

Farbrengen *With The* **Rebbe**

כד

Farbrengen 24 Teves 5741

Free Translation

1. This farbrengen commemorates the passing of the Alter Rebbe. In Tanya (Iggeres HaKodesh ch. 27,28), the Alter Rebbe writes "that when a Jew (and especially a Tzaddik, particularly a Rebbe) passes away, his deeds and Torah ascend to the source from where it was drawn. It then effects salvation in the midst of the earth." In other words, the deeds of a tzaddik bring about salvation in "the midst of the earth" especially on the day of his yartzeit.

For a basic understanding of the words "in the midst of the earth," we can turn to Rashi's commentary where he explains the simple, basic meaning of the text ("I have only come to elucidate the simple meaning") on a verse in this week's portion (Exodus 8:18): "... I am the L-rd in the midst of the earth." Rashi: "'In the midst of the earth': Even though My Residence is in the heavens. My decree is fulfilled in the lower world." It goes without saying that the "midst of the earth" refers not only to the "earth" in general but to the lowest level of "earth" i.e. Egypt. As we know Egypt was called Ervas Ho'Oretz — the most corrupt land. And it is even to Egypt that, in the words of Rashi, the "decree" of G-d extends from heaven. Now, although, "heaven" is a generic term describing all that is above, there are certainly many levels denoted by this word. In our context, since we are dealing with G-d's influence ("decree") in the lowest levels of the earth — the most corrupt land, Egypt — the word "heaven" denotes the highest possible level. In the words of the Alter Rebbe himself, "Only the loftiest can possibly reach the nethermost depths."

In short when the Alter Rebbe writes that the deeds of the Tzaddik are elevated on his yartzeit and then radiate to this world to "effect salvation in the midst of the earth," he refers to a radiation from the highest possible level to the nethermost recesses of this corporeal world. This is also alluded to in the word "decree" which is an unequivocal command from the king which brooks no opposition. The king offers no reason, for his decree transcends all reason.

The accomplishments of the Alter Rebbe can be divided into two broad categories:

- 1) His teachings;

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2) "The souls that he had gotten" (Bereishis 12:5).

The Alter Rebbe's teachings, the "Tanya," "Shulchan Aruch" and various Chassidic discourses were an expression of his very being, not unlike the giving of the Torah, when G-d said "Anochi am the L-rd your G-d." The Sages interpreted the letters of the word "Anochi" to mean "Ano Nafshi Kesovis Yehovis — I have given of My soul in writing," meaning that the very essence of G-d is contained within the Torah. Now, since "Tzaddikim are akin to their Creator," the idea is found with regard to the Alter Rebbe's teachings. If we want to form a bond, a link with the Alter Rebbe, we have only to learn his works, especially, as the Alter Rebbe points out in Tanya (ch 5): "[when one studies Torah] it is a wonderful union [with the Torah], like which there is none other."

But the Alter Rebbe's principal achievement was the many Chassidim he attracted and his impact on Jews themselves. This is why it becomes so important to assemble and occupy our time — that most valuable possession of ours — and reflect on the teachings and accomplishments of the Alter Rebbe, and how they can be utilized in a practical way ("action is of paramount importance") to "effect salvation in the midst of the earth."

We must not be frightened by being in the "midst of the earth." We must tackle the task of disseminating Torah and Chassidus with resolve, inspired by the concept of "decree" — transcending all seemingly logical considerations that are thrown at us: that we are a minority; that we are weak. None of these considerations should deter us even for a moment. We must do our utmost to spread the Torah, despite any obstacles.

This will lead to the meritable outcome — the ultimate salvation in the midst of the earth — when an end will once and for all be put to all darkness and we will be redeemed, speedily in our days.

2. As discussed above, the influence of the Alter Rebbe has permeated all the various types of Jews, from the "heads of the tribes" to the "water drawers." He has had an impact on the two categories of

- 1) "Tzaddikim (the righteous) and
- 2) Baalei Teshuvah (the penitents).

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However the Alter Rebbe's main effort was directed towards bringing Baalei Teshuvah closer to the correct path. And we see this emphasis by all the Rebbeim, including the previous Rebbe, who encouraged the translation of Torah works into other languages. This was to enable those who were not conversant with Lashon HaKodesh (the holy tongue). Similarly, with Moshe Rabbeinu, the Midrash tells us that his energy was mainly directed to those sheep who ran away from the flock to a barren, waterless part of the terrain. Moshe would follow the sheep and, upon reaching them, would carry them back to the flock on his arms. It was then that G-d decided to appoint him the shepherd of His people.

The question can be asked: How can we say that the Alter Rebbe's primary concern was Baalei Teshuvah, when we know many stories were the very reverse is highlighted: he had much to do with those who always occupied themselves with holy pursuits.

