

STRENGTH

in the face of **Tyranny**

The following collection, unique in style, captures an interesting theme related to Chof Av: Although the Rebbe generally avoided discussing personal matters during sichos, there were a quite few occasions where the Rebbe did speak of his illustrious father. Aside for the Torah-writings of his father which were discussed at almost every Shabbos farbrengen, there were those times when the Rebbe related a story or anecdote from him, casting light on the immense reverence and esteem the Rebbe accorded him with.

A YORTZEIT FOR ALL

We'll begin with the Rebbe's explanation of the nature of Chof Av, Rav Levi Yitzchok's *yortzeit*, and its relevance to all:

My father's yortzeit is seemingly a personal matter; one of relevance only to me. But, when taking into account the sequence of events in the years leading up to his passing, we find that the natural reason for his shortened life was due to the pain and suffering he endured in exile, itself a result of his efforts in the realm of spreading Yiddishkeit to all Jews with mesirus nefesh. Hence, his passing is indeed pertinent to all of the Jewish people.¹

EDUCATION FROM AN EARLY AGE

On a number of occasions throughout the years, the Rebbe made mention of the special *chinuch* he received in his father's

home, including the bravery to stand up for true Yiddishkeit even in the most fearsome times:

In my youth, my father hired a teacher for my two brothers and me. He lived in our home, and my father set aside a special room for him. The reason why my father wished that he reside in our home was in order that the children learn from his way of life and personal conduct as well; not just the subject matter that he taught us. Once, I walked into my teacher's room on Tisha B'Av and I found him sitting and studying Torah! When I asked him, in a respectful manner, "How can you do this?" he replied: "When I reach the next world, I know that they will punish me either way. I would be much happier if the punishment will be on account of learning Torah on Tisha B'Av!"²

In a response to those who expressed opposition and fought against the Rebbe's *mivtzoim*, the Rebbe mentioned:

I was raised during the time of the Yevsektzia and was educated that one need not be afraid of them. Despite the fact that they were capable of bestowing harsh threats, and even carrying out those threats; including sending you to Siberia!³

Once, while speaking about the dangerous situation in Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe commented:

Hashem helped me that (although not by my choice) I was the firstborn son to my father, who later became the Chief Rabbi of Yekatrinoslav. In those days there were arguments and quarrels that arose which needed combat, and in order to do so one needed to know Russian. I was charged with the task of responding to



THE REBBE WHILE DAVENING AT THE OMUD ON CHOF AV 5746.

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 147583

these quarrels, as the eldest son of the chief rabbi... And so, for some 60-65 years now, I am already accustomed to the fact that one need not wait until he is adorned with honorary titles; sitting quietly on the side is unacceptable and is not the way I was raised! I hold steadfast to the education I received at home that when it comes to matters of life-and-death, one must act!⁴

In another instance, the Rebbe responded to threats he received to his efforts in Mihu Yehudi:

Their harassing me will be of no use, for I will not let up. This is not the first time I've been subject to harassment; I was born in a communist country and my father was the chief rabbi of Yekatrinoslav. Being the eldest in the family and fluent in Russian, I was sent to the Yevsektzia where I was

questioned about matters of religion and they harassed and annoyed me. No matter what these people want to do to me now, they will not surpass the [annoyance I endured with the] members of the Yevesktzia! I am not intimidated by their threats, and I will not give up [my stand] on anything so central to the continuity of Am Yisroel.⁵

I was charged with the task of responding to these quarrels, as the eldest son of the Chief Rabbi...

YUD-TES KISLEV CELEBRATION

The following story was related by the Rebbe more than once, in which he

fondly recalls his father's lively Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen:

In the city where my father served as Rov he had many opponents, because he used to teach Chassidus and instituted various halachic stringencies in the city.

Once, an opponent of his informed on him to the governor of the region, claiming that the community has chosen a Rov who drinks excessively and tears off people's garments!

The Chief of Police was quite surprised to hear that the majority of the Jewish community would choose such a person as Rov, and he sent one of his agents to my father's home to investigate the matter.

When the agent reached my father's home, he found the Rov sitting and learning; no alcohol in sight and



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all looked just fine! The agent was completely confused and asked my father about the entire episode, but my father replied that he had no inkling of what he was speaking.

Later on the truth came to light; there was indeed some basis to the story:

On Yud-Tes Kislev there was a farbrenge, and the participants really farbrenge well (“gut farbracht”). In good, high spirit, my father repeated words of Chassidus and the farbrenge went on till the late hours of the night. In those days, Chassidim had the custom that as morning neared, at the end of a farbrenge, they would remove their jackets and break out in a dance. On that particular Yud-Tes Kislev, it seems that one of the participants refused to remove his jacket, so my father attempted to “help” him. (My father was in good spirits; he wasn’t yet troubled about parnosa and

had recently returned from a trip to Lubavitch.) The end result was that the sleeve turned up in my father’s hand, and the remainder of the sirtuk in the other Chossid’s hand...⁶

MOTZOEI YOM KIPPUR

During a Yom Tov meal in the Frierdiker Rebbe’s apartment, the Rebbe was asked whether his father got involved in building a sukka on Motzoei Yom Kippur, and the Rebbe responded:

It seems that he did not, because my father was preoccupied with farbrenge on Motzoei Yom Kippur.⁷

In Rebbetzin Chana’s diary, she vividly describes her husband’s special, joyous mood on Motzoei Yom Kippur, in contrast to the solemn feeling earlier that day:

When my husband would return home after Yom Kippur, he couldn’t easily settle back into the everyday

The agent was completely confused and asked my father about the entire episode, but my father replied that he had no inkling of what he was speaking

mundane existence. After coming home quite late in the evening, he drank only a glass of tea. Then he remained sitting, still garbed in his kittel and the gartel of his great-great-grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek, to lead a farbrengen until two or three o'clock in the morning.

This was his regular custom on the evening after Yom Kippur, both when Jewish life had been less constricted and later when Judaism could be practiced almost solely within the confines of one's own home.

Some of our friends were aware of my husband's custom, and they would eat a quick evening meal with their families before coming to our home. My husband would deliver a Chasidic discourse on subjects connected with the Yom Kippur prayers. In later years he spoke about the great qualities of Jews, their self-sacrifice to observe Judaism, and how they expressed their love towards other Jews in that difficult era.

Ten or fifteen people always attended this farbrengen, which included dancing as enthusiastic as on Simchat Torah.⁸

MEMORY

Speaking of his father's phenomenal memory, the Rebbe once commented:

Obviously, he did not have a sefer "Eitz Chayim" with him while in exile. The authorities would not allow him to bring along any seforim, and certainly not a large-formatted sefer like that. Nevertheless, he cites references to Eitz Chayim, evidently based only on his memory, and all his references are accurate.⁹



THE HAGGADA WITH RAV LEVI YITZCHOK'S HASKOMA PRINTED IN THE YEAR 5683

MY FATHER'S HASKAMA

While explaining the passages of the Haggada on the second night of Pesach, 5718, the Rebbe remarked:

Just before Pesach, I was given a Haggada which bears a letter of approbation (haskama) from my father. In that Haggada, the author explains this passage...¹⁰

LEADER IN RUSSIA

In the following sicha, the Rebbe uses exceptional terms to display the reverence and high esteem that Rav Levi Yitzchok deserved, almost putting his status equal with that of all the Rabbeim:

My father sacrificed his life to spread Yiddishkeit in Russia. After the [Friediker] Rebbe left Russia, he was the only descendant of the Alter Rebbe, the Mittler Rebbe, and the Tzemach Tzedek remaining in that country. Thus, he was the leader of Jewry there, and for this reason, many people turned to him for advice. Eventually, he was arrested for his efforts in spreading Yiddishkeit and passed away in exile...¹¹

TORAH OF EXILE

On many occasions, the Rebbe recounted how his father, while in exile, painstakingly transcribed his Torah

thoughts on the margins of the few seforim he had with him. In the following sicha, the Rebbe points out an ironic twist in this regard:

It's interesting to note that by hashgocha protis [of all my father's writings], it is largely the Torah he wrote while in exile that was published and made available to study. Most of his writings (spanning thousands of pages!) from the time he served as Rov of his city have not yet reached us.¹²

HIS TZIYUN BREATHES LIFE

Rav Levi Yitzchok's everlasting impact on Russian Jewry continues even after his physical life here on earth, by way of his Tziyun:

We can now clearly see that many Yidden were infused with chayus in their Yiddishkeit by his presence there in exile with them, [as well as his continued presence there] now with his Tziyun being there. It caused a great arousal of yiras shomayim, learning Torah and fulfillment of mitzvos. If not for [his being exiled there] it's hard to know how the presence of Yiddishkeit would look...¹³

1. Hisvaaduyos 5744 vol. 4 p. 2389. Similar sentiment was expressed by the Rebbe in other Chof Av farbrengens.
2. The Rebbe in Yechidus to the Belzer Rebbe; Sichos Kodesh 5733 vol. 1 p 456. Varying details in Sefer "B'tzel HaChochma" p. 29.
3. Sichos Kodesh 5735 vol. 1 p. 378.
4. Sichos Kodesh 5739 vol. 3 p. 565.
5. Sichos Kodesh 5732 vol. 1 p. 593.
6. Toras Menachem vol. 11 p. 146. The Rebbe related this story on several other occasions as well; see Hisvaaduyos 5745 vol. 3 p. 1482.
7. Shmini Atzeres 5730; HaMelech B'mesiboi vol. 2 p. 53.
8. Memoirs of Rebbetzin Chana – part 26; copyright by Kehos.
9. Sichos Kodesh 5725, v. 2 p. 349.
10. Likkutei Sichos vol. 3 p. 1016.
11. Sefer Hasichos 5748 vol. 2 p. 588.
12. Sefer Hasichos 5750 vol. 2 p. 621.
13. Sichos Kodesh 5736 vol. 2 p. 622.