



# Polishing Our Buttons

It was noon when the clock tower's bell began to ring, and a buzz filled the soldiers' barracks. "The parade begins in an hour!" someone yelled. The hum became louder then, as the men realized what day it was. The annual procession was to take place in the city square and the soldiers would need to march. Drowsily, the crew got up from their cots and shuffled to the lockers, ready to change outfits for the occasion. The red frock coats hung neatly in a row and the boots stood gleaming beneath them. While they got dressed, the soldiers spoke excitedly between themselves in anticipation of seeing the king. It was a pleasant, sunny afternoon so it took some time for them to

get accustomed to the light and at a quarter to one, the troops stood ready in uniform; the parade would begin momentarily. As they stood in wait, each man looked to his friend and noted the perfection and beauty of his attire; flawless. All that was left was for them to add that extra brilliance, that slightly brighter glimmer to their buttons. Then they'd truly be ready.

At a farbrengen on Simchas Torah, 5689, the Friediker Rebbe declared that Yidden are already polishing the buttons of their uniform to greet Moshiach.<sup>1</sup>

"The only thing that remains to be accomplished before Moshiach comes, is the polishing of our buttons," the Rebbe would often quote that

sicha. “Everything else has been accomplished. *Ut ut kumt Moshiach!* Moshiach is at the doorstep!”

Shining one’s buttons is the last thing one does after he has gotten dressed, so understanding the analogy on a simple level would be that the goal has almost been reached and only a small, peripheral mission remains. Simply learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvos, bringing the world closer to its completion.

On a deeper level however, the specific *mashal* of polishing one’s buttons in comparison to the accomplishment of any task, has more meaning. A button’s function is to fasten one part of a garment to the other, and in line with our *minhag*, specifically the right side over the left. The button, therefore, symbolizes our assignment in *galus* to elevate the holy (right) over the mundane (left). The point is not to entirely wipe away the left side, the Rebbe explains, for it is also part of the garment which protects the person. Only that the left side must be controlled by the right. This way, the left side will also give back to the right *כיתרון האור מתוך החשך*.<sup>2</sup>

At this point in history, says the Rebbe, we’ve already done our task to an almost perfect degree and very little remains to be achieved in this mission; the garment has already been manufactured, the buttons fashioned and sewn. We have to add just a bit more shine, a bit more luster. The last few dust particles need to be brushed off. (The Rebbe added that *bderech hatzachus*, the word dust is *roshei teivos* “*da sitra* (*achara*)—this is *sitra achara*.”)<sup>3</sup>

Even more, the original parable was said about the buttons of a soldier’s uniform, and this too is a deliberate detail. Every Jew is a soldier in Hashem’s army, and as Moshiach comes we will go out to greet him while wearing our uniforms with their shining buttons<sup>4</sup>.



THE REBBE IS SHOWN A “BUTTON” PRODUCED BY THE MESIBOS SHABBOS GROUP IN NEW YORK, CIRCA 5702.

The Rebbe once pointed out an additional symbolism in the button. As long as a shirt is unclosed, a foreign object can wedge itself into the opening. By fastening one’s buttons, a person closes the gap in his garment and leaves no room for anything unwanted to enter. This idea is a parable for “*ein od milvado*.” Chassidus explains this *passuk* to mean that there is no existence other than Hashem; everything is an extension of his essence. The unbuttoned shirt symbolizes a reality where otherness is possible. To button one’s clothing means to create a world that expresses only Hashem and nothing else. A reality where there is no room for anything foreign. This *avodah*, which is essential for Moshiach to come, has already been accomplished almost in its entirety, and all we need to do is polish it<sup>5</sup>.

In the later years<sup>6</sup>, the Rebbe said that the buttons have already been shined to perfection. “Thirty years plus have passed since we’ve began polishing our buttons. By now, they are certainly polished completely<sup>7</sup>.

“More so,” the Rebbe continued, “polishing one’s buttons for too long will actually have the opposite effect, diminishing the fine, beautiful look...”<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand we are told that all is done. The final touches have been made. On the other hand, Moshiach still hasn’t come, which means there must still be work left. On Shabbos Hagadol 5748<sup>9</sup>, the Rebbe delivered a *maamar* which speaks about the things we need to accomplish to bring Moshiach. Then the Rebbe asks the question we’re all thinking, “Aren’t we already done? Why are there still more tasks we need to finish?” The Rebbe explains that we’ve indeed completed one form of *avodah*, that of beyond order (*musafim kehilchosom*). What we can still do is serve Hashem in an orderly fashion (*temidim kesidram*) where every day we grow a little more. This is all while knowing that in essence all the work is done and Moshiach is at our doorstep. May he indeed come speedily in our days. **T**

1. Sefer Hasichos 5689 p. 42.
2. Toras Menachem 5747 vol. 2 p. 173. et al.
3. Likutei Sichos vol. 25 p. 481.
4. Sefer Hasichos 5748 vol. 1 p. 279.
5. Sefer Hasichos 5752 vol. 1 p. 39, Sichos Kodesh 5752 vol. 1 p. 191.
6. See for example Toras Menachem 5747 vol. 2 p. 301.
7. Sefer Hasichos 5748 vol. 1 p. 279.
8. Sefer Hasichos 5748 vol. 1 p. 355.
9. Toras Menachem 5748 vol. 2 p. 507.