

The Jewish Weekly

A Summons to Spiritual War

by Rabbi Menachem M. Kirschenbaum

In a letter to his family, a famed Chassid, Rabbi Eliyahu Chayim Altheus, writes:

It was midnight, Purim 5687/1927 [after the festive meal, during the long farbrengen, while we were singing a wordless Chassidic tune]. Tears were falling from the eyes of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn and moistened the white tablecloth.

Those of us seated before him in that cavernous hall noticed the Rebbe's turmoil and easily guessed the reason. Until then we had made gallant attempts to lose ourselves and celebrate the holiday and the historic rescue of our people. But now, more than ever, we were in need of deliverance. With the Communists at our heels, in particular that odious Jewish branch, the Yevsektzia, we were not merely concerned with physical survival. We were fighting for our souls.

We intensified our communal melody, along with the undertone of bitterness.

Suddenly the Rebbe rose.

Both face and eyes were aflame. His whole body trembled. "Brothers! Jews in general and my congregants in particular!

"All of us in Russia find ourselves in the same situation as our ancestors who left Egypt - the desert on two sides, the sea in front, and Pharaoh and his army behind.

"Every Jew must know, and every one must convey this in my name to his fellow: Every Jew is allowed, according to government law, to fulfill all the commandments without interference. Everyone can have his son learn with a teacher.

"Brother Jews! The desolate desert is on two sides and the Egyptians - the Yevsektzia - are pressing from behind. It is very bitter for us; we have no way and no choice except to fling ourselves into the sea of self-sacrifice, into the sea of faith and trust!

"Every Jew in Russia, no matter his age, position, or affiliation - middle class or intelligentsia - must remember the period of the Inquisition in which we were burned and slaughtered for Torah and mitzvot. Every Jew must say just this: He is a Jew, and he should display this with his participation in the founding of a Jewish school. Every Jew should remember this moment: Come and let us fling ourselves into the fire of self-sacrifice!

"All should remember - they are taking our children away from us. They want to make us all childless, Heaven forbid. All of us - rabbis, teachers, scholars, men and women alike - together we must prepare to be burned, Heaven forbid, for Torah and mitzvot, in order to merit children and grandchildren.

"Jews! Explain to one another this terrible situation and where we have been led by the riffraff, the Yevsektzia, may their names be erased. Remember who your enemies are. Each of you should arouse the G-dly feeling within and fight this bitter enemy. We have suffered greatly; in every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, and in every generation G-d saves us.

"They want, Heaven forbid, to apostatize Jews. Remember, and save yourselves while you still can. Make schools and classrooms, go to synagogues, and learn in them each day. Strengthen the path of your fathers. And may G-d give you children and grandchildren."

The Rebbe ripped open his shirt and uncovered the area near his heart. With clenched fist he beat on his chest. His audience recoiled, but the Rebbe paid them no attention.

He turned to me, standing nearby, and thundered, "Eliyahu Chayim! Eliyahu Chayim! Last year I told you to write, and you did not listen! Therefore, you've been suffering the entire year.

"Now I am ordering you to write to all the cities and towns as follows: We had a Rebbe, and he left us a son. What kind of fruit is he?"

The crowd of devotees remained speechless, not daring to utter a word. The Rebbe continued, "I order you to write in my name - that whoever has a son and sends him to the schools of the Soviets and Yevsektzia will not live out the year! Will you write that?"

The Rebbe repeated this, over and over, pounding his chest. "When you see the body burn, do not have mercy. Watch out for the head!"

The Rebbe sank into his seat, body wracked with sobs.

* * *

We Chassidim had had enough. Fear and dread fell upon us all. We could no longer hear such piercing and fiery words. Our fear was twice what it was before.

At the end of the table, facing the Rebbe, stood members of the Yevsektzia. They came, as they did to all the special farbrengens, and brazenly stood there, listening. In the past, however, the Rebbe, aware of their presence, had cloaked his speech to avoid giving them any pretext. This time, however, he ignored them completely. To him, they were nothing, simply the dust of the earth. Even when many Chassidim shot nervous glances their way, he continued his harangue while openly mentioning them.

The agents themselves appeared discomfited as if aware they were caught spying. Soon, however, their expressions turned to rage, and their eyes burned with murder and madness. All knew that the threat hanging over the Rebbe's head had grown stronger.

It Once Happened...

