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Days Full

**A SELECTION OF WHAT THE REBBE SAYS ABOUT THE
IMPORTANCE OF UTILIZING ONE'S TIME TO THE FULLEST.**

Two Types of Vacation

During the summer of 5710*, Reb Shlomo Zalman Hecht, the Frierdiker Rebbe's shliach to Chicago since 5703*, received an interesting letter from the Rebbe. The Rebbe begins by acknowledging that he had received Rabbi Hecht's letter from a few days earlier and that he had greatly enjoyed reading that Rabbi Hecht had gone on vacation with his family. The Rebbe concludes, "Certainly you will use the time for the health of the body and the health of the *neshamah*. May it be Hashem's will that it be successful."¹

The idea of Chassidim taking time off, going on vacation, or leaving on holiday is a subject that the Rebbe addressed many times. In general, keeping with the Rebbe's personal work ethic and the standard that he demanded of Chassidim, the Rebbe generally did not look favorably on the basic concept of vacation.

However, when looking with a broader and deeper lens at the Rebbe's view on this topic, we must make a distinction between the necessary break or a breather, and the careless attitude traditionally associated with vacation.

As we will further explore, we find two basic themes in the Rebbe's view on vacation. The first is the Rebbe's strong rejection of the idea that the summer period is a "time off"—time off for schools, yeshivos, and *mosdos*, to be used for "vacation" and being laid-back, in a dialed-down mode, where the main point is to "let oneself go." The second is the Rebbe's view of a vacation as an important break or a breather for the people that need it, and the absolute necessity that this vacation be utilized fully as a rejuvenation and a step up to further grow in *avodas Hashem*.

At the farbrengen of Yud-Beis Tammuz 5724*², the Rebbe discussed the idea of vacation and going to the "country." At the beginning of this segment, the Rebbe explains the positive roots of the idea of "*yemei chofesh*" [vacation days], explaining that these days aren't a time off from *kedusha*-matters, *chas veshalom*. Rather vacation must be a temporary break for the body to rest and re-energize, allowing it to then serve Hashem with a renewed energy and even greater vigor.

The Rebbe then continues to point out that there

is a flip side to every good thing, describing the faults that come from seeing the summer months as a time off from *kedusha* and a break from "intense" Yiddishkeit, and the mistake of viewing these months as a time when we can lower our Chassidishe standards. The Rebbe then urges Chassidim to behave as Chassidim even in the country, and reassures them that if they use this time to strengthen their *neshamah*, they will surely be successful in both areas.

In another interesting *sicha*, from Yud-Gimmel Tammuz 5715*³, the Rebbe quoted the *bracha* that the Frierdiker Rebbe gave a number of years earlier for a "*gezunten zumer un a hatzlacha'diken zumer*—a healthy and successful summer—to all those that **need** to go to the country." The Rebbe points out that the Frierdiker Rebbe used the word "need," but now, after several years passed, the correct word is "want." And the Rebbe concludes, pointing out an irony, that "in most cases, those who want to go don't need it, and those who need it aren't able to go."

In addition to Rebbe's clear approach in this *sicha*, by perusing the many letters and answers from the Rebbe on this topic to individuals, we can also learn a more individualized approach to various specific situations.

An eighteen-year-old girl who had spent her year tirelessly teaching and arranging Bnos Chabad events, had written her plans for the summer to the Rebbe. Her plans consisted of working and running two different camps. To her surprise, no response had arrived. She wrote a second time, and once again no answer was forthcoming. As the summer was fast approaching, she wrote a third time and this time she wrote that her parents were pushing her to go take a vacation and visit Eretz Yisroel. This time the Rebbe replied, circling the words "to take a vacation" and wrote, "*Ve'chein taaseh*—and this is what she should do."

Another scenario was an answer to a shlucha who wrote to the Rebbe that following all her hard work making various arrangements and dealing with her son's health, she feels that she needs a vacation. In response, the Rebbe circled the word vacation and wrote: "*Harei zeh hei'pech tivah*—this is the opposite of her nature."

