

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi YY Jacobson

Dancing with You

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement, was once sitting on Friday night at his Shabbos table with his family and close disciples. Suddenly at the end of the Kiddush, the Baal Shem Tov began to laugh. The disciples were startled, but out of respect for their holy master, they remained silent. They began the Shabbos dinner and recited Hamotzi, tasting the fish, until the Baal Shem Tov let out another laugh. The disciples again were astounded. Maybe there's some humor in the fish, they reasoned, but there was nothing funny about the fish. As the meal progressed and they began singing the Shabbos songs, the Baal Shem Tov began to laugh for the third time. It was an absolute mystery.

After Shabbos, one of the students asked his master, "What was your laughing all about?" The Baal Shem Tov asked him to summon the bookbinder of town. He was a fine, poor, simple, and G-d-fearing Jew named Shabsi. When Shabsi arrived, the Baal Shem Tov gathered his students and asked the bookbinder to share with them what had transpired at his home during the Friday night meal. Shabsi blushed, feeling very uncomfortable, but the Baal Shem Tov reassured him.

For years shops Shabsi was struggling to earn a livelihood. Life in 18th century Ukraine was not

easy. But he always saved up some extra rubles to be able to afford a beautiful and festive Shabbos dinner for the holy day. Shabbos, an island in time, a transcendental oasis, was his cherished day, and he wanted to celebrate it with full tranquility and joy. But that past week, due to the heavy snow, there was no business. Nobody came to buy any books. Friday morning, he realized he didn't even have a single ruble to give to his wife to purchase food for Shabbos. There would be no candles burning, no wine, no Challah, no vegetables, no fish, meat, fruits or dessert. Sadness set into his heart. So he went to the synagogue and stayed there all Friday day, reciting psalms and studying the weekly Torah portion.

Friday night after the services, he came home expecting to find it empty and dark. To his amazement, the house was lit up with glowing candles. The table was decorated with the most exquisite of foods. His wife explained that when she saw the pain in his eyes, that he would not be able to celebrate the holy day as he always did, she felt she had to find a solution. So she searched and searched, and discovered an old coat of hers that had golden buttons. She sold them and purchased all of this beautiful Shabbos food so they would have an amazing Shabbat together.

Shabsi continues telling the story. "I made the Kaddish, and my heart swelled with gratitude to G-d for

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giving us the opportunity to celebrate this special, exquisite day, the day of rest, the day of oneness, the day of ecstasy and serenity. The day in which we can connect to our spiritual core. I was so grateful and so moved by what my wife had done. I could not contain my joy, and I asked my wife if she would dance with me. She agreed. So I joined my wife for a dance around the candlelit Shabbos table.

We continued our Shabbos dinner. I finished the fish and again my wife and I were overwhelmed with so much gratitude. We couldn't thank G-d enough for allowing us to enjoy this beautiful day of exquisite rest and inner tranquility, a day saturated with so much holiness, peacefulness, intimacy, love and serenity. I asked my wife, "Would you dance with me again?" And she said, "Of course." So my wife and I, for the second time, went for a fiery dance around the Shabbos table. We danced with all our heart and mind and soul. Then we sat down and began to sing the Shabbos songs, both melting in delight. We felt so privileged to have each other in our lives, and to have our G-d, and to have the gift of Shabbos. I felt so grateful for all my years with my amazing wife at my side.

We both could not hold back the limitless joy.

I asked my wife if she would dance again with me and she said absolutely. So for the third time, we joined hands and hearts and we began to dance and dance around the table until the end of evening. "This," Shabsi said, "is what happened in our home on Friday night." The Baal Shem Tov looked at Shabsi, the bookbinder, and said, "Shabsi, I want you to know that as you danced with your wife, Heaven was dancing with you. As the two of you joined hands and hearts and sang and danced, the angels themselves were dancing in the Heavens. The eternal heart itself heard your music and it was warmed. G-d Himself was dancing and celebrating with you. And I too," the Baal Shem Tov said, "participated in your joy. On a Shabbos of such perfect, transcendent happiness, who wouldn't laugh? Each time you both got up to dance, I could not contain my laughter and joy."

