

# י"א ניסן

התוועדות חסידיים

*As we approach Yud-Aleph Nissan, a day that each and every one of us Chassidim seeks to enhance our connection with the Rebbe and draw upon the special qualities of the day, we spoke with two mashpi'im, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Itkin of Pittsburgh and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Gourarie of Detroit, to record words of inspiration in honor of this great day.*

This "chassidische farbrengen" on paper, filled with inspirational stories and first-hand memories of encounters with the Rebbe, will surely arouse our readership with a very timely message.



## A DAY FOR EVERY YID

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Itkin



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THE REBBE ESCORTS A GROUP OF GUESTS WHO CAME TO JOIN THE REBBE FOR HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY – YUD-ALEPH NISSAN AND PESACH 5732

When talking about Yud-Aleph Nissan, there's an important point to remember: On one hand, this day is the Rebbe's very personal time; the Rebbe's birthday. We all know what the Rebbe wrote in Hayom Yom for Yud-Aleph Nissan; that on one's birthday he should spend time alone and contemplate the occurrences of the past year, rectifying those things that need to be tended to, and so on. In other words, a birthday is a personal day.

Yet on the other hand, the Rebbe is our *nossi*, and the birthday of a *nossi* is a cause for celebration for his entire generation. In an interesting *sicha* said by the Rebbe on Yud-Beis Tammuz 5722, the Friediker Rebbe's birthday, the Rebbe explains that the when a *nossi* is born, the seeds that carry all the *avoda* he will do throughout his lifetime, including the spiritual *koach* he will give to each and every Jew of his generation, are brought into being and begin spreading their light in the world. Hence, concludes the Rebbe, the *nossi's* birthday each and every year is a most joyous day for all the Jewish people!<sup>1</sup>

In our generation, especially as the years progressed, the Rebbe went out of this way to share this day with us, his Chassidim. He allowed us to celebrate and mark the date in various ways.

In the very early years, not many Chassidim knew what the date of the

Rebbe's birthday was. But in 5707, when the Rebbe was in Paris to bring his mother, Rebbetzin Chana, to the United States, she revealed to the small group of *anash* there that Yud-Aleph Nissan is the Rebbe's birthday. Still, the date was largely unknown to most Chassidim.

On Yud-Aleph Nissan 5712, the Rebbe's fiftieth birthday, he delivered a *maamor* in his room in front of a small audience of carefully selected individuals. Ten years later, in 5722, the Rebbe held a special *farbrengen* in honor of Yud Aleph Nissan—*shnas hashishim*. Later on, starting in 5731, the Rebbe held a *farbrengen* on almost every Yud-Aleph Nissan.

### Each to their Own

What is possibly more interesting is the fact that the Rebbe allowed, and even appreciated, for Yud-Aleph Nissan to be celebrated by everyone according to their individual levels.

From a *tomim* learning in Tomchei Tmimim, the Rebbe accepted gifts of increasing in *limud haTorah*, showing his appreciation for the extra effort done in honor of the day.

I'll give you an example:

In 5732, when we celebrated the Rebbe's *shnas hashiv'im*, special *matonos* were presented to the Rebbe in honor of this

momentous occasion. In fact, the Rebbe himself explained in a sicha on Purim, a month before his seventieth birthday, that although it is seemingly unfitting for one to request a gift, he is nevertheless letting everyone know that the main focus of the *matonos* should be on increasing in *limud haTorah*.

I was then a young *bochur* studying in Oholei Torah. A few months before Yud-Aleph Nissan, our class held a meeting along with our *mashpia*, Reb Pinye Korf, to determine what we should do in honor of the upcoming milestone. Together we decided that we would learn 70 *blatt* of *Gemora* by heart, as well as 70 *sichos*. In those years, every *bochur* had the opportunity to go to the Rebbe for *yechidus* around his birthday, so we resolved that the next member of the class that will be by the Rebbe would write about our new undertaking. As it happened, I was the next one to go in for *yechidus*. Reading that section of my *tzet'l*, the Rebbe responded: "דאס וואס דו שרייבסט וועגן י"א ניסן, ס'איז א גלייכע זאך, און גורם נחת-רוח, וממנו יראו וכן יעשו..."—"What you write about Yud Aleph Nissan, it is an appropriate thing and it causes [me] *nachas-ruach*. Others should see and emulate your actions..."