It is clear that vacation can be used as a tool for strengthening *avodas Hashem*, and when on vacation this must be the guiding principle. Yet, as expounded in the Rebbe's Torah, "*Adam lamal yulad*—man was



created to toil,” and taking off just for the sake of taking off negates the purpose of our existence as described in Chassidus and explained by the Rebbe. As we will explore further, a prime example for this error is the culture of migrating to the “country.”

The Irony of “Country”

Starting from the early days of Lubavitch in America, many families of *anash* would relocate for the summer to bungalow colonies or little villages in the mountains. This was presumably for the fresh air and to get out of the city, but ultimately, going to the country was also viewed as a “compulsory” part of American lifestyle and culture. As we see, this “custom” persists in today’s day and age as well.

Throughout the years, the Rebbe discussed the absurdity and the folly of going to the country and the effects it often has on the person and his family. At times, the Rebbe would go into detail, describing the technical hassles and the spiritual and emotional tolls that are tied in with taking these types of vacations.

In an expressive true-to-life *sicha* from Yud-Beis

Tammuz 5714^{*4}, the Rebbe goes through the process of “going to the country,” mocking the entrenched American vacation style that had taken root by the Chassidim in America.

The Rebbe first describes that in this incongruous culture, anyone that wants to be considered one of the “who’s who” in America, of the higher social class, needs to *schlep* themselves out to the country as soon as the Fourth of July appears on the calendar.

“And following this absurd practice, one has to pay even more money to get an even smaller room, specifically in a place where it will be harder to get *cholov Yisroel* and therefore negatively affect his diet, all in order to be in the company of important people who are in a higher tax bracket and pay more money.”

The Rebbe then continues, describing the effect it has on the people: “It makes no difference if the person has the funds or not, or if the trip is serving his health or not. The food is worse, the sleeping conditions are inferior, the Yid isn’t sure if he’s getting dark from the tan or from the hard work, he’s *schlepping* back and forth to the city, and he’s entirely ‘*oisgerisen*’ [drained], but at least he was in the country...”

The Rebbe compared Chassidim’s perspective on the “necessity” of going to the country to a story of a *melamed* in Russia whom the doctors had instructed to go out to the fields for relaxation. Since he needed to

keep his job, he would wait until he finished his day of teaching, and only in the evening would he head out to the forest that was three hours away from the village. He'd spend an hour or two "relaxing" in the forest and then rush back to daven Maariv before dawn. There was definitely no sun to speak of, and the night air was dense and moist, but he was following the doctors' orders...

In this *sicha* we see the satirical lens through which the Rebbe viewed Chassidim's obsession with the country, emphasizing the unnecessary material headaches that people put themselves through for "gains" that don't actually help much. This goes hand in hand with an additional element referenced in this *sicha*, discussed more at length at other farbrengens; namely, the spiritual *yerida* that can happen when one moves away from a Jewish community and accessible Jewish amenities, as a result of the general vacation "freedom" mindset.

Vacation From Responsibilities?

A large part of the problem with vacation is specifically when it comes to the dodging of responsibility. This can apply to every Yid, but even more so to people running *mosdos*, whether they are shlichim, *menahalim*, or rabbonim. We find this concern raised in many letters and *maanos* from the Rebbe, where he explains that in situations such as theirs, the "*chofesh*" is not only not enhancing their *avodas Hashem*, rather it is standing in their way and disturbing their mission.

In a letter from the summer of 5715*, the Rebbe writes to an *askan* who organized a conference but had then cut it short to be able to leave to "*ne'os deshe*" [vacation]:⁵ "This is certainly not what is meant to be the benefit for the health of the body in tandem with the well-being of the *neshama*." The Rebbe continues in the letter to dismiss all possible excuses, explaining that these justifications may help excuse the person but they don't achieve the goal, which was the true point of his shlichus. The Rebbe adds that "had the shlichus been fulfilled the way it was supposed to be, then that would make the trip to '*ne'os deshe*' be most effective, materially and spiritually," and concludes that while

generally it isn't his practice to give *musar*, but because the *askan* mentioned "the country" the Rebbe felt it was important to share his opinion on this topic.

