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Chassidus is the Only Path to Spiritual Fulfillment and Happiness

Reb Yoel Kahn

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Oholei Torah Ballroom, Brooklyn New York

Preface

On the evening of Tuesday, 21st of Teves 5774, close to 2,000 men and women gathered in the Oholei Torah Ballroom for a monumental gathering on the direction of Anash.

The gathering was led by Reb Yoel Kahn and HaRav Ezra Schochet who spoke of the path of Chassidus and its application as a way of life for every person.

We are happy to provide you with a transcript of Reb Yoel's speech by R' Eli Rubin. Also included is a free translation of the Rebbe's letter discussed by Reb Yoel.

It is our hope that this talk will offer you the clarity and purpose that you seek and need.

Merkaz Anash

Chassidus is the Only Path to Spiritual Fulfillment and Happiness

In his speech, Reb Yoel spoke out against the perception that people might be able to more easily find spiritual fulfillment through sources other than Chassidus. Drawing a sharp distinction between the worldly approach to happiness and the Chassidic approach to happiness, Reb Yoel argued that we have to realize that at its heart Chassidus carries a very practical message. The Eibershter has given us the privilege of an unbreakable connection with Him, and it is only by embracing that relationship and subjugating ourselves to the Eibershter's will that we can reach ultimate fulfillment and happiness. The full transcript of Reb Yoel's speech follows below.

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Lately we have been hearing that people are searching. They are not sufficiently happy, so they are searching. To search is actually a very good thing. But we have to know what we are searching for and where to search for it. There is a distinction between the way many concepts are perceived by the general world and the way they are understood from the perspective of Chassidus. The same applies here.

When a person is lacking some kind of vitality, is not internally happy, what can be done that he should become happy? From the worldly perspective, the answer is that he should become free; that he should have no yoke upon him. So long as he has a yoke he is limited thereby; it constrains him.

It is noteworthy to contrast this with the way Chassidus looks at it. There is a letter penned by the Rebbe on the 17th of Elul 5710

(1950); a Jew had complained about various things, concluding that he “cannot find satisfaction,” and that “he feels that he is missing something.” This is what the Rebbe wrote in reply: “In my opinion, what he is missing is acceptance of the yoke (*kabalas ol*).” This is exactly the opposite of the worldly outlook. What is the meaning of this?

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Let’s take it even further. There is *maamar* from the Rebbe (Rani Ve’simchi Bas Tzion, Sivan 27th 5727, printed in Sefer Maamarim Melukut Vol. 4), where he explains why the *Eibershter* “turned the mountain above their heads like a barrel” before giving the Jewish people the Torah. The *Eibershter* forced them to accept the Torah. Everyone asks the obvious question; the Jewish people wanted to accept the Torah of their own volition, they had already said “we will do and we will listen.” Why then did the *Eibershter* have to force them? The Rebbe explains this at length; his explanation is founded upon a teaching of the Baal Shem Tov and the Rebbe explains it with great depth. But simply speaking, when the time comes that a Jew does not want to accept the yoke of *mitzvos*, this is when the power of the overturned mountain has its effect; something compels him and forces him so that even when he no longer wants it, he cannot tear himself away.

Accordingly, there can be three general ways in which a Jew learns Torah and fulfills *mitzvos*: One way is that he enjoys it, he is a *frum* Jew, a *chossid*, and he enjoys it. He learns a piece of Gemara and enjoys it, he does a *mitzva* and enjoys it, and so on. That is one way. A second Jew has no particular desire, he doesn’t enjoy it, but accepts the yoke of heaven. He knows he has a yoke upon him and he does want to be a pious Jew. He does accept the yoke, but it remains a yoke, a burden from which he doesn’t derive any pleasure. The only motivation is his acceptance of the yoke of heaven. A third person, doesn’t even want to accept the yoke of heaven. He wants to abandon it, but there is something that prevents him from doing so.

What is that prevents him? That turning over of the mountain. The *Eibershter* transmitted something of such potency that the individual cannot tear himself away. Practically speaking, this is expressed in different ways, either because of something his father has said, or that his grandfather said, or that his childhood teacher said. But this is only the technical medium. What is it really? It is the effect of the *Eibershter* turning the mountain above their heads like a barrel.