I recall how I came out of the *yechidus* and recounted what the Rebbe had told me to the older *bochurim* standing outside. The Rebbe's words made a strong impact on them, boosting the already prevalent "Yud-Aleph Nissan spirit" in the air, and encouraging everyone to step-up their efforts.

That was all for *bochurim*.

On the other hand, the Rebbe also welcomed more simple gestures as presents for Yud-Aleph Nissan, coming from less learned, but equally sincere individuals.

Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky relates that he attended a wedding of an acquaintance which happened to take place on the night of Yud-Aleph Nissan 5748, just a few weeks after the Rebbe launched the *mitvza yom huledes*.

In the midst of the celebration, the *chossin's* family presented a magnificent birthday cake holding 86 candles and an inscription reading "Happy Birthday Lubavitcher Rebbe."

When noting this in his *duch* to the Rebbe, the Rebbe commented in his holy handwriting:

"הערה כללית בזה, אומרים שבקצתם חשש של "חלב וק"ל"—"A general note: they say that some of them [birthday candles] may contain *cheilev*..."<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the Rebbe accepted their gesture, even commenting on the type of candles they placed in the cake to be sure they were not problematic!

But the Rebbe took it even further, as we shall see in this next story.

In 5733 there was a young man hanging around in Crown Heights who had a strange obsession for certain elements of Christianity. After spending quite some time with the Jewish community and in the Rebbe's presence his Yiddishkeit began strengthening a bit; but then one day he decided to leave. From the letter he wrote to the Rebbe, we get an idea of the low spiritual level he had stooped to; he thanks the Rebbe for all that he had while in Crown Heights, but he apologizes and says that he cannot stay anymore, because of the disrespect for *oisoi ho'ish* that he senses in the community!

In response, the Rebbe encourages him to stay in Crown Heights at least for another few months, until after Tishrei, and, in the Rebbe's words: "באופן שנוכל לחוג ביחד"—"So that we will be able to celebrate all three *regolim* together (as well as my birthday)..."<sup>23</sup>

Imagine! This Yid had fallen so low that he felt emotionally attached to *oisoi ho'ish*, and the Rebbe still invited him to celebrate Yud-Aleph Nissan together, in the hope that he would reconsider his decision and eventually lead a Torah-true life!

Yet again, we observe how the Rebbe allows for his special personal day to be shared with every Yid, each according to their level.

And if the Rebbe maintained that even a Yid on that level could change just from a Yud-Aleph Nissan experience, all the more so us, Chassidim, who can better relate to and appreciate the significance of the day. If we only tap in to what's available on this day, we can surely be changed for the better.

In fact, the Rebbe encouraged his own *bochurim* to be with him on this special day as well.

In 5733, the *mazkir* Rabbi Binyomin Klein wrote to the Rebbe that the group of *talmidim-shluchim* leaving to Australia for a two-year *shlichus* would be departing New York in the beginning



RABBI ITKIN AS A BOCHUR WALKS ON EASTERN PARKWAY

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 142027

of Nissan, and he asked if the Rebbe was happy with this plan. The Rebbe commented on his note: “מהו הטעם והגעשמאק שיסעו מכאן ימים אחדים לפני יא ?ניסן?”—“What is the reason and pleasure to leave here a few days before Yud-Aleph Nissan?”

We know that traveling to Australia is more than a 24-hour journey from New York, and that Yud-Aleph Nissan is only a few days before Pesach. These *bochurim* were embarking on the Rebbe’s *shlichus*, no less, yet still the Rebbe insisted that they stay, in order to be in his presence for Yud-Aleph Nissan.

From this we discern with even more certainty how important this day is to each and every one of us, and the importance of being in the Rebbe’s presence on his special day.