This element of the issue is strongly highlighted in a sharp *sicha* from the Rebbe, said on Yud-Beis Tammuz 5736*⁶, only days after the great miracle of Entebbe. The Rebbe explained in the farbrengen the great *hisorerus teshuva* that should be happening as a result of this open miracle, and encouraged rabbonim to inspire their communities to strengthen their Yiddishkeit, specifically with regards to *mivtza mezuzah* and *mivtza tefillin*.

Following this point, the Rebbe describes a back-and-forth he had with a certain rov. The Rebbe had urged him to inspire his community, but in response the rov told the Rebbe that he's on vacation and that the Rebbe should remind him in six to eight weeks after he'd be finished with his vacation. The Rebbe laments on this out-of-place and irresponsible behavior: "Why does he have to be reminded? This is his community! And they are the ones supporting him, his congregants are essentially paying for his holiday in the country! The least he can do is come through on their return.

"Last year he went to the country, and truthfully, also then he shouldn't have gone. Were he to have stayed with his community, he'd have been able to accomplish a lot more. But all that aside, after such a story and such a *hisorerus*, how can he leave and not use this opportunity to inspire his community?"

On a broader level, this theme is found in many letters and *maanos* to shlichim about leaving their shlichus even for a short while—though not specifically in connection to vacation, but also about going to family *simchas* or visiting family, and at times, even regarding coming to the Rebbe. The point emphasized in many of these *maanos* is that a shliach has a shlichus and should therefore be fully immersed in it and not leave his post.

Another interesting concern the Rebbe raises with regard to a shliach going on vacation, is the questionable image it can create for others, both by the communities they are serving and also within *anash*. In response to a certain *askan* in Eretz Yisroel who wanted to go on vacation to Europe for two weeks, the Rebbe brought up precisely this issue, and suggested, if necessary, he should go for a few days to vacation spots in Eretz Yisroel.

In this same *maaneh*, we also see a fascinating point addressing the supposed reasons for vacation, and

the ways to circumvent them. In response to what the *askan* had written about the immense pressure that he is under, the Rebbe wrote that it seems like he (the *askan*) doesn't have set times to learn Torah (*kevius itim*).

An additional point can be found in a response the Rebbe sent to a son of older shluchim that were working for a *mosad*, who had suggested that his parents, after so many years of hard work, should take an extended vacation. The Rebbe replied that while theoretically such an idea makes sense, for people who have found fulfillment in a certain area for a long time, stopping this work entirely, or even an extended vacation, can prove detrimental to their emotional and spiritual state and may in fact counterbalance the physical gains of relaxation.

As mentioned, answers from the Rebbe are specific to the people who received those responses, yet it is insightful to see the Rebbe's view on these matters from a number of different angles.⁷

Hanachos Haolam

An issue that was mentioned previously, primarily regarding the "country," but on some level in connection to vacation in general, is "*hanachos haolam*," i.e. conventional behavior, "everyone is doing it." This issue is mentioned and discussed in many *sichos* and letters on the subject, but we see it in personal anecdotes as well.

To cite two examples: Reb Zalmon Jaffe had come to New York from Manchester, England, and over his stay he took a ten day trip to Miami. The Rebbe wrote to him: "*Ma chipes b'Miami shebishvil zeh nasa m'Crown Heights*—What were you looking for in Miami that for this you left Crown Heights?" Another remarkable response was given to Reb Hendel Lieberman. He had asked the Rebbe about a vacation to Florida, to which the Rebbe answered: "*Vi vait vet men aropfiren dem Chasidishen vogen fun veg*—How far will we lead the Chassidishe wagon off the road?"