The explanation can be found in the writings of the Alter Rebbe himself. He explains that Teshuvah — usually translated as repentance — must actually be understood in light of the verse (Koheles 12:7) "and the spirit returns (toshev) to G-d Who gave it." Teshuvah is really the "return" to one's source, to live up to one's potential. This is possible also of a Tzaddik, for he also has a potential far greater than the actual. Also he can do teshuvah and "return." As the Zohar states, concerning Mashiach. "He will bring tzaddikim to teshuvah."

The following passage in the Talmud (Kiddushin 48b, 49b) will throw some more light on the matter: "[If someone marries a woman] on condition that I am a pauper' and he was found to be wealthy, the marriage is invalid ... 'on condition that I am righteous' the marriage is valid, even though he is known to be wicked, for he might have repented in the interim." The question arises: When he stipulates that he is a pauper and was found to be wealthy, the marriage is invalid, even though there seems to be no advantage to a pauper over a wealthy man. Why, then, when he stipulates that he is a tzaddik, is the marriage valid because he is presumed to have repented? Are we not told by our Sages that tzaddikim cannot stand before baalei Teshuvah because of the latter's virtue. baalei teshuvah correspond to the wealthy, while tzaddikim are likened to paupers! How can the stipulation of being a tzaddik be somehow included in the category of Baal Teshuvah, while the stipulation of pauper is negated by wealth.

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One of the answers offered is that although teshuvah is a great leap from the one extreme of evil to the other extreme of good, nevertheless, it does not totally bypass all the intervening levels. The level of tzaddik is fleetingly attained and because of this, the marriage is presumed to be valid if there is a stipulation of tzaddik. The latter attainment of the higher level of Baal Teshuvah cannot annul the marriage which was established when he repented and, for a moment, gained the status of a tzaddik.

Now, the Alter Rebbe did indeed devote time and effort to the segment of Jewry which was not in need of repentance in the literal sense. This he did in keeping with the dictum that "Mashiach will bring Tzaddikim to teshuvah." But the primary concern of the Alter Rebbe was to attract those Jews who were as yet on the "outside." This was a tangible contribution to Mashiach's coming since "he will come when your [the Baal Shem Tov's] wellsprings will be spread to the outside." In fact bringing Jews from the outside closer to Torah is also a way of "bringing tzaddikim to teshuvah," for on their way to the status of a Baal Teshuvah, they are, for a moment, Tzaddikim!

What is the practical lesson from all of the above? It is that both streams, tzaddikim and baalei teshuvah, have a special relevance for us in our daily lives. When we, as emissaries of the Rebbe, become involved in bringing all Jews closer to Torah, we must bear in mind that it's not enough to do things in the normal, ordinary, accepted pace. What is essential at this crucial time is the "added light" that results from the transformation of darkness — the lesson of the Baal Teshuvah. It is essential to take courageous and far-reaching steps to banish the "fourfold darkness" that engulfs us today. The "tzaddikim" — the ordered, step-by-step manner of Divine service — must "be brought to repentance" — be enlivened with additional light and life.

On the other hand, in being a living example, it becomes important to exhibit the manner of a "tzaddik" — the ordered way. For if it becomes apparent that all can be achieved "in one moment" (as in repentance) then the temptation to wait till "the last moment" and to meanwhile continue one's old ways, will be great. There is, one will think, always time! I can always repent in one moment! It must therefore be clearly demonstrated that the service of G-d is an orderly, painstaking process and that it needs a tremendous amount of effort to be properly fulfilled.

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Teshuvah, to be sure, is a unique phenomenon. Not only does it rectify the present and future, it also has an effect on the past. We are told that with the highest level of teshuvah even one's deliberate transgressions are converted to good deeds. Imagine! The heavenly court records that on such and such a day, one performed a good deed! Nevertheless, the way of teshuvah alone is incomplete. Mashiach's task will be to instill the element of teshuvah in tzaddikim — those who serve G-d in the step-by-step manner.

‘And by working with both systems, we will bring to fruition the Alter Rebbe's work of "the souls that he had gotten" in all its' level, baalei teshuvah and tzaddikim; the heads of the tribes and the water drawers — that all Jews will be brought closer to G-d — not only those who must upgrade their service and beautify it, but also those who are on the "outside" in the most extreme sense.

In this merit, "a great multitude will return" to Eretz Yisrael, composed of all segments of the Jewish People and no one will be left behind.

3. It is well known that the Baal Shem Tov stated that we must derive a lesson in our Divine service from all that we see and hear. This includes the way a particular day is fixed in the Jewish calendar. The 24th of Teves can fall on different days of the week, and each has its own special lesson. This year, the 24th of Teves falls on a Wednesday, when we learn the fourth portion of the Sedra of Va'eira. Of course, though the 24th of Teves doesn't always fall on a Wednesday, the lesson that we will learn is pertinent to all subsequent years. For example, although we commemorate the exodus from Egypt on Pesach, nevertheless the lessons we learn are carried through to the entire year, to the extent that we are told to mention the exodus twice a day.