The Baal Shem Tov looked at Shabsi and said, "And now I want to bless you. What do you want? What do you need?" Shabsi said, "My dear Rebbe. We have been blessed with so much, but my wife and I never had a

child. We would love to be blessed with a child." The Baal Shem Tov said, "I bless you that G-d should grant you and your spouse a child." Indeed, a year later, a young boy was born. They named him with the same name as the Baal Shem Tov, Yisrael. He grew up to become one of the greatest spiritual luminaries of Polish Jewry, known as the Kozhnitzer Maggid, one of the great Chassidic masters, the author of a work called Avodas Yisrael. And he brought so much wisdom, depth, love and light to Polish Jewry.

Sometimes you're sitting alone with your spouse or with another loved one or with yourself, enjoying a moment of holiness, of purity, of love, a moment of Shabbos. You're doing a mitzvah or you're engaged in Torah study. And you might think, "I'm just a simple man, a simple woman, unimportant, invisible, inconsequential. Who knows? Who cares?" But as you kindle your flame of holiness in this world, and you dance with your blazing heart, remember, Heaven is dancing with you.

And the Tzaddik laughs along.

Rabbi David Nakash

No Goalie

The long-awaited day was about to arrive. The World Cup. The clash of the most touted and premiere soccer teams, competing with their finest athleticism against one another for world respect. But for one boy, this posed as far more than a game. It meant his life. A die-hard soccer player, nothing would make him miss watching the game and following every minute with his closest attention. Except, he too had his own

opponent: himself.

He was a yeshiva student, and as much as he knew he could and should be attending his scheduled shiurim (classes) and study times, the World Cup was the World Cup. He wouldn't miss it for the world. Though, once again, he was a yeshiva student. The inner conflict this stoked was unrelenting. But each time, the boy suppressed it, going back to his single-minded focus on the game that all eyes

around the world were glued to.

The boy's Rebbe was sharp and perceptive. Catching on to his student's behavior and rationale, he decided to pay him a visit and dive into the heart of the matter. With humbled curiosity as to why this game meant so much to the boy, the Rebbe began inquiring about the game of soccer. "Rebbe, you don't understand," explained the boy. "This isn't just some game where you try to kick

a ball into a net. It's not that easy. Every second means something, and there's tension, because there's a goalie. The goalie is always there, protecting his team's goal and trying to stop the other team from scoring. And these teams not only have the best players, they have the best goalies. The competition is at its best."

The boy's words were all that the Rebbe needed to make his visitation worthwhile. His message had been sent.

Aggressive opposition and challenges are the ultimate gatekeepers of life. They force us up or out. They either hold us back or push us forward. If, despite the struggle, we fight through and overcome the hurdles facing us, we become the champions of our life.

Your child is relentless in needing your patience and guidance. Your perseverance to wake up every morning and study is waning. Your empathy to listen to your friend talk again and again about her troubles is diminishing. You have good reason to back down from the goalies in your life, to head the other direction and take the easier route. You are certain that the chances of you staying the course are slim. You take a good look at the opposition, at the battle facing you, and you turn the other way.

But.

If you stare the goalie in the eyes and arch your kick with every ounce of heart and sweat you have, and it swishes through the net, you will be a winner. And you will not just have scored easily and freely. You will

have done so against the odds in your life. You will have scored in the World Cup, where the finest of players compete. And that is growth. That is success.

If we wait, hoping for a moment of calm where we feel settled, it may never arrive. G-d doesn't arrange our life as such. Never is there respite. Yaakov Avinu, even after rounds of tribulations, faced yet another fight during the last decades of his life: losing his son, Yosef. "You want to rest in this world too?" said Hashem to Yaakov Avinu. "The Next World is where you rest."

This world is where we fight.
Fight and you will win.