Rabbi Altheus slipped out of the room and hurried to the nearby alcove, where Rebbetzin Shterna Sara, the Rebbe's mother, placidly sat. He knew that only she had the ability to stop this dangerous farbrengen. Indeed, little was needed to convince her.

As she swept into the full hall, the Chassidim parted way for her in anticipation and the Rebbe rose in honor.

"Mother," he announced, before she could utter a word, "please go to your room, read a chapter of Psalms, and weep. This will help us greatly." He himself wept as he spoke.

At the sight of her anguished son, the Rebbetzin burst into tears. Soon the Chassidim there joined them in grief and bitterness. The only ones not in tears were the wicked ones, who scanned the crowd.

"Mother," the Rebbe sobbed, "I do nothing on my own. All this I worked out with Father." He stopped, unable to finish.

The air was tense and still. Suddenly the Rebbetzin broke the silence.

"Yosef Yitzchak," she said, "please stop. Have mercy on your health - for your sake, for my sake, and for the Chassidim. Please, go to the nearby room and rest. You must preserve your health, I beg you." She was already well aware of the Rebbe's weakened condition.

The Rebbe, however, remained planted to the floor. Suddenly, he fainted.


His body was carried into the adjacent room where efforts were made to revive him. One Chassid even poured cold water on him! Ten minutes later, which seemed like an eternity, the Rebbe regained consciousness.

Outside, in the hall, the Chassidim stirred about in despair, each one feeling resigned to his fate. Each one envisioned his house going up in flames, the proverbial ship sinking, leaving everyone to drown in utter helplessness.

About two hours later, the Rebbe returned to the table. As if the midnight madness had simply gotten up and walked out the door, the Rebbe resumed his normal farbrengen patterns. He gave over inspiring words and we sang our songs the usual way, until half past seven in the morning.

We left, refreshed and invigorated by the Rebbe's guidance. But what had unfolded earlier, prepared us for the holiday ahead, where we would leave our oppressors and plunge into the waters of Torah and Jewish nationhood. It was truly a night of inspiration.

Reprinted from an email of the Avner Institute (Rebbebook@gmail.com).



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Parshat Yitro

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:45	5:59	6:39
Tel Aviv	5:00	6:01	6:36
Haifa	4:50	5:59	6:36
Be'er Sheva	5:04	6:02	6:40



"Don't ask Twice; Just Listen"
By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

The following story was related by Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka of blessed memory, wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe:

There was a family, relatives of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who lived in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. Whenever they had a question for the Rebbe, they asked his wife, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, and she passed the question on to the Rebbe. Afterwards, she related the Rebbe's answer to the family.

One day, the Rebbetzin received a phone call from that family, that the mother was very sick and, after many tests in the hospital, the doctors concluded that she needed surgery. They were calling to ask for the Rebbe's consent and blessing for the operation. When the Rebbetzin conveyed the message to the Rebbe, the Rebbe responded that they should not do the operation. The Rebbetzin told the family the Rebbe's answer, but a few days later, they called again. They said that the doctors said that because they refused the operation, her condition deteriorated and her life could be endangered. They asked whether she could ask the Rebbe again.

The Rebbetzin said that in Lubavitch you don't ask twice. "I consider myself a chassid of the Rebbe and I do as the chassidim do, so I cannot ask again," she said.

The family was distraught, so the Rebbetzin said that if the Rebbe came home and asked whether she had heard anything from the family, she was willing to repeat what they had told her, but she would not ask again.

When the Rebbe came home for supper, he asked the Rebbetzin whether she had heard from the family. She told the Rebbe what they had said and then added, "I'm not asking; I'm just telling you."

The Rebbe looked serious and after a pause he said, "I repeat, they should not operate!" The Rebbetzin conveyed this clear answer to the family and a few days later they called again. They said that the doctors said her condition had deteriorated further and her life was in immediate danger. They were asked to sign that they took full responsibility for the woman and absolved the doctors and the hospital of any responsibility.

The Rebbetzin said, "The Rebbe said two times already not to operate."

When the Rebbe came home, the Rebbetzin told him the latest events and the Rebbe said, "Why don't they try medication?"

The Rebbetzin immediately called the family to tell them. They in turn mentioned it to the doctors, who laughed at them in response. "The rabbi knows better than we do about medicine? We say that only surgery can save her. It is definitely not a matter of medication."

