaving the room, the Rebbe once



A BIRTHDAY BRACHA WRITTEN IN THE REBBE'S KSAV YAD KODESH AS A POSTSCRIPT, CIRCA 5721: בברכת שנת הצלחה – בקשר עם יום הולדתו – ולמילוי משאלות לבבו לטובה בכה”ע [=בכל העניינים] שכותב.

again looked at the *tzetel* and said, “Vov? Zayin?”

Reb Avraham was mystified by this, as the difference between the letters *vov* and *zayin* are quite obvious in the script he had written his note. He called his mother to find out the exact time he was born. To his amazement, she acknowledged that he was born in the evening (*bein hashmashos*) between Vov and Zayin Cheshvan. The exact date was not relevant at the time, because his *bris* had been delayed due to other circumstances.¹⁴

Rabbi Yitzchok Dov Lieberman of Kfar Chabad merited his first *yechidus* on his 19th birthday, Daled Cheshvan, 5734.

“I prepared for *yechidus* to the best of my abilities. In my note I requested a *bracha* for my *yom huledes* on Daled Cheshvan, among other requests. Reading my note, the Rebbe asked ‘When is your *yom huledes*?’ I was shocked, and although I had not prepared to speak to the Rebbe I managed to reply ‘Daled Cheshvan.’

“The Rebbe asked again, ‘When is your *yom huledes*?’ I figured that I had responded too softly the first time, so in a louder voice I said ‘Daled Cheshvan.’ At this point I should have realized that all is not in order, and the Rebbe asked a third time, ‘You are sure your *yom huledes* is Daled Cheshvan?’”

“Flustered, I nervously responded in the affirmative and even added that this was the day I celebrated my bar mitzvah. The Rebbe shrugged and



A LETTER FROM THE REBBE TO A BOCHUR IN HONOR OF HIS BIRTHDAY, DATED 15 ELUL 5710. THE REBBE WISHES HIM “TO BE ZOCHEH THAT THROUGH YOU WILL BE ACHIEVED A PORTION OF WHAT MY FATHER-IN-LAW WANTED TO ACCOMPLISH IN THIS WORLD.”



30 TISHREI 5740, LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 194235

THE REBBE INSTITUTED THE PRACTICE OF BOCHURIM GOING INTO YECHIDUS FOR THEIR YOM HULEDES.

proceeded to *bentch* me in connection with my *yom huledes*.”

“Leaving *yeichidus* in a daze, I shared the story with my friends, who advised me to speak with Rabbi Hodakov. Upon hearing my strange story, he was angry with me that the Rebbe needed to ask the question so many times. ‘After the first time you should have understood that you need to investigate the matter!’

“Upon finding my birth certificate after a difficult search, we discovered that the date of my birth was **Yud-Daled Cheshvan**! My father recorded our birthdays in a notebook with pencil, and apparently the ‘yud’ of my date of birth was small and therefore overlooked. This is my only explanation for the source of such an error.”¹⁵

The Rebbe instructed those who were born on a date that does not appear on the calendar every year (such as 30 Cheshvan or 30 Kislev) to observe the *minhagim* on both the last day of the previous month and the first day of the new month.¹⁶

BIRTHDAY CAKE

On 15 Kislev 5747, on the way back from the Ohel, the Rebbe remarked to Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky about it being his *yom huledes*.

“Did your family prepare a cake for your birthday?” the Rebbe asked.

Rabbi Krinsky was unsure how to respond, and the Rebbe said, “Nu, you can still make up for it.”

“That night I went home and shared the Rebbe’s instruction with my family. We prepared a cake and had a *chassidishe farbrengen*.”

For Klal Yisrael

Following the *histalkus* of the Rebbetzin on Chof-Beis Shvat 5748, the Rebbe *davened* during the week in his home on President Street throughout the *shnas ha’aveilus*. On Chof-Hei Adar, the Rebbetzin’s 87th birthday, several minutes after the conclusion of *Shacharis*, the Rebbe suddenly descended from the second

floor and approached his *shtender* to say a *sicha*. This came as an absolute surprise to everyone present.

Continuing the theme of “והחי יתן” אל לבו that the Rebbe had emphasized since the *histalkus*, the Rebbe suggested that in connection with the Rebbetzin’s birthday it was appropriate to focus on the *minhagim* of *yom huledes* and to share them with *klal Yisrael*. The Rebbe added that doing so “will be the greatest *zechus* for the *neshama* (of the Rebbetzin).”