Now, let's think about these three types of Jews; one enjoys Torah and *mitzvos*, another has no enjoyment but accepts the yoke, the third doesn't even accept the yoke, but cannot bring himself to abandon it, something prevents him. When is happiness possible? How can one's study of Torah and fulfillment of *mitzvos* be permeated with happiness? For the first person it is understood, he has an outright pleasure from learning, whether from studying a page of Gemara or from learning a *maamar* Chassidus. Likewise he enjoys fulfilling *mitzvos*, he fulfills *mitzvos* in the most beautiful way, and with enthusiasm. The second person only accepts the yoke; seemingly there is no enjoyment here.

But Torah tells that it is not so. In the Beis Hamikdash there was the pouring of the wine and the pouring of water (*nisuch ha'yayin* and *nisuch ha'mayim*); wine has an enjoyable taste, water does not. Similarly, when a person understands what he is doing he enjoys it, but water has no taste and is likened to a person who simply accepts the yoke. But the Gemara says that true joy was experienced when the water was poured, "one who did not see the happiness... never saw happiness in his life." Elsewhere wine too is described as causing happiness, but in comparison to the happiness of water this is not happiness. True happiness was experienced specifically when the water was poured. This is very strange; when a person knows and understands we say that he doesn't achieve true happiness, but by simply accepting the yoke he finds happiness.

When we come to the third type this goes even further. Here the individual doesn't even accept the yoke; is happiness possible even

for this person? The Rebbe says yes. A very strange thing. When a Jew says “you have chosen us from all the nations,” that the *Eibershter* has forged such a relationship with us that even if we want to abandon Him we cannot, this is the greatest possible joy. Such a deep relationship! Such a deep connection that he cannot tear himself away even if he wants to. This joy, which derives from the recognition that he is so strongly connected that he can’t tear himself away, is even greater than the happiness that is derived from simple acceptance of the yoke. He rejoices that he is so strongly bound with the *Eibershter*.

This expresses a different vision of how a person achieves happiness. The way it is seen from a worldly perspective compared to the way it is seen from a Torah perspective is an entirely different world.

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Let’s return to what the Rebbe wrote in that letter. The individual complained that he is dissatisfied, that he feels he is missing something. The first thing the Rebbe writes in reply is that “what he is missing is acceptance of the yoke,” and that “this is the foundation and root of all service.” Then the Rebbe continues to explain how one brings oneself to accept the yoke, that this is simple, that one doesn’t need to achieve lofty levels; simply, as it says in Tanya, to contemplate how the *Eibershter* “views and looks and searches the interior of each individual...” Then the Rebbe continues further, “In order to make this work easier for him, the *Eibershter* gave him the merit that he is a *chossid*, which means that his soul is a part of the general soul of the *tzaddik*, and if the individual soul is missing something, through the correct connection he can draw whatever he is lacking from the general soul...” The Rebbe continues to write at length, discussing many foundational ideas, that a mitzvah is a means to connect to the *Eibershter*, etc.

But there are situations when a person is unhappy, when he does indeed need to see a medical professional. To make it into some kind

of movement requiring everyone to seek medical help, is obviously a very strange idea. It doesn't stand up, neither according to Torah, nor according to human reason. But it is clearly understood that someone who is ailing must go to a medical professional. Even if in such a situation, in which one does need help, one has to know which doctor to go to and on what kind of basis; there are many things that need to be considered. Furthermore, even in such a situation, no doctor, not even a good doctor, can make a person happy. If an individual is missing something, no other person has the ability to replace that which is missing. Certainly, as the Rebbe writes in the letter, the *Eibershter* sustains everyone and will fill everything with good. But when a person is missing something, the question is what is the address? What is the address to which you should turn for fulfillment? There is no reason to start looking elsewhere. The address is right here.

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Sometimes we try to convince ourselves that "Hashem's glory is upon the heavens." We want to exalt the *Eibershter*, saying that he transcends even the heavens, but does he also have a connection with simple people? Is he present down on this earth? Chassidus, we argue, is a very lofty discipline. Certainly, we must learn Chassidus, but we study it as another subject. "I am just a simple person, with a coarse animal soul; I am not especially refined. So what connection does it have to me?" This is a mistake. This is the core of the issue. We argue that everything taught in Chassidus is not sufficiently tangible. Of course there are lofty ideas, but the ideas expressed in the Rebbe's letter are very simple.