Today's Torah portion relates that Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon called upon Pharaoh to release the Jewish People. Upon his refusal he was smitten with the first two plagues, Blood and Frogs.

Let us delve further into the Torah itself, for the meaning of the first plague, Blood. The Midrash tells us that the plague was "measure for measure." The Egyptians, fearful that the Jewish population would mushroom, took various measures to stem the high birth rate. They decided to close all mikvahs, thereby preventing the Jewish women from immersing in a mikveh in order to emerge from

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menstrual ritual impurity. They would be unable to cohabit with their husbands. In retaliation for this, G-d smote all the water in the Land of Egypt and turned it to blood. Retribution was swift indeed for those who dared to interfere with the birth of Jewish children.

This underscores an important lesson for us today. G-d, in whose hands the miracle of child-bearing lies, should be the one to decide when a child should be born. G-d is essentially good, and whatever He does, is calculated to be of the utmost good. A child is born at the best time for the mother, the father, and indeed for the child him/herself. It is not for us to presume to comprehend the workings of the A-mighty. Of course, although the power to grant children is G-d's alone, He has given us the ability to interfere with it somewhat. But at the same time, G-d tells us: "Choose life!" — I have given you the choice, but I expect you to choose the correct course! In G-d's words in Bereishis (1:28): "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth (oretz) and subdue it" — any earthly considerations must be subdued. You might think that it is not financially feasible to be fruitful and multiply or that it might cause too much strain, or excessive pain in pregnancy. All this, you might argue, will disturb your tranquillity and disturb your study of Torah and performance of mitzvos. Worse still, you might argue that to be fruitful and multiply will preclude the deriving of maximum benefit from this world! All these earthly, physical considerations must be subdued at all costs, for they are simply fallacious. Those who argue for spacing children have forgotten that, in the words of our Sages: "The blessing of G-d causes wealth," and the greater the receptacle for that blessing, the greater is the blessing itself. And in proportion to the necessity, not only does G-d make up all the shortcomings, but G-d's blessings causes wealth — the more sons and daughters that are born, the better the prospects for bringing them up in a prosperous way. As long as there are vessels, as in the story of Elisha in Kings II ch. 4, the oil miraculously continues to flow from the small source. As soon as there are no more vessels, the flow ceases. Similarly with children, the more children are born, the more "vessels" there are to receive the blessings of G-d.

When a man and a woman contemplate that G-d disregards all considerations that are influenced by worldly attitudes, will they be the ones to thwart His intentions? Of course not! They will realize how laughable these considerations really are. And they, like their forefathers in Egypt, who faced down the decree of

the Egyptians in closing mikvahs, will fulfill the blessing in the Torah, concerning the Jews in Egypt (Shmos 1:7): "And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them."

This, then, is the lesson from this year's placing of the 24th of Teves in the calendar:

The plague of Blood only affected the Egyptians; the Jews had water, even if they drank from the same cup as an Egyptian. This means that we, as a "wise and understanding nation," should know what path to choose, namely the path of life. The Egyptians hoped to stem the rise in the Jewish population by closing down the mikvahs; we must do the opposite — bring more and more souls to the world. [Of course if there is a question of danger of life, a competent Rabbi must be consulted and he will decide if spacing is indeed necessary. If he does so decide, then it becomes a directive of the Torah — the path of life. But in the absence of a competent Rabbi's ruling, no one else, least of which the couple themselves who are far from a disinterested party, can decide that spacing is necessary.) The lesson that we must learn is also with regard to having a beautiful mikveh, both spiritually and materially. The physical beauty of the mikveh — the entire building, including the entrance — is also important, since we are told to fulfill all mitzvos in an enhanced manner.

One mitzvah leads to another. It is appropriate now to mention all the mitzvah campaigns beginning with the mitzvah of Ahavas Yisrael, then Education, Torah, Tefillin, Mezuzah, Tzedakah, Holy Books, Kosher food, Shabbos and Yom Tov candles and of course the campaign that we've just discussed, Family Purity.

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לע"נ

הרב התמים יוסף ע"ה

בן יבלח"ט הרב נחמן בער

קריימאן

לע"נ

הרה"ח התמים ר' משה אהרן

בן הרה"ח ר' בן ציון ז"ל

גייסינסקי

יאהרצייט, ג' טבת

הוקדש ע"י משפחתו

לזכות

ר' אליעזר חיים וזוגתו רבקה בתי'
יוצאי חלציהם וכל בני משפחתם שיחיו

לפידות

בוענאס איירעס, ארגענטינא