The Rebbe then proceeded to introduce two new elements to the *yom huledes* observance:

1. Every individual should host a *farbrengen* in connection with their *yom huledes*. They should gather friends and family, and together they should say “אן אמתן לחיים, א חסידישן לחיים”—a true, *chassidishe l’chaim*. The joyful atmosphere of a *farbrengen* is conducive to taking on new *hachlatos*, ensuring that they will be meaningful and enduring.

The Rebbe added that doing so “will be the greatest zechus for the neshama (of the Rebbetzin).”

- Parents should observe these *minhagim* with their young children, especially hosting *farbrengens* and parties for their friends in connection with their birthdays, thus encouraging them to increase in their excitement in all areas of Yiddishkeit. In turn, they will surely make a *shturem* for their parents to do the same on their birthdays, and especially with regard to *hachlatos tovos*.¹⁷

Shortly thereafter, a detailed list of ten *minhagei yom huledes*, compiled from the Rebbe's *sichos* and letters, was edited by the Rebbe and publicized.¹⁸

Thus *Mivtza Yom Huledes* was born.

While giving out dollars, the Rebbe would remind children and adults to host a party or *farbrengen* in honor of their *yom huledes*.

During Chol Hamoed Pesach, a Yiddish advertisement was prepared for the *Algemeiner Journal* calling upon all to mark their birthday with the significance it deserves. It was entitled “Do not miss out on observing the most important day of your life!” The Rebbe edited the memo and instructed that it be translated into English and Hebrew.¹⁹

Additionally, Tzach published a full-page ad in *The New York Times*, also edited by the Rebbe, titled “Birthdays Matter.” Tzach in Eretz Yisrael launched an ambitious *yom huledes* campaign, reaching tens of thousands of children around the country.

During the *farbrengen* of Acharon Shel Pesach (Moshiach's Seudah) that year, the Rebbe explained the various Torah sources and rationale for publicly celebrating birthdays at length.²⁰ This *sicha* was the Rebbe's participation in the *kinus Torah* customarily held following each Yom Tov.

This campaign was well received by all who were affected by it. Shluchim in their respective cities, as well as teachers in schools and *bochurim* on *mivtzoim*, inspired hundreds of thousands to utilize their special day to increase in Yiddishkeit. The

mere fact that someone was thinking of them on their birthday was very satisfying and heartwarming for many.

A CHOSSID'S BIRTHDAY

In 5751, a Chossid wrote to the Rebbe that a certain date would be the fortieth anniversary from the day he first had the merit to see the Rebbe. The Rebbe responded: “מנהגי יום הולדת. אזכיר – Observe the *minhagim* of a *yom huledes*. I will mention it at the Ohel.” (See *Hayom Yom* 30 Shevat).

Birthdays Matter

They matter because they mark the day you began your life.
 And that makes birthdays the perfect day for reflection along with celebration. A time to think about your life as a Jew. About good deeds you'd like to perform. About relationships with friends and family. And about the role Torah could be playing in your life.

Your birthday is your day. So get together and celebrate with the people you're close to.
 At the party, say a prayer of thanks to G-d. Give money to charity. Help out someone in need. Celebrate your Jewish identity.

The Talmud says your birthday is a day when good fortune is on your side. But that good fortune to work. And make your birthday matter.

LUBAVITCH YOUTH ORGANIZATION
 A Division of the Worldwide Chabad-Lubavitch Movement
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 Brooklyn, New York 11213

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A FULL PAGE ADVERTISEMENT IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, PROMOTING MIVTZA YOM HULEDES.



THE REBBE'S HANDWRITTEN HAGAHOS ON THE PRESS RELEASE IN YIDDISH ANNOUNCING MIVTZA YOM HULEDES.

The Final Birur

For us Chassidim, the *Mivtza Yom Huledes* bears special meaning, as it was initiated by the Rebbe for the *aliya* and *zechus* of the Rebbeztzin.

The Rebbe explained the reason this special observance became widely known only in recent years. As the final generation of *galus*, we are tasked to orchestrate the final *birurim*.²¹ Through observing the *yom huledes*, one transforms a regular day into a Yom Tov.²² The lowest levels of reality are elevated to the greatest levels of *bittul*.

