

The Beauty of Pearls

Yud-Tes Kislev



From the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; translated and adapted by Yosef Loebenstein

From the Sichos in English Collection

Chassidus not only infuses life and warmth into the practice of Judaism, but, as the means whereby a Jew unites with G-d, it also is a “taste” of the revelations of the Messianic era.

The nineteenth day of the month of Kislev marks the release of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi from Czarist imprisonment. R. Schneur Zalman, known also as the Alter Rebbe, was the founder of the Chabad school of *Chassidus*, and author of the *Tanya* and *Shulchan Aruch Admur HaZakein*. The Czarist government arrested him because of slanderous accusations brought by opponents to the Chassidic movement. After extensive investigation R. Schneur Zalman was cleared of all charges and released on the nineteenth of Kislev. It has been a day of celebration for *Chassidim* ever since.

It was more than the liberation of just one individual. The Alter Rebbe had been in the forefront of those who disseminated the ideals of *Chassidus* and his arrest was a danger for the whole movement. The Chassidic movement was barely a half century old then, and an adverse judgment would have boded ill for its future. His vindication was a vindication of *Chassidus*, and his liberation was the signal for increased vigor in spreading its directives.¹

Two reasons for *Chassidus*

The teachings of *Chassidus* are primarily in the mystical realm of Torah. The revealed aspect is the “body of Torah” and *Chassidus* is the “soul of Torah,”² expounding the most lofty and sublime concepts.

But it is axiomatic in Jewish thought that spiritual loftiness progressively declines in successive generations.³ The generation of the *Mishnah*, for example, was spiritually greater than that of the *Talmud*. Why then was *Chassidus*, which teaches the loftiest of concepts, introduced in the latter generations specifically?

Two reasons may be given:⁴

(i) A Jew’s purpose in life is to serve G-d in all ways, thereby introducing G-dliness into a spiritually void world. A Jew utilizes the powers of his soul to combat the spiritual darkness. As the exile has progressed, this spiritual darkness has grown.⁵ *Chassidus*, which is the “soul of Torah,” helps reveal the soul’s latent powers, enabling a Jew to perform his duties despite the increasing intensity of exile.⁶ *Chassidus* therefore was introduced specifically in the latter generations when it was most needed.

(ii) Everything in Torah needs adequate preparation. In our time we are approaching the end of exile and the beginning of the future redemption. The redemption, too, needs adequate introduction and preparation, and that preparation must be similar to the redemption itself. In the Messianic age, the secrets of the Torah will be

revealed to all. *Chassidus*, which is the study of the Torah's secrets, is thus a taste of, and fitting preparation to, the Messianic age.⁷ It therefore was revealed specifically in the latter generations, the time of Moshiach's coming.

Defensive v. Positive

There is an important difference between these two reasons. The first reason is principally defensive: to endow a Jew with the necessary strength to withstand the exile. It focuses on the mission of the Jew to defeat the spiritual darkness. *Chassidus*, drawing on the hidden powers of the soul, serves as an *aid* to a Jew's abilities to carry out his task.

The latter reason is more positive. *Chassidus* is not emphasized as a defensive measure but rather as a means to unite with G-d. As the introduction to and taste of the Messianic age, there is no emphasis on combating spiritual darkness, for in the Messianic era there will be no darkness, as written, "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth."⁸ Instead of drawing on the powers of the soul as an *aid* to a Jew, emphasis is placed on a Jew's soul as an *end in itself* — the unity between the innermost aspects of the soul and G-d. *Chassidus*, the "soul of Torah," unites the soul of a Jew with G-d. It is thus a taste of the Messianic age, when the service of Jews will be not to struggle with spiritual darkness, but to rise ever higher in knowledge of G-d.

Coals and Pearls

This difference between the two reasons is illustrated by a parable given by the Previous Rebbe: "Pearls come from the bottom of the ocean. Coal, which generates warmth and light, comes from the depths of the earth. In the process of procuring the coal, there must be a manager who directs the workers where and how to mine. The workers can confidently rely on the manager's knowledge, but only when they follow his instructions exactly. And while they can rely on the manager's knowledge, they cannot rely on his oxygen supply. Each worker must have his own air-hose connecting him to the oxygen above the ground. If not, he will become lifeless. Similarly, a pearl diver must also have an air-hose."⁹

Chassidus may be compared to both coal in the ground and pearls in the sea. The first reason given earlier for the revelation of *Chassidus* in our times may be compared to coals; the second reason to pearls. Let us analyze this parable closely.

Coal, the Previous Rebbe says, "generates warmth and light." Warmth and light are not quantitative measures, adding to an object. Their effect is qualitative: the *same* object that was previously lifeless is now warm and full of life. *Chassidus* did not add anything to Torah. The 613 mitzvos were performed fully before its introduction. But when the world became spiritually darker and colder, *Chassidus* provided warmth and light, revitalizing the performance of mitzvos. By tapping the inner resources of a Jew's soul, *Chassidus* breathed new life and joy¹⁰ into the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos. And by shedding light, it showed a Jew how to serve G-d beyond his normal capabilities, to transcend his limits.

But a Jew needs to know *how* to use *Chassidus*, *how* to add warmth and life to his service to G-d. In the words of the Previous Rebbe: "There must be a manager who directs the workers where and how to mine." The coal

— *Chassidus* — is there, ready to give warmth and light. The manager who directs the workers how to mine for it is the Rebbe of each generation. And, warns the Previous Rebbe, “the workers can confidently rely on the manager’s knowledge, but only when they follow his directives exactly.”

Breathe for oneself

A *chassid*, however, cannot thrust his entire burden on the Rebbe. “While they can rely on the manager’s knowledge, they cannot rely on his oxygen supply. Each worker must have his own air-hose.” The Rebbe will teach *how* to reach the coal; the *chassid* must be the one to reach it, and therefore he must have his own air-hose.¹¹ A person will not receive the needed light and warmth from *Chassidus* unless he *learns Chassidus*. The Rebbe will teach *how* to breathe life into one’s service to G-d. The *chassid* must be the one to breathe.

Such study must be done thoroughly, not superficially, with a Jew striving to truly comprehend its concepts. It must be learned every day, not just intermittently, for the study of *Chassidus* is one’s air-hose and one cannot stop breathing one day and start again the next. When one’s air-hose is working as it should — when one learns *Chassidus* properly every day — the *Chassidus* warms and illuminates the service of the entire day.

This is the idea of *Chassidus* as represented by coal. It