Rabbi Reuven Epstein

A View From Heaven

Imagine you enter a portal and ascend to Heaven. The angels begin showing you around, as you start talking to people who have long ago passed. You talk to your great-great-grandmother and then to the Avos. As you make your way through Heaven, you glance down at this world. Can you imagine for a moment how you would have no questions about your life?

All the things that are important to us in this world are not really that important. There is only one thing which is important in Heaven: how close your neshama is to a real relationship with Hashem. That is the only thing which really matters.

With that perspective, you look down a reverse telescope and look around this world. "Why is that going on?" you wonder. "Oh, I see, there's a reason." "What about this person?" "Oh, I get it." Everything has a calculation. That will become clear to you in Heaven.

There's a reason for all the difficult experiences that people have in life. Life is just seventy or eighty years, and the only thing you need to focus on is your neshama. You make money, who cares? You lose money, who cares? We care in this world, because we are very connected to our materialism and to the here-and-now. We are attached to our homes, our cars, and everything part of our materi-

alistic, physical life. In Heaven, do you think they care how well done your steak is? They have no interest whatsoever in these matters.

When Shaul Hamelech recalled Shmuel HaNavi to this world, Shmuel was disturbed. "Why are you returning me to this world?" he exclaimed. There was nothing in this physical world which held any interest to him once he had the clear understanding revealed to those in Heaven.

We might be thinking that after one hundred and twenty years, after passing from this world, we'll be the one who will stick around in this world and see what needs to be

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done... But you won't. You won't have any interest here once you are exposed to the brilliant truth that shines in Gan Eden and Heaven.

This world is an opportunity and a corridor to prepare ourselves for the Next World. Internalizing this, we begin to appreciate that everything

which occurs to us in this world is only to push us to come closer to our truest purpose of existence.

Rabbi Mordechai Kalatsky

In the Pits?

The Land of Israel is blessed with Seven Species, five of which are fruits: the olive, date, grape, fig and pomegranate. Not ironically, there is something which all these fruits have in common: they all contain a pit.

The olive has a pit which is bitter and you spit out. The date has a pit which is usually put into your mouth and then spat out. The grape has a pit, which you usually swallow. The fig has pits, but they are part of the fruit and you consume them. The pomegranate, lastly, is a pit itself, and you eat it all.

The commentaries explain that this spectrum represents life itself. Sometimes life is the pits. It's hard and difficult. You start off like the olive and you hate pits and spit them out right away. Your biggest problem is where you should go on vacation: Florida or Los Angeles? When

you get older, you come across the date. You still spit out pits, but it's sweet! You grew from your experience and you can see and acknowledge that this time around.

During mid-life, you hit the grape. Things are going to go wrong. Pits are part of life and you accept that as a fact. You are going to be stuck on the phone with a frustrating operator, you are going to be stuck in traffic, and you are going to encounter unexpected events.

As you grow more mature, you wind up with the fig. The pit is part of the fruit. You understand the value and greatness that results from struggles. You don't like them, but you welcome them because you see their value.

The highest tier is that of the pomegranate, where the fruit itself is the pit. You recognize that struggles which refine and perfect

ourselves are the very purpose of life. To face our struggles and overcome them is not ancillary to our journey in life; it defines our highest aspiration in life. The fruit itself is the pit and that grants us the most delicious experience. They are one and the same. They are inextricably bound together, and both are sweet to our palate.

Struggles in life do not always manifest in miserable tragedy. It takes the form of getting up in the morning for davening, not losing our patience or growing angry with our children, or becoming frustrated when stuck in traffic or facing the decision to errantly run a yellow light.

Tragedies are horrible, but life is about taking the darkness and turning it into light.

Rabbi Meyer Yedid

Just Ask

Shlomo Hamelech tells us, "One who listens to advice is wise" (Mishlei 12:15). If you don't know what to do, ask someone. Ask someone who has more experience or knowledge than you. Seek those people who care about you, whether it be your father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, or Rabbi.