This will surely expedite this final phase of *galus* (which is compared to pregnancy²³) and usher in the *geulah shleima* (which is compared to the birth of *am Yisrael*) *teikef umiyad mamash!*²⁴ **T**

STORY

As told by Rabbi Levi Gansburg, Toronto, Canada.

In honor of Purim Katan 5749, my father, Rabbi Yosef Gansburg, arranged a trip for a group of *mekuravim* from Toronto to come to the Rebbe for Shabbos. My older brother and sister were celebrating their birthdays that month, and he took them along so that they could receive a dollar and a *bracha* from the Rebbe for their birthdays. He decided to take me along as well, although my birthday was in the summer.

During the several hours we waited in line, my siblings rehearsed how they would notify the Rebbe of their birthdays. I knew they would receive an extra dollar and I would receive only one—but that's life.

The moment came when we reached the front of the line and my sister and brother both mentioned their birthdays and received a second dollar and *bracha*. I received a dollar from the Rebbe and continued walking silently. The Rebbe suddenly called me back and asked “When is your *yom huledes*?”

As I was not expecting to speak to the Rebbe and surely did not anticipate the question, I was tongue tied. My father responded on my behalf that my birthday is in the month of Av. The Rebbe handed me a second dollar saying, “You should give this to *tzedaka* on your birthday.”

It was very special to me that the Rebbe expressed such sensitivity to ensure that I not feel left out from my other siblings. But the story does not end there.

During that summer, my father arranged another trip to the Rebbe for Shabbos Mevarchim Av. The Rebbe once intimated to my father that this trip should occur annually. Since my birthday is during the month of Av, I naturally joined along so that I could receive the Rebbe's *bracha* for my birthday.

While waiting on line that Sunday, I rehearsed my line numerous times: “My *yom huledes* will be in the month of Av.” I was very excited to receive an extra dollar in honor of my special day.

Approaching the Rebbe and receiving the first dollar, I was sure to recite my line as I had practiced so many times. To my surprise and disappointment, the Rebbe continued giving a dollar to the next one in line and in the rush I found myself outside with only one dollar in my hand.

“I did not receive a second dollar!” I cried to my father.

My father was visibly shaken. “What do you mean?”

As we stood there in shock, my father suddenly remembered what had occurred half a year earlier.

“Don't worry, Levi, You received the dollar and *bracha* for your birthday six months ago in Adar!”

This is one of countless stories emphasizing that every encounter with the Rebbe is a meeting of *neshamos*.

Minhagei Yom Huledes²⁵



VIDEO STILL OF THE SICHA, 25 ADAR 5748.

Aliya

Receive an *aliya* to the Torah on the Shabbos before the birthday, either at *Shacharis* or *Mincha*.²⁶ (There were those who were specifically told to receive an *aliya* at *Mincha*.)²⁷ If the birthday is on a Monday or Thursday, receive an *aliya* then as well.

The Rebbe advised someone with a birthday right after Yom Kippur to at least try to receive *hagbaha* or *gelila*, as receiving an *aliya* on Yom Kippur would be difficult.

To one who had not received an *aliya* the Shabbos before his birthday, the Rebbe instructed him to receive an *aliya* the following Shabbos.²⁸

Tzedaka

Increase in giving *tzedaka* before *Shacharis* and *Mincha*.²⁹ If the birthday is on Shabbos or Yom Tov, give extra *tzedaka* before and after Shabbos or Yom Tov.

To one who had given *tzedaka* in the amount of sixty in connection with his sixtieth birthday, the Rebbe commented: *It is customary with regard to tzedaka to give one extra, corresponding to the coming year.*³⁰

When the birthday occurs on Shabbos, a double portion of *tzedaka* should be given on Friday. As the Rebbe wrote to someone:

ראה פרש"י עה"ת בראשית (ב, ג) ברכו
(הש"ק) במן כו' ובששי כו'.

See Rashi on *Bereishis* (2:3): [Hashem] **blesed (Shabbos Kodesh) with the mann, etc. and on the sixth day, etc.** [a double portion of *mann* was provided to *bnei Yisroel*].³¹

Tefilla

Increase in *kavana* during davening, contemplating the greatness of Hashem.

Recite the entire Tehillim (or at least one *sefer*).

1. *Shemos Rabbah* 52:2.

2. *Megillah* 13b.