Even today, when we don’t see the Rebbe physically, we have no doubt that the Rebbe’s bright light shines and affects everyone, especially on the Rebbe’s day of Yud-Aleph Nissan.

### More B’ruchniyus

I’m reminded of a story:

Reb Shmuel Zalmanov, the legendary author of *Sefer HaNigunim* and coordinator of the *Nichoach* music series, one of the editors of “HaTomim” and much more, once asked the Rebbe if it would be possible to edit something he had prepared. The Rebbe explained that he did not have time at the moment, for there would be a wedding that night and he was preoccupied. Reb Shmuel was puzzled; the Rebbe had already officially stopped being *mesader kiddushin* and

would surely not be attending the wedding! But then the Rebbe explained: “Being there *b’ruchniyus* is more work than actually attending *b’gashmiyus*!”

In other words, the fact that the Rebbe’s presence is not seen in a physical sense in no way negates the *brachos* and *hashpa’os* that the Rebbe provides us with. On the contrary; the Rebbe is with us even more and our connection with him is even stronger!

Let us utilize this powerful day of Yud-Aleph Nissan to strengthen our own connection with the Rebbe, each in our own way, but guided by the Rebbe’s teachings, and with Hashem’s help this year, we will be *zoche* to be with the Rebbe for Yud-Aleph Nissan, with the *geulah teikef umiyad Mammosh!*



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THE REBBE DELIVERS A MAAMOR AT THE YUD-ALEPH NISSAN FARBRENGEN, 5737.



## WITH THE REBBE HIMSELF

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Gourarie*

In 5732, the Rebbe's *shnas hashivi'im*, I was learning in Oholei Torah. From the beginning of the winter, there was a sense of elation in the air; one could feel that it was a special time, a period of preparation for Yud-Aleph Nissan.

We all felt a deep joy that the Rebbe was reaching this landmark day, and that we had the great *zechus* to be the Rebbe's Chassidim and *talmidim*. When we would farbreng together—a common occurrence—our feelings frequently brimmed over with the song of “*Ashreinu ma tov chelkeinu*,” which we would sing with great passion and excitement.

We wanted to give the Rebbe a gift in honor of this momentous occasion; and the gift of a yeshiva bochur, especially a bochur in the Rebbe's yeshiva, is learning Torah. So all the bochurim got together, and we each took upon ourselves to add *inyonim* in learning, both *b'iyun* and *baal peh*.

And the *hachlatos* were substantial.

Some bochurim took upon themselves to learn 70 *sichos* in *Lekutei Sichos* by heart; others decided to learn 70 *blatt* of Bava Kama—the *mesechta* learned in yeshivos that year—by heart; others would learn the first “*hemshech*” of Ranat (which is eight, long *maamorim*) by heart. The other *hachlatos* were on a similar scale.

That winter we had the custom that on Friday night we would go to sleep very

early, at about 9:00 p.m. At 2:00 a.m. we would wake up, go to our *zal*, and, for the next few hours every bochur would learn what he took upon himself for Yud-Aleph Nissan.

It was a beautiful sight. 3 o'clock in the morning, 4 o'clock in the morning, and bochurim were sitting and learning with enthusiasm and gusto; the *zal* was filled with words of *Likutei Sichos*, *Gemora*, and Chassidus. Every once in a while the *niggun* of “*Ashreinu ma tov chelkeinu*” could be heard in the *zal*.

This was how the weeks and months passed by. The joy grew stronger and stronger, and the sense of elation was felt more and more. We were farbrenging more, learning better and better, davening with more concentration, strengthening our *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe; a complete and utter involvement in *ruchniyus*.

Truth to be told, we felt pretty good about ourselves. We felt that we had done pretty well.

And then, on *Shabbos Hagadol*, Yud Nissan, the day before Yud-Aleph Nissan, something occurred which completely changed our perspective; then and forever after. This has a lesson for all of us, and especially for bochurim.