A Jew must simply reflect on the fact that we have a Rebbe, that the events of Gimmel Tammuz did not change anything, and the Rebbe gives us attention just he did previously. This is a fact, and it is meant in the most simple sense. This is not something that we're just saying to comfort ourselves. This is the fact. What it says in Tanya, that *tzaddikim* are more present following their passing than they were

in their lifetimes, is a fact. This refers to *tzadikim* in general, and especially when we are discussing a shepherd of Israel, "shepherds of Israel do not abandon the sheep of their flock." The Rebbe used that phrase regarding the Rebbe Rashab. But in this case it is even more intense; the Rebbe Rashab left behind a son, and the Friediker Rebbe left behind a son-in-law, but in our situation we only have the Rebbe just as it was before.

If somebody is searching, if somebody is in such a situation that he needs to pour out his heart to somebody; where can he pour out his heart? where can he cry his heart out? Apart from the fact that he can go to the Ohel and ask for a blessing, which is a whole different concept; we are talking about the need to express what is in one's heart. The only Jew -- not a Jew in the supernal realms, but in this world, "found in all realms more than in his lifetime" -- to whom he can cry out to and speak his heart to is the Rebbe. Talking from a psychological perspective, there is a need to pour out what is in one's heart, but not everything can be said to just anyone, some things can only be said to a very strong and close friend. This is a very practical thing. When we exalt these notions, arguing that this is a heavenly thing or some kind of spiritual thing, we are making a big mistake.

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Another thing mentioned in this letter, is the special opportunity that this individual has as a Shliach of the Rebbe. We are all Shluchim of the Rebbe. There are those who are specially designated as Shluchim, but we are all Shluchim. In the very first *maamar* that the Rebbe said in 1951 he stated that we are now in the seventh generation and that the purpose of the seventh generation is to draw down the essence of the divine presence. It is for this that all the generations have waited, it is for this that the Torah was given, for this the *mishkan* and Beis Hamikdash were built, for this Chassidus was revealed, for this Chabad Chassidus was revealed. All of this for what? For the individuals of this generation.

Somebody said to me that the reason one might go to one place or another is because there they uplift the individual. Nothing uplifts an individual like Chassidus. Accepting the yoke of heaven doesn't mean that you are a nothing. On the contrary! Chassidus tells a person how great he is, that the *Eibershter* has given you unparalleled ability and an unparalleled responsibility. This is all clear. But to achieve happiness you need to have the right perspective. As the Rebbe writes again at the end of this letter, "abandon the excessive complaints... subject your will to the will of our Rebbe who has transmitted to you the will of the *Eibershter* ..." The emphasis here is again subjugation of the self and acceptance of the yoke of heaven. Why does the Rebbe continually emphasize subjugation? A person complains that he cannot find satisfaction and the Rebbe's answer is subjugation!

But that is exactly the point. When a Jew says "you have chosen us from all the nations," when he praises the *Eibershter* that he is so strongly bound up with Him that even if he wants to he cannot tear himself away, he is not complaining. He doesn't pity himself saying, "Woe! What should I do that the *Eibershter* has chosen me..." A Jew say "you have chosen us" with happiness and with a melody. On the contrary! Despondence is the very opposite of this chosenness. It is imperative that we not see this as some kind of heavenly or abstract idea. We should not say "Hashem is exalted above all nations, his glory is upon the heavens." This is the fact, the practical reality.

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There is a humorous anecdote told in the name of Reb Itche der Masmid, that there was once a nobleman's estate and he had dogs, very big dogs, so that it was impossible to pass through there. If you has to pass through you would travel with a very high wagon, which was too high for the dogs to jump up on. Two Jews were passing through one on such a wagon and one by foot. The one with the wagon told the other to join him on the wagon to protect himself from the dogs. But he said "No, I'm not afraid."

“Why are you not afraid?”

“I have an incantation, and as soon as I repeat this incantation the dogs will disappear.”

The Jew on the wagon wasn't so impressed by this, so he drove very slowly so that if anything happened the other Jew would be able to climb aboard. Soon enough, the Jew on foot shouted for help and jumped on the wagon. Afterwards the wagon driver asked him what happened to his incantation.