"I'm starting high school now... what's the right perspective to have?" "What's the right decision to make?" The answer you get might be very different than your own ideas. You're getting married or starting a new business or having a child, seek advice. Don't assume that because you're having children, you know how to take

care of them. Don't live as if you are the only person and no one has walked through this world before you. Only Adam HaRishon, the first human being, was that way. We have the privilege of having many people around us who have lived life. We have access to a treasure trove of wisdom that we can gain from others.

Use that advice, because it will ensure that you reach your goals of success and happiness.

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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 22 Shevat)

פרננדו סימון בן טניה (מרמן) צחי בן דבורה (עידן) קית' שמואל בן גלדיס (סיגל) קרינה בת אירינה (ארייב) רום בן תמר (ברסלבסקי) רומי בת מירב (גונן) רון בן חנה (בנימין) שגב בן גלית (כלפון) שגיב בן נעמית (חן דקל) שירי בת מרגיט (ביבס) שלומי בן רוזיטה (זיו) שלמה בן מרסיל (מנצור) תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)	קרמל בת כנרת (גת) לואיס נורבטו בן נורה (הר) ליאור בן מיכל (רודאפי) לירי בת שירה (אלבג) מישל בן סולמירה (ניסנבאום) מקסים בן טלה (הרקין) מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט) מתן בן ירדנה (צנגאוקר) נדב בן חנה (פופולוול) נועה בת ליאורה (ארגמני) נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן) נעמה בת איילת (לוי) עדן בת שירית (ירושלמי) עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ) עוז בן מירב (דניאל) עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט) עומר בן שלי (שם) טוב) עומר מקסים בן אורנה אסתר (נאוטרה) עידו בן כוכבה (קלדרון) עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר) עידן בן דלית (שתיווי) עמירם בן שרה (קופר) עמית אסתר חיה בת אילנה אלין (בוסקילה) עמרי בן אסתר ורה (מירן)	אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו) אריאל בן שירי (ביבס) בר אברהם בן ג'וליה (קופרשטיין) גד משה בן שרה (מוזס) גיב בן מירב (גלבוע דלאל) גלי בן תמר (ברמן) דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו) דולב בן יעל (יהוד) דורון בת סימונה (שטיינברכר) דניאל שמעון בן שרון (פרץ) דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבוע) דרור בן דורית (אור) הירש בן רחל (גולדברג פולין) זיו בן תמר (ברמן) חיים בן נחמה (פרי) חן חנן בן ורד (יבלונקה) טל בן ניצה (שוהם) קורנגולד) יאיר בן רות אדית (הורן) יאיר בן פלור (יעקב) יגב בן אסתר (בוכשטב) יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה) יורם בן בלה (מצגר) יצחק בן אנטה (אלגרט) יצחק בן גילה (גלרנטר) ירדן בן פנינה (ביבס) כפיר בן שירי (ביבס)	אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור) אביתר בן גליה (דוד) אברהם גלעד בן ליאת (מונדר) אגם בת מירב (ברגר) אוהד בן אסתר (בן) עמי) אוהד בן אסתר (יהלומי) אור בן טלי (לוי) אורי בן עינב (דנינו) אוריאל בן נעמי (ברוך) איתי בן חגית (חן) איתן בן רות אדית (הורן) איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור) אלון בן עידיית (אהל) אליה בן סיגי (כהן) אליהו בן חנה (שרעבי) אליקים שלמה בן אבישג (ליבמן) אלכס בן אוקסנה (לובנוב) אלכסנדר ששה בן ילנה (טרופנוב) אלכסנדר בן נינה (דנציג) אלמוג בן אורית (מאיר ג'אן) אלמוג בן נירה (סרוסי) אלעד בן חנה (קציר) אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט) אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס (דמארי) אנדריי בן יבגניה (קוזלוב) ארבל בת יעל (יהוד)
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