The Correct Attitude

In the *sicha* of Yud-Beis Tammuz 5714*⁸ referenced earlier, the Rebbe reproaches the attitude Chassidim

VACATION BY THE REBBE

In 5747*, the Rebbe's shlucha to Paris, France, Mrs. Bassie Azimov, was recovering from a medical situation that had made her very weak.

Mrs. Azimov had a special relationship with the Rebbetzin, and during her illness and recovery, the Rebbetzin had reached out to her to see how she was doing.

The Rebbetzin encouraged her to go on "*vacance*" (vacation in French), and after recuperating a bit, Mrs. Azimov was happy to inform the Rebbetzin that she was able to get away for two days.

Several days later, the Rebbetzin once again broached the idea of vacation. Mrs. Azimov then replied that since Pesach is approaching, there isn't really enough time to travel; but since she may not have energy to prepare Pesach, she is considering coming to New York for Pesach to spend Yom Tov with the Rebbe. To this the Rebbetzin responded, "*Ut dos iz vacance*—This is vacation!"



In 5738*, when the Rebbe was recovering from the events of Shemini Atzeres, the doctors suggested to the Rebbe that he get more fresh air and travel a bit.

The Rebbe told them that twice a month he takes a trip to the Ohel, and there, at the Ohel, there is fresh air.



THE REBBE SPEAKS AT THE FARBRENGEN OF YUD-BEIS TAMMUZ 5736*.

have towards these vacations, and says that taking into account that Chassidim will be going to the country in any case, at least they shouldn't be so excited and immersed in it.

At that farbrengen, the Rebbe relayed that someone came to ask him what he should do: His wife really wants to go to the country and the time has come, should he go or not? The Rebbe told over that his response was, "It may very well be that he has to go, whether because of *shalom bayis*, or to fulfill the *minhag hamedina* [the way of the land], and since there is no way around it, he should go and be blessed with a healthy and happy summer." But the Rebbe highlights the issue that remains even when someone has a good reason to go: "The main question is, what is the reason for the '*koch*' and eagerness about this matter?"

The Rebbe then cites the cautionary tale in the Gemara⁹ about Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. He traveled to Deyomses, a beautiful place known for its fresh water and quality wine, but not a place of Torah. In time, Rabbi Elazar forgot all the Torah he had learned. The Rebbe stressed that the reason the Gemara offers for his forgetting his Torah was specifically because "*imshach basrayhu*—he was drawn after them." The Rebbe compares Deyomses to the modern day country, saying it is possible that people need to go for whatever reason, but at least there shouldn't be the "*imshach basrayhu*"—the exhilaration from the country.

The Rebbe continues describing the excitement people derive from the fact that they are able to be in the Catskills, a place where a Jew is allowed in, even a Yid with a beard and *payos*, and they're excited by the wonders of Hashem that they can be *frum* and in the country simultaneously. The Rebbe ironically agrees in that regard, saying that it truly is a *chiddush* that there are *frumme* Yidden not in a place of Torah.

The Rebbe goes on lamenting the unnecessary indulgence and the "*pasmakeven zich*" [roughly translated: "finger-licking"] experience that people are chasing in the country. The Rebbe explained that "*mosros*" [unnecessary pleasures] were meant for Esav, and are supposed to be appreciated by non-Jews; but for Yidden, our life is about fulfilling our purpose in this world, serving Hashem.

The Rebbe continues, that definitely every Yid should have whatever they need and *b'harchava* as fit for *bnei melachim*, but nevertheless it shouldn't be in the way of "*imshach basrayhu*."

The Rebbe concludes (in response to the Chossid who claimed that his wife is pushing him to go on vacation) that when a husband speaks about this with his wife honestly, in a way that she could see he really means it, she'd agree as well, as would their children, and then they could all experience a truly healthy, happy and peaceful summer, not just *b'ruchniyus*, but also *b'gashmiyus*.