3. *Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah* 3:8. See *Korban Ha'eida*.

4. See *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 24, p. 178-187.

5. *Sefer Hasichos* 5703, p. 451.

6. *Hayom Yom* 20 Cheshvan, *Hatomim* Vol. 1, p. 263

7. *Eruvin* 13b

8. *Reshimos Devarim* (Rabbi Yehudah Chitrik), p. 166.

9. *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5709, p. 142.

10. *Teshura Gourary-Matusof Kislev* 5772.

11. *Sichos Kodesh* 5735 vol. 1, p. 125.

12. P. 81.

13. *Toras Menachem* 5742 vol. 4, p. 2190.

14. As told by his nephew Rabbi Mendel

Dunin. *Kfar Chabad Magazine* #1543.

15. *Kfar Chabad Magazine* #1580.

16. *Heichal Menachem* vol. 2, p. 38.

17. *Sefer Hasichos* 5748, p. 331. Listen to the *sicha* at www.chabad.org/554613.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 406.

19. The manuscript of the Rebbe's corrections in his holy handwriting is published in *Tzaddik LaMelech* vol. 1, p. 143.

Kapitel

In accordance with the instruction of the Baal Shem Tov to recite the chapter of Tehillim connected with your age,³² learn the new chapter thoroughly.

There was a discussion whether on a birthday one should recite the old *kapitel* in addition to the new one. Rabbi Michoel Seligson wrote this question in a note and the Rebbe responded: “מהי שייכותו (ה'ז שן) – What is its connection? (It is the old one).”

Torah

Increase in Torah learning. Add an extra *shiur* in *nigleh* and Chassidus during the birthday, in addition to the established *shiurim* of Chitas and Rambam.

When a birthday occurred on a Friday, the Rebbe instructed several *bochurim* in *yechidus* to be *maavir* the *sedra* (*shnayim mikra*) that week

specifically during the day (and not on Shabbos).³³

Chazaras Dach

Learn a *maamar* by heart (or at least a section), and review it in front of a group of acquaintances on the birthday or at the earliest opportunity, especially on the following Shabbos afternoon. On several occasions the Rebbe specified to learn “the Rebbe’s *maamar*.”³⁴

Hafatza

Increase in influencing others to grow in Yiddishkeit and Chassidus, with an attitude of *ahavas Yisrael*.

The Rebbe told Rabbi Shmuel Lew in *yechidus* that when he will speak with others about Yiddishkeit with “more *chayus*” on his birthday, it will have a greater impact, since on that day “*mazalo gover*.”

Hisbonenus

Spend some time alone to reflect on the past, identify flaws that need to be corrected, and make new *hachlatos* for the coming year.

Hiddur Mitzvah

Accept a new *hiddur* in one area of life, as is customarily done on Rosh Hashanah. Increasing in learning Chassidus is a good start.

Farbrengen

Host a *farbrengen* with family and friends in thanksgiving to Hashem for this special day. It is appropriate to say *Shehecheyanu* on a new fruit or garment.

20. Ibid., p. 398.

21. Sefer Hasichos 5748, p. 380.

22. Ibid., p.343.

23. Torah Ohr, Vaeira.

24. Sefer Hasichos 5748, p. 405.

25. The following is a translation of the list published in Sefer Hasichos 5748, p. 406, as well as various details of each *minhag* compiled from other sources as notated below.

26. Hiskashrus #766.

27. Rabbi Yehoshua Laine (Brooklyn, NY) received this instruction twice in *yechidus*.

28. *Yechidus* with Rabbi Berel Baumgarten, 14 Av 5714. Kfar Chabad Magazine #1543.

29. The Rebbe instructed some *bachurim* to give in numerals of 18 (18 cents or 36 cents, etc.) See Sichos Kodesh 5712, p. 339. Teshura, Bar Mitzvah, Oberlander, 5776.

30. Kfar Chabad Magazine #1543.

31. Kfar Chabad Magazine #706.

32. Igros Kodesh Admu”r HaRayatz vol. 10, p. 53. Kovetz Michtovim published in Tehillim Ohel Yosef Yitzchok. See Toras Menachem vol. 29, p. 269.

33. Sichos Kodesh 5724, p. 563. Kfar Chabad Magazine #1712. Teshura Slonim-Stein 5768.

34. Teshura, Bar Mitzvah, Oberlander, 5776.