The family believed the Rebbe and went from department to department, looking for a doctor who would understand them. Finally, they found a doctor who thought for a moment and then said, "I think I know which medication the Rebbe has in mind, and since I wear a white jacket and can go wherever I want, I will visit your mother and give her an injection and let's see what happens."

A few days later, the doctors said her condition had suddenly stabilized. They did not know what had happened, but she was no longer deteriorating. The doctor was optimistic and told the family that apparently he had used the medicine the Rebbe was thinking of. He gave the woman another injection and two days later the doctors who had been treating her admitted she had improved somewhat. Every so often, the doctor would come by and give her medication until she was out of danger and was released from the hospital.

The family kept in constant touch with the Rebbetzin. When the Rebbetzin told the Rebbe that the mother had returned home, the Rebbe said, "When they asked me about an operation, I saw that if they did it, she wouldn't make it off the operating table, which is why I adamantly opposed an operation. When they asked again, I thought the doctors would see that the family was adamantly opposed to an operation and would try medication. When I saw that they weren't thinking along those lines at all, I explicitly suggested medication."

The Rebbetzin related this and said that the Rebbe had added, "Now you see how important it is to listen to whatever we say, even when the experts say the opposite."

* * *

Do the Rebbes know everything? Here is another, similar story:

Once, someone asked the Rebbe Rayatz (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn), the Rebbe's predecessor, whether his son should travel or not and the Rebbe said "No." The son did not listen and boarded the ship. A few days into the voyage the ship sank.

After the week of mourning, the brokenhearted father came to the Rebbe and said, "If the Rebbe would have explained why he negated the trip, I am sure my son would have listened."

The Rebbe Rayatz replied, "Believe me that not every time I say something, do I know why I am saying it. I just convey what I am told from Above. But this I know: when I say it, you have to follow it - or else..."

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.

Editor's Note: Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson's 35th Yahrzeit is Monday, 22nd Shevat – February 13th of this year

Is it possible for anyone to see sound?

As heard from Rabbi Mirvis, the Chief Rabbi of England and the Commonwealth, there are three different terms used in the Torah for 'listening'.

The first appears at the very beginning of Parashat Yitro, "וישמע יתרו – Yitro listened." When we use the term 'שמע' it means, that we take what we hear very seriously – what we hear becomes a call for action. That is why Hashem says to us, "שמע ישראל" – Listen O' People of Israel, to the fact that I am the one G-d that you must believe in." We, in turn, call out, "שמע קולנו ה' אלוהינו – Listen to our voices O' Lord our G-d." – appealing to Hashem to help us.

The second term is 'להאזין' – to hear. Sometimes a word can go into one ear and out through the other, and that is what happens with 'מאזין', that is 'hearing'.

But there is a third, unexpected term, which is the most powerful form of listening. It comes immediately after the Ten Commandments. When in this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us, "וכל העם רואים – and the entire nation saw the sounds." Here we have a combination of senses, something quite extraordinary. Perhaps even close to supernatural, in which we were able to internalize the messages that reached us from Hashem, with our entire beings.

So powerful was that experience at Mount Sinai, that we believe all of our souls were there. We carry that experience with us, even today, and it gives us the incentive, to carry out the expectations of that covenantal relationship, established at Sinai.

So if 'listening' is a call for action, 'קל וחומר' – how much more so, when one sees the voices? As a result, all that transpired at Mount Sinai, continues to be a very powerful and essential call to us, through all ages, to live our lives according to the will of Hashem.

It is good when people are able to say, 'I hear what you have said'. It is even better, when they're able to say 'I have listened'. But the best of all is when somebody can tell you, 'I see what you mean'.

So let's hope Hashem sees what we mean, by praying for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual and sweet Shabbat.

The Jewish Weekly's
PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 17
MITZVOT ASEH: 3
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 14

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 75
Many Chumashim print the number of pesukim at the end of the Parsha. In Parshat Yitro, the number is 72 or 72 pesukim. The discrepancy is due to different ways of counting the Aseret HaDibrot. The Aseret HaDibrot consists of 13 pesukim. However, when they are read as Statements, rather than pesukim, there are only 10.

NUMBER OF WORDS: 1104
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4022

HAFTORA:
Ashkenazim: Yeshaya 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6
Chabad & Sephardim: Yeshaya 6:1-13

יתרו
פרשת

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