“My incantation?” he said, “My incantation is a sure thing. There's nothing to talk about! But the dogs didn't even give me a chance to say it.”

Chassidus is a conducive remedy for everything, but sometimes the dog doesn't let you use the incantation. Sometimes the dog says that the books should remain on the shelf, that we shouldn't learn them; but sometimes the argument is more subtle. “On the contrary, learn it, but in practice it is not effective. It's a spiritual thing, but you are a coarse person. You, you need to search elsewhere; search for things that are lower and more tangible.”

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From here we need to go forth, as was said earlier, to strengthen one another. First of all, the more Shiurim established, the better, in the very simplest sense. Likewise, the more Chassidische Farbrengens, the better. And at a Chassidische Farbrengen we must talk to the point. Not to speak nonsense or about irrelevant matters, but to explain that Chassidus is practically effective and relevant. That all things were for the purpose of this generation, that the *Eibershter* chose us and gave us the greatest abilities, and that from this we should derive happiness. We must work, certainly we must work. Don't search elsewhere for any nonsense or for any wisdom. Neither

nonsense, nor wisdom. We should walk in the Rebbe's ways for ever and for eternity.

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Addendum

After Rabbi Schochet spoke, Reb Yoel asked to add something:

I believe that everyone clearly understood what was said. But sometimes we must spell everything out clearly, so that there will be absolutely no mistakes. Earlier we spoke, and Rabbi Schochet spoke, and he probably elaborated more than me, but I see that we still need to spell it out even clearer.

Earlier we explained that there are two perspectives on how to look at a person who feels dissatisfied, and two way to look at the way forward. There is a worldly perspective, and a Torah perspective -- a Chassidic perspective. The worldly way is to decrease the yoke as much as possible; one wants to become free. They tell you you're a great person, don't worry about others, be yourself. But what does this come to? What is the measure of this person's self? It can be nothing more than what it is. But the less yoke, they claim, the more the self is helped.

But then, as I mentioned earlier, there is a different perspective. There was a Jew who complained that he did not have satisfaction, and the first thing the Rebbe says is accept the yoke. That's the first thing. But then this goes even further, there is the concept of the *Eibershter* turning the mountain over them, that even when one no longer wants it, the relationship with the *Eibershter* cannot be broken. And it is from this relationship that true happiness is derived.

The Rebbe once said something, not exactly about this, but nevertheless a relevant statement, "For a Jew, true being is non-

being.” This is the difference; for a regular person his being is nothing more than his being, therefore if you subdue him and place a yoke on him it is a negative imposition on his sense of self; it constrains him. But for a Jew exactly the opposite is true; his being is his relationship with the *Eibershter*, expressed through subjugation to the *Eibershter’s* will.

Who communicates this and reveals it? Torah and Judaism in general, and especially the teachings of Chassidus. This is the notion behind “we will do and we will listen” and even more so “he turned the mountain over them like a barrel.” Accordingly, when does a Jew achieve true happiness? The more that he is touch with his Divine soul. And what is the Divine soul? Acceptance of the yoke of heaven. Moreover, a Jew says “you have chosen us” not with self pity, but on the contrary, with joy!

In the *maamar* that we mentioned earlier, Rani Ve’simchi, the Rebbe asks how we can achieve happiness even when the relationship is only because the *Eibershter* turned the mountain over them? The Rebbe answers that this is through our relationship with the Rebbeim, our relationship with the Rebbe.

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This has all been clearly elaborated, but it means as follows: Since people are searching, and searching itself is a very desirable thing, we must know where to go, where to look and where to find it. In simple language; we have no reason to enter foreign gardens. If somebody did enter foreign gardens, what has passed has passed, it shouldn’t be repeated.

What are the resolutions of this meeting? The first resolution is that this matter is entirely out of the question. This is clear. There are no foreign gardens, we have a garden, we have our own garden. What is our garden? This brings us to the second resolution; one is dependent upon the other. We have to increase our study of

Chassidus as much as possible, the study of the Rebbe's *maamorim* as much as possible, the Rebbe's talks and the Rebbe's letters. We need to learn these and realize that it does not consist of heavenly abstractions, these are effective in our tangible reality.

There are tens of letters of the Rebbe, if not hundreds, where Jews asked how to find tranquility in their souls, and the Rebbe answered that there is only one way -- one must conduct oneself in accordance with the directives of Torah. That's it. Conducting oneself in accordance with the directives of Torah is the path to a tranquil soul. This applies especially to Chassidim. But the *yetzer hara* clamours in your head and tries to confuse you, and presents a clever argument that "on the contrary, Chassidus is a very lofty discipline."

We have to know that this is the seventh generation, and that each one of us has the greatest abilities, and that the Rebbe empowered us, and continues to empower us. And that if someone wants to pour out his heart, he has where to pour his heart out. The Rebbe listens just as he did previously. And when someone comes and pours out his heart and requests a blessing the Rebbe prays on his behalf, and the Rebbe feel his pain. And when the blessing is fulfilled and the individual returns to inform him, the Rebbe is pleased. We have no reason to go who knows where. If you want to speak out your heart you have who to speak to, and you have who to ask for a blessing too. If you are searching for a path in life, this is the path of life that the Rebbe gave us. We must continue to follow with even greater strength. We will walk in the Rebbe's ways for ever and for eternity; till the coming of Moshiach and certainly afterwards.

The Key to Joy

"Abandon the excessive complaints of self feeling, what you are lacking and what you have..."

17 Elul, 5710 [1950]

In response to your letter from the 28th of Av in which you describe your situation, and quote what my father-in-law, the Rebbe HK"m, wrote to you that you should organize shiurim in your home and endeavor to increase the number of participants in the learning. You also write to me that you were active in making children's gathering and *mesibos Shabbos*, sometimes during the week as well. And that now as well you have *shiurim* in learning, but you do not have satisfaction from this and you feel that you are 'lacking something,' and you ask my opinion on the matter.

In my opinion, what you are lacking is *kabalas ol*, which is the basis and foundation of all service. To acquire *kabalas ol* there is no need for a special in-depth *hisbonenus*. You must only imagine how the King of kings, Hashem, created the world, and then "blew a spirit of life into his nostrils," which is your *neshama* which enlivens your body, and Hashem stands above you and watches, and He checks your heart and inner being, your actions and words, and he counts all your steps (Tanya *perek* 42).

In order to ease this avoda, Hashem has given you the *zechus* that you are a *chossid*, meaning that your *neshama* is a part of the General Neshama of the *tzaddik*, and if something is lacking in the individual neshama, then through a proper connection [to the *tzaddik*] all that you are lacking is drawn to you from the General Neshama. The [Friediker] Rebbe said clearly, that when he accepted upon himself the *nesius*, he stipulated that it be "with kindness and compassion." Since then, from 5680 until now, he 'stands and serves,' and he

draws down upon his students, *chassidim* and those connected to him, power and enthusiasm in the service of Hashem, which includes both matters which are between man and Hashem and matters that are between man and his fellow;

In addition to the above, the Rebbe has personally chosen you and placed upon you a special shlichus, and it is known even according to *nigleh* that "the messenger of a person is like the person himself," it is therefore understood that in this shlichus the Rebbe gives you from his powers. And as explained in the maamar for Chai Elul this year, that the word *mitzva* means an attachment and connection, and as explained there at length with a *mashal*, that when a person fulfils the commandment of a wise man or king, then even if he doesn't understand the meaning of the matter and doesn't comprehend it's greatness, his joy is nevertheless limitless, since he thereby connects and becomes united with the essence of the wise man and the king.

Now, despite the fact that you have all of the above, you still complain that you have no satisfaction and do not feel enthusiasm, and you only feel that you are 'lacking something.'

If you will listen to my voice, you should abandon the excessive complaints of self feeling, what you are lacking and what you have, and you should consider the good portion that was given to you that you are amongst the students and the *mekusharim* of our *nasi*, my father-in-law, the Rebbe HK"M, and you should rejoice with great joy over this lot, and you should draw down the joy in practical activities to carry out the will of his sender, for which you were given powers and are only lacking the willpower. And when you will disregard your will in favor of the will of our *nasi*, who has given over to you the will of Hashem, then this alone will be the vessel through which you will receive enthusiasm in all of your activities of carrying out the will of the my father-in-law, the Rebbe HK"M.

לזכות המנדבים שיהיו

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יעמוד להם ולבני ביתם בכל המצטרך להם בגשמיות וברוחניות

