



FINDING THE Joy

TEMMI HADAR

Temmi was asked to speak at a community Chof Beis Shvat event. This is what she said:

I was asked to speak.
I said I don't think so. Then probably not.
And now here I am.
But what to speak about?
Share a personal story, they said.
But I don't have one.

The truth is, I'm a skeptic.
Stories never sold religion to me.
I always mentally calculated which part was most likely to be exaggerated
or made up entirely.
What about the stories without a happy ending?
What happens then? I always wondered.
There's one story I've always loved.
Of a Chabad *chossid*, traveling to the fair.



Sitting with other types of *chassidim*, each one sharing a miracle story of their Rebbe.

This one was blessed with a baby.

This one was saved from a Jew-hating priest.

That one's son was rescued from the army.

And then they asked the *chossid* of the Rebbe Rashab, the fifth Chabad Rebbe:

Tell us about your Rebbe. Tell us a miracle story.

The *chossid* replied: *I deal in lumber. The Rebbe advised me on a specific deal. I followed my Rebbe's advice. I lost all my money and fell heavily into debt.*

The listeners paused, waiting for the punchline.

And then? What happened?

Nothing, I am still struggling financially.

So, where's the miracle? they asked.

The *chossid* answered, *I am still his chossid, just the same as before. My relationship with the Rebbe has nothing to do with his wonder-working powers. I continue to follow my Rebbe's directives in every area of my life.*

The miracle is that I am still his *chossid*.

This story always spoke to me.

Sometimes I look around and wonder, where are the miracles?

I struggle to feel connected to the Rebbe.

I wonder what being a *chossid* means in 2020.

Someone once commented on something I wrote and said, how lucky you are that you have everything all figured out. Some of us will always be confused, unsure and doubtful.

If only they knew.

I'm perpetually unsure, confused and doubtful.

It's a crazy world we live in.

It was Chof Beis Shvat today.

But what's the message for me?

If I struggle to feel connected to our Rebbe, then how to connect to the Rebbetzin?

Even in her lifetime most people never saw her.

But if there's one thing the Rebbetzin was, it was a *chossid*.

First a *chossid* of her father, the Frierdiker Rebbe, and then a *chossid* of her husband, our Rebbe.

So for me, today is a day to reflect on what it means to be a *chossid*.

The Rebbe didn't want to become the Rebbe. But the Rebbetzin said to the Rebbe:

What will become of my father's work?

Somehow these words echo in my head 70 years later.

What will become of the Rebbe's work?

While the Frierdiker Rebbe often cried when he spoke to the *chassidim*, our Rebbe was much more composed.

But on Yud Shvat, the Rebbe's voice shook with emotion. At the end of *Basi L'Gani* the Rebbe said, *it's not through our own efforts, and not our choice, but we are the seventh generation and we have a mission.*

We are the Rebbe's *chassidim*.

And how does one connect to the Rebbe?

What does it mean to have *hiskashrus* to the Rebbe?

Hiskashrus to the Rebbe means *hiskashrus* to Hashem.

Our Rebbe empowers us to connect to Hashem.

There are many approaches to Yiddishkeit.

I was teaching a class recently and a student raised his hand and asked if one receives the punishment of *karess* (meaning one's soul is cut off from the Jewish community) for a particular sin.

I was startled.

In my entire life I have never done or not done anything because I was scared of *karess*. I don't know if that's a good thing. But it's the truth.

I never grew up with a Judaism that was a reward-and-punishment model.

Mitzvos aren't something to be done so I don't burn in hell and they aren't even something I do for a reward in heaven.

To be honest, I'm grateful for that. Because I am pretty sure that if that's the model I was exposed to, I don't think I would be standing here today with a *sheitel* on my head.

And it's not that I don't believe in reward and punishment. Or think that it isn't true.

I believe in it. I know it's true.

But that's not the point.

The point is right here, right now, in this very space that we are in, in the fastest-paced society in the history of the world, we are put here, handpicked and handplaced by G-d, to make a home for Him.

Six years after the Holocaust, with millions of Jews still stuck behind the Iron Curtain, the Rebbe said that this world is a garden, a delight.

And our mission is to make it Hashem's home.

I don't feel I can do that sometimes.

But the Rebbe said it's our mission, and we are standing on the shoulders of previous generations.

I am not my great-grandfather who sat in a Russian prison.

I am not my grandfather who sat at the Frierdiker Rebbe's Shabbos table.

I am not my parents who sat for hours at *farbrengens*

and received direct guidance from the Rebbe on whom to marry and where to go on *shlichus*.

So I look around and I wonder if it's even possible.

How can it be that we will be the ones?

But the Rebbe told us it's up to us.

And so we must do.

And that's what *hiskashrus* is to me.

To live a life inspired by the Rebbe's teachings, even when I'm not feeling inspired.

To know that the Torah was given to me, for right here, right now, in this place.

To know the transformative power of one small act.

The importance of the individual.

Hashem's endless love for us.

The home as a *mikdash me'at*.

The immense responsibility of the woman.

The purity of children.

The joy in being a Jew.

The power to use all of our talents to make this world a home for G-d.

That a *chossid* is one who tries every day to be better than the day before.

And if there's one teaching I hold on to most, it is that we as human beings have a spark of G-d within us and we are unbelievably powerful and can do almost anything, even when we feel like doing nothing.

I say it on the phone to my sister, while laughing about the ridiculously long list of things we both need to do.

We can do anything.

We can.

So I may be unprepared, and feel hopelessly inadequate at times.

But I can find meaning in the incredibly mundane list of things that I do every day.

So as I run around doing errands, teaching, preparing for Shabbos, picking up my kids from school, even organizing my house, I just need to remember:

To be extraordinary we don't need to be famous and break world records.

Every small thing we do connects us to the divine, and if that's not extraordinary, I don't know what is.

To be connected to the Rebbe is to try our best to fulfill what the Rebbe begged of us.

It means living a life that is filled with the Rebbe's mission to reveal the *Shechinah* in this world.

And when it seems impossible?

I just look around and see the greatest miracle of the Rebbe.

His *chassidim*. ❧



Temmi Hadar, born and raised on *shlichus* in Seattle, is now living about a million miles away in Johannesburg, South Africa. This is the third installment of her column, "Finding the Joy," in which she ponders the meaning of life while perpetually sleep-deprived and attempting to juggle the roles of mother, wife, *shlucha*, teacher, writer and human being.

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