Doing Vacation Right

In addition to the change in approach that the Rebbe demanded from Chassidim, we also find directives from the Rebbe to Chassidim who would be spending their summer on vacation. In a letter to Reb Peretz Mochkin, the Rebbe instructs about creating *shiurei Torah* and *kvius itim* for the Chassidim from Montreal who will be going out of town on vacation, to keep up the health of the *neshamah* while the body is getting its boost.¹⁰

In a letter that the Rebbe sent in the summer of 5710* to a number of different people that were spending their vacations with their families, the Rebbe begins with good wishes for their stay: “May it be Hashem’s will that your stay — in a vacation spot together with your family — will lead to the desired benefit of [enhancing] the health of the body and strengthening it in an obvious manner, according to the saying of my father-in-law, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe, in the name of his father, the Rebbe Rashab: “*Vi taier dos (haguf) iz, az tzulib dem gist men azoi fil Torah*—How precious is a Jewish body, so much Torah is poured out for its benefit!”]

In that letter, the Rebbe presents a “*kal vachomer*” from the health of the body to the emphasis necessary in maintaining and strengthening the well-being of the *neshamah*, especially while investing in the health of the body. He warned that highlighting the material well-being shouldn’t lead to a weakness in the *neshamah*, and he refers to the above story of Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach and the waters of Deyomses.

The Rebbe then concludes, “I am not writing merely for the sake of rhetoric, but rather to prompt an undertaking, somewhat like *is’hapcha*, to use the days and the opportunity for restoring the health of the body, for strengthening the soul, i.e., to add a fixed time for special study during this vacation period. Also, you should look for opportunities to inspire others coming to vacation in your place or surroundings to Torah study, *avodas Hashem*, and *gemilus chassadim*, each person according to his own circumstances.”¹¹

We find a similar theme in letters to children that were off from school for the summer, explaining that

they are meant to use their vacation time to strengthen their spiritual needs as well as their physical needs. For some, there is even a special emphasis on the free time they have from *limudei chol*.

[The topic of children’s summer vacation and *bochurim*’s time off of yeshiva has been covered in another article.¹²]

Following the point the Rebbe made of using the time to grow in one’s personal *avodah*, the Rebbe also called for taking advantage of the unique opportunities vacation offers to spread Chassidus and strengthen Yiddishkeit, bringing the Rebbe’s message to wherever one’s vacation may take them.

In the *sicha* of Matos-Masei 5712*¹³, the Rebbe talks about the great importance of every Chossid being a dynamic walking billboard of Yiddishkeit, serving as a modern-day “*miklat*” sign for all the people searching and at a crossroads in their lives. The Rebbe ties in this important mission to the young families that were heading out on vacation at that time.

Quoting the teaching of the Frierdiker Rebbe—that when a person is feeling hungry, it is essentially because their *neshamah* is drawn to this *birur* [refinement] in that piece of food, and that creates the physical feeling of craving for food—the Rebbe draws an analogy from hunger and food to wanderlust and the desire for vacation. He explains that people being drawn to the country for material reasons, is in truth because their *neshamah* is pulling them there; but in order to explain it to the body “in English,” it comes in the guise of physical reasoning. The real reason, however, is to be able to positively impact anybody and everybody they come in contact with on their vacation. **T**

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 3, letter #672.
2. Toras Menachem, 5724, Seif chof beis, pg. 215.
3. Toras Menachem 5715, Seif lamed hei, pg. 212.
4. Toras Menachem, 5714, pg. 100.
5. Igros Kodesh 11, letter no. 3671.
6. Sichos Kodesh 5736, pg. 393.
7. For all the above, see Shlichus Kehilchasa, pg. 500-503.
8. Toras Menachem vol. 12, pg. 103.
9. Shabbos, 147b.
10. Igros Kodesh vol. 11, letter no. 3514.
11. Igros Kodesh vol. 3, letter no. 646.
12. See *A Chassidisher Summer*, Derher Sivan 5779.
13. Toras Menachem vol. 12, pg. 106.