



‘THIS STORM IS BECAUSE OF ME!’

RABBI SHLOMA MAJESKI

I want to preface by saying that we as *chassidim* relate to our Rebbe the way the Rebbe related to his predecessor, the Friediker Rebbe. The Rebbe often said that whatever his predecessor spoke about most recently, i.e., within the year before Yud Shvat 1950, was meant to show us how to conduct ourselves after the *histalkus*. Similarly, whatever the Rebbe spoke about most recently (before we stopped hearing *sichos*) was the Rebbe telling us what we need to know today.

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There is no need to elaborate on the upheaval the coronavirus has caused in our lives. What's going on in the world right now is affecting everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike. What is clear is that this is a turning point in preparing the world for Moshiach.

I remember a *sichah* the Rebbe said in the 1980's, when Iran and Iraq were at war. The whole world was in turmoil, but the Rebbe said that the commotion was all for the sake of the Jewish people. I can still hear the Rebbe's words ringing in my ears: "*Sheli ess hasa'ar hagadol hazeh! This whole storm is because of me!*"

The Rebbe was quoting a *passuk* from the story of Yonah. Hashem had sent him on a mission to Nineveh, to tell the people to repent or the city would be destroyed. But Yonah tried to escape his *shlichus*, because the people of Nineveh were non-Jews—he was afraid that if they accepted his *nevu'ah* and repented, it would make the Yidden look bad, since they (the Jews) had also been exhorted to do *teshuvah* and had not yet obeyed. Yonah boarded a ship and it soon became engulfed by stormy waters. The people on the boat came to Yonah and asked him why he wasn't *davening*. Yonah wasn't *davening* because he knew very well why the storm had come, and he said so: "*Sheli ess hasa'ar hagadol hazeh! This whole storm is because of me!*"

This is a lesson for the Jewish people for all generations. Whenever there is a storm in the world it's because of us. Never in history have we ever experienced a global storm of this sort. Certainly, *sheli ess hasa'ar hagadol hazeh*—it all relates to the Yidden and to Moshiach.

People are now coming up with all sorts of references in Torah and *Midrash* that relate to the current situation. Some are likening it to Mitzrayim when the Yidden were told to stay in their homes, and the Baal Haturim says the same thing will happen with the future *Geulah*. Yalkut Shimoni says that there will be a *dever gadol*—a big

epidemic—before Moshiach comes. There are speakers and lecturers from all over the spectrum who are now talking about this being the era of Moshiach.

Even the people who, before, were mocking us and saying we Lubavitchers have an obsession with Moshiach are now connecting what is going on to the coming of Moshiach.

What this means for us is that now is not a time for anxiety, sadness, or fear, *chas v'shalom*. On the contrary, now is the time to strengthen our *bitachon* and *simchah*.

I once heard Reb Mendel Futerfas speak about the many years he had spent in prison in the Soviet Union. He said that in all those years he had never once violated Shabbos—but that was not such a big deal. He had never missed a day of putting on *tefillin*—but that also was not such a big deal. The one thing that he did consider a big deal, something that he could take credit for, was that he never once fell into *atzvus*. He never allowed himself to become depressed over his situation.

Staying *b'simchah* is more important now than ever before, and as *chassidim*, we are well aware of the principle of *tracht gut vet zain gut*, especially an event like this which is taking place on a global scale.

We need to be very cautious when making statements explaining why the coronavirus epidemic happened. It is not up to us to give reasons for what Hashem does and for the terrible suffering that people are undergoing. In particular, some people try to explain the unprecedented closure of shuls, *chadarim*, *yeshivos*, etc., by claiming that there must have been something lacking in these areas and that's why Hashem caused them to close down. The Rebbe taught us not to dwell on the negative or imply that Yidden are at fault for our *tzaros*, G-d forbid. Instead, I'd like to share a *sichah* of the Rebbe on the last *passuk* of the Torah: "All the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel." On the words "*le'einei kol Yisroel*," before the eyes of all Israel, Rashi comments that this refers to Moshe breaking the *luchos*. Hashem told him, "*Yashar kochacha she'shibarta*." Well done, good job, thank you... for breaking the *luchos*!

Why did Hashem think Moshe did such a wonderful thing by breaking the *luchos*? Just imagine someone taking a *sefer Torah* and ripping it up. Just the thought

of it is horrifying. Here Moshe took the *luchos* made by Hashem Himself and destroyed them. And even if what he did was necessary in that moment, why does the Torah refer to it in the very last *passuk*, as if that act sums up the entire Torah? We would expect the Torah to conclude with something positive.

The *Midrash* brings a *mashal* to explain why Moshe broke the *luchos*. A king went overseas and became betrothed to a woman. Before the marriage, her maid acted improperly with another man and this gave a bad name to the king's betrothed. Her attendant quickly took the *kesubah* that the king had given him to hand to the woman and tore it up. As long as he didn't actually hand her the *kesubah*, she'd be judged as an unmarried woman, not as a woman who is betrothed to the king.

When Moshe saw the Jewish people sinning with the *eigel*, his first thought was to protect the Jewish people, so he broke the *luchos*, the *kesubah* in the marriage between Hashem and the Jewish people, to prevent the Jews from being severely punished. It was not easy for him to do; it was an act of tremendous courage and devotion, which is why Hashem told him, "*Yashar koach!*" The last words of the Torah emphasize Moshe Rabbeinu's great *ahavas Yisroel*. It was better to let the *luchos* be destroyed than the Jewish people harmed.

When we faced this terrible crisis, our Rabbanim had to make a difficult decision. They chose to close down shuls, *chadarim*, *yeshivos*, etc., not because there was something wrong with our *tefillos* or our learning but because this is what they needed to do to protect our lives. Hashem's love for us is *bli gvul*. Those months that we spent at home, with shuls and *yeshivos* closed, might have seemed as dire as the breaking of the

luchos, but it gave us an opportunity to sense the tremendous love that Hashem has for us.

HAVE NO FEAR!

In 5751 (1991), during the Gulf War, the Rebbe reiterated the words of the Midrash: *Bonai al tisyoru*. My children, do not fear. Everything that I did is for your sake. *Higia zman Geulaschem*—the time of your redemption has arrived.

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So what should our response be to today's situation?

When I read a book, I always like to turn to the last page first. I read the ending and I know if the main character survived or not, and then I can go and enjoy the rest of the book without anxiety. In life, also, many of us would like to turn to the last page already. How will everything turn out in the end? What will be?

As *chassidim*, we don't have to turn to the last page because the Rebbe already told us what will be. We know that we are already living in the time of *Geulah*. That removes all panic and anxiety.

There are two principles that the Rebbe refers to again and again in many different contexts.

One principle is *hamaaseh hu ha'ikar*. Action



Rabbi Shloma Majesky takes his daughter Miriam and his son Mendy to ask for lekach from the Rebbe on Erev Yom Kippur, 9 Tishrei 5738 (Sept. 21, 1977). JEM Photo ID #22016.

is the main thing. We can get involved in analyzing and philosophizing, but the main thing is to take action.

The second point is that every single person, man, woman and child, has the capacity to turn things around. You don't have to uproot mountains. One small action by one small person can turn everything around. In fact, we can learn from the virus itself. What's going on now is having a greater impact than the two World Wars. The World Wars did not affect every part of the globe equally. If you lived in the United States during World War II, you were relatively safe and protected. The coronavirus has penetrated every country in the world and affected every aspect of life.

The power of *kedushah* and goodness is much greater than the power of evil. If a tiny

virus can cause so much devastation, how much more so do we have the power in our hands to transform the world for the good. The Rebbe reiterated many times that each individual can make a very great difference.

What are the actions we should be focusing on now?

IT ALL CONNECTS TO MOSHIACH

Starting from the early '80s, the Rebbe started to focus very strongly on Moshiach. He introduced the idea of demanding Moshiach, to cry out to Hashem and beg for Moshiach—he sang, "We want Moshiach now!" and got us all to sing it.

On Shabbos Parshas Vayigash, 5747 (1986), after *didan natzach*, the victory of the *sefarim*, the Rebbe repeated many times that

everything is finished, everything is ready. We only need to receive Moshiach. The Rebbe did not just mention this once or twice. He repeated it many, many times, in *farbrengen* after *farbrengen*, and this message became more and more intense as the months and years went by.

On Purim 5747, the Rebbe said that the style of *farbrengen* had changed, not only compared to *farbrengens* of previous Rebbeim, but even relative to his own past *farbrengens*. Now, the Rebbe said, the entire *farbrengen* revolves around the theme of Moshiach.

The Rebbe made it very clear that the main *avodah*, the main and most central *shlichus* left, is to publicize and prepare the world for Moshiach.

On Shabbos Parshas Mishpatim 5751, the Rebbe quoted the *passuk* in Tehillim, “*Motzosi Dovid avdi b’shemen kodshi m’shachtiv.*” I have found my servant Dovid; I have already appointed him and anointed him with holy oil. Moshiach is already in our midst. The only thing left is for the Yidden to acknowledge and accept him as Moshiach.

A short time after the passing of the Rebbetzin, in the *sichah* of Beis Nissan 5748, the Rebbe said the time has come to declare “*Yechi hamelech—Long live the king!*” Accepting the *malchus* of Moshiach gives life to the king and causes Moshiach to be revealed.

What should we be focusing on now? The answer is very clear. A *chossid* follows in the Rebbe’s footsteps. A *chossid* is passionate about whatever the Rebbe is passionate about.

We don’t need to search and look for creative ideas. We need to stick to what the Rebbe said is our mission statement: *kabalas hamalchus*—to accept the *malchus* of Moshiach on ourselves, to strengthen our *bitachon*, to learn *inyanei geulah u’Moshiach*, to increase

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in *simchah* and spread the Rebbe’s message far and wide. It may take creativity to figure out the best way to reach each audience so they can relate to it. But it doesn’t take a lot of imagination to figure out what our *avodah* is for today.

May all Yidden be protected from all harm, and may Hashem give all those who need a *refuah shleimah* an immediate *refuah shleimah*. And may we speedily see the *hisgalus* of Melech haMoshiach leading us out of *galus*, immediately. ❧

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