During the farbrengen on Shabbos there wasn't a big crowd. It was only a short few days before Pesach and people were



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CHASSIDIM SING AS THE REBBE ENTERS THE CAR ON HIS WAY HOME FOLLOWING THE YUD-ALEPH NISSAN FARBRENGEN, 5744

busy with yom tov preparations, so most of the guests were only coming to New York on Sunday, for the big Yud-Aleph Nissan farbrengen. It seemed that the majority of the crowd was bochurim, and we felt that the Rebbe was speaking directly to us.

A novelty at this farbrengen was that there were two *maamorim*; one on *kapitel ayin* (the kapitel of the Rebbe's outgoing year), *dibur hamaschil* להזכיר לדוד; and the second *maamar* with the *dibur hamaschil* בעשור לחודש הזה.

In the first *maamar*, the Rebbe explained the Midrash on the *possuk* להזכיר לדוד. The Midrash explains that Dovid was asking “to be remembered.” Why?

In order to explain, the Midrash offers a *moshol*: This is similar to a king who had sheep, and he got upset at them, so he let the sheep out, dismantled their stalls, and sent the shepherd away. A while later he gathered the sheep and rebuilt their stalls, but he forgot the shepherd. Said the shepherd, “The sheep are gathered, and the stalls are rebuilt, yet I am not remembered?!” Similarly, at the conclusion of the last *kapitel*, Dovid said, *כי אלקים יושיע ציון*; Hashem rebuilt Yerushalayim and restored the Yidden in it, but I am not remembered?

It's a famous *maamar*, so I'll only repeat the central theme which is relevant to our topic: When talking about a “shepherd” of the Jewish people, a *nossi*, the Rebbe, there are two levels; the *chitzoniyus* of the רועה and the *pnimiyus* of the רועה. A person can be in a situation where everything seems to be beautiful; in the words of the Midrash, “the sheep are gathered and the stall is built”—the *avoda* of making a *dira bitachtonim* seems successful.

Yet, “the shepherd is not remembered.” All of this only reaches the *chitzoniyus* of the shepherd, not the *pnimiyus*. To reach the *pnimiyus* of the shepherd, a much deeper *avoda* is required, the *avoda* of ישראל וקוב”ה, *total bittul*, ועמך לא חפצתי כולא חד.



PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 110462

THE REBBE WISHES L'CHAIM TO THE ASSEMBLED AT THE YUD-ALEPH NISSAN FARBRENGEN, 5732

That is the point of the *maamar* in short.

It's impossible to know whether this was what the Rebbe meant, but we took this as a personal message. True, you accomplished much. You learned a lot, you were involved in *ruchniyus*, your *avoda* is going great. But the true *hiskashrus*, the *hiskashrus* to the *pnimiyus* of the רועה—that is a whole other story. For that, one needs a much more profound, true *hiskashrus*.

This is how we understood the *maamar*.

At first, we felt dejected, as is quite understandable. However, we immediately caught ourselves and realized that to the contrary, we were lucky that the Rebbe had revealed this to us. The fact that the Rebbe had told this to us showed that we were in fact capable of reaching this deep level of *hiskashrus*.

The next day, at the big Yud-Aleph Nissan farbrengen, the Rebbe looked upon us with a shining face, and we gazed at the

Rebbe. As we sang the new *niggun* בך ה' חסיתי אל אבושה לעולם (which was sung for over a half hour), we resolved deep inside ourselves to connect to the Rebbe with a true and *pnimiyus'dike hiskashrus*.

We said *l'chaim*, and the Rebbe answered *l'chaim v'livracha*. We felt a deep and sincere experience of אשירנו מה טוב חלקינו that we merited to be the Rebbe's Chassidim.

May Hashem help us that this year as well, as we prepare for Yud-Aleph Nissan, we should understand and feel this—to bring it down to action, and המעשה הוא העיקר.

And most importantly, we should be with the Rebbe here in *olam hazeh*, with the coming of *Moshiach tzidkeinu*. D

1. Toras Menachem vol. 34 p. 110
2. Ksav yad kodesh appears in the teshura, Kotlarsky-Hertz; Cheshvan 5774
3. Igros Kodesh vol. 28 p. 18