

Doing Work in Mighty Waters

Farbrengen notes, Gimmel Tammuz, 5774

Chaya Shuchat

While cleaning for Pesach this year, I decided I was ready to purge some 30-odd years' worth of accumulated papers. My filing cabinet had broken under the strain and I had to reduce the burden to a more manageable level. I set to the task without pity. My first year teaching papers – out. My seminary and high school notes – over and done with. Notes from elementary school? Who needs them.

The purging process was coming along quite nicely and I had filled about a half-dozen recycling bags, when I came to a small red notebook. I leafed through it and saw that it held the notes I had taken of the Rebbe's sichos from when I was eight or nine years old.

As a child growing up "out-of-town," a farbrengen of the Rebbe meant going to shul and listening to the sichos over a loudspeaker via a telephone "hook-up," or on a video screen, later, when the farbrengens were broadcast on cable TV. As children we were taught to take notes when the Rebbe would speak, whether or not we understood the Rebbe's words. The Rebbe spoke much faster than my eight-year-old hand could keep up with, and my attention span wasn't very long, so the notes were mostly brief sentence fragments. Still, it was possible to discern in them some thread of an idea. This notebook, I could not throw away.

As children, many of us grow up with the illusion that we would one day give our children all the things we never had. And of course, it goes without saying that our children would have all the things we did have. However, the reality is that, for better or for worse, our children lead different lives than we did. We may not always be able to give them all the things we loved and enjoyed in our own childhood, let alone the

things we never had. Each generation has its own struggles, its own challenges and its own triumphs.

It is 20 years since Gimmel Tammuz, 5754/1994.

I was 20 years old on Gimmel Tammuz, on the verge of adulthood. My children were all born after Gimmel Tammuz, and some are now on the verge of adulthood themselves. A whole generation has grown up after Gimmel Tammuz.

In secular culture, each generation has a term with which to define itself. There is the hippie generation, the yuppies, the gen-X, the gen-Y, the millennials. Those who follow Chabad closely know that each decade has its own flavor and theme. The Chofs, the Lameds, the Mems, the Nuns – each one is qualitatively different, in the style of the Rebbe's sichos, the projects, the activities, the hora'os.

As a child growing up in the Mems, what did that mean? It meant being a soldier in Tzivos Hashem, which was founded in 5741/1981. It meant witnessing the exciting birth of the motto, "We Want Moshiach Now!"

I was eight years old the first time I saw the Rebbe. We lived in Detroit, but were spending the summer with my grandparents in Philadelphia and made the two-hour drive to New York. It just so happened that there was a Tzivos Hashem rally on that day, during which the Rebbe addressed the campers of Camp Emunah and Gan Yisroel.

Chassidim would hold the first day they came to the Rebbe as their "chassidishe birthday." So I was curious to know what the Rebbe said on that day, Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5741. Because it was Rosh Chodesh, the Rebbe discussed the concept of the Jewish people being likened to the moon, the "smaller light," which receives light from the sun.

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"And if so," says the Rebbe, "a Jewish child can think: How can I accept the shlichus of the King of the universe, and be confident that I can fulfill the shlichus, if I am small?"

And the Rebbe's message to us, the children of Tzivos Hashem, was: We are not small. Or rather, we *are* small, but because we are part of the greatest of the great, we can accomplish great things, far in excess of our puny little powers.

And if this was true for my generation, the children of the Mems, the first Tzivos Hashem cohort, how much more is it true for our children. We grew up with unprecedented access to the Rebbe. We could see the Rebbe on a daily basis, if we wished. We have shelves filled with kuntresim, albums filled with dollars that we received personally from the Rebbe.

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There is a verse in Tehillim, *yordei hayam ba'aniyos osei melachah b'mayim rabbim*. There are those who go down to the sea in ships, who do work in mighty waters. The Baal Shem Tov explains that "going down to the sea" is a reference to the neshamah coming down into the world. The word *aniyah* has two meanings. It refers to a ship, but it can also mean *ta'aniyah va'aniyah* – mourning and lamentation.

Some neshamos descend into the world in ships. They are fortunate to be born into a nurturing environment, with parents who protect them and provide them with a proper Torah education. Then there are those who enter the world in turbulence – they are born without the safety of a ship, without the security of a loving, peaceful home, without an atmosphere of Torah and mitzvos. And then there are those who "do work in the mighty waters." These are the people who are given the mission of rescuing those who are in the sea without a ship. Forsaking the safety of their own ship, these special souls brave the storms to bring other souls back with them.

Now, you might think that if you were one of the unlucky ones born into chaos and turbulence, and didn't merit a safe, secure childhood, then that's that. There is nothing to be done about it except wait to be rescued. However, in a sichah of Yud Shvat 5725, the Rebbe

explains that actually, we each have all three aspects within ourselves. We each have a part that is confused, aching and tempestuous, and we also have within us a part that is calm, peaceful and secure. Regardless of where we started out, we can all find our way to our inner "ship" – the strength and stability we have within. And what's more, regardless of our own woes, we are all gifted with the ability to set aside our own needs and jump into the great waters to help someone else.

Before Gimmel Tammuz we were fortunate enough to coast along on a comfortable ship. We could see the Rebbe on a daily basis. The Rebbe was always available to us to answer our questions, our fears and our doubts. The Rebbe constantly generated new ideas and charted our course of action. The Rebbe led, and we followed.

Yes, the Rebbe still leads, and he still gives his answers and brochos. I believe that very strongly. But we are not on our comfortable ship anymore. We are out there in the open seas, and sometimes we may feel that we are floundering. But it's our choice. We can see ourselves as lost and adrift, or we can fight our way back to the ship, bringing others back with us.

A chossid once came to the Tzemach Tzedek and asked him to bless his son with a good memory. That way, his child would come to the Rebbe and soak up the words of the Rebbe and the ways of chassidim, and *b'derech m'maileh*, as a matter of course, he would be a yerei Shomayim.

The Tzemach Tzedek responded that his goal was to create chassidim through avodah, not *derech m'maileh* chassidim.

This is not to say that memories are not important. We need to give over our memories, we need to share them with our children. But more important than the memories are the avodah and the mission. The Rebbe's expectations of us are very clear.

One thing that the pre-Gimmel Tammuz generation shares is an overwhelming sense of indebtedness to the Rebbe. After all, the Rebbe would stand and give, give, give, and we would take, take, take. Brochos. Dollars. Lekach. Kos shel brachah. Kuntresim. And even when we thought the Rebbe had already given everything he could give, the Rebbe would surprise us and add something new. We saw day in and day out how the Rebbe transcended the rules of nature on our behalf. And that created a strong sense of hischayvus, an obligation to give back to the Rebbe. How could we go to the Rebbe and take directly from his hand and then not keep the Rebbe's hora'os? How could we look the Rebbe in the eye?

And this is what I find so awesome about our children, the generation that grew up after Gimmel Tammuz. Somehow, I see in them the same hischayvus. I see them running out to mivtza'im and farbrengens. I see them staying up late to finish Chitas and Rambam. I see them going off on Shlichus. My sons have teachers and mashpiim who are in their mid-20's – and somehow they are instilling our young bochurim with chassidishkeit and yiras Shomayim. Where do they get it from? They didn't hear it from the Rebbe's mouth. They didn't stand on line for dollars, and if they did it was at an age they can barely remember. But the hischayvus remains. This is something I find deeply inspiring about today's generation. And this is something the Rebbe alludes to in the maamar "*Kimei Tzeischa Me'eretz Mitzrayim Arenu Niflaos*," where the Rebbe teaches that the Geulah will come about primarily through the avodah of the final generation, immediately preceding the Redemption.

The Rebbe explains that during the time of the Beis Hamikdosh, G-dliness was clearly revealed. There were ten miracles apparent to the naked eye, many of which were obvious even to common people. As a result, it was easy to serve G-d. It was something that came naturally and made sense intellectually. There was less spiritual darkness, and G-dliness was more accessible and understandable to us. There was no real challenge, no mesirus nefesh involved.

Similarly, there were times during galus when the darkness was not as overwhelming. It did not demand great mesirus nefesh to serve Hashem.

However, this is not true of our time, the generation immediately preceding Moshiach's coming. The forces of darkness increase daily, and there are many challenges to overcome – in particular, not to be affected by those who mock. To overcome these challenges, we must reach deep inside ourselves, to a level of mesirus nefesh that transcends all boundaries and limitations. And this, in turn, will draw down the innermost level of Hashem into this world.

The Rebbe concludes: "May it be G-d's will that this occur most speedily; that our present deeds and divine service hasten the time when we will greet our Righteous Moshiach. And then, we will witness the actual fulfillment of the prophecy, 'As in the days of your exodus from Egypt, I will show you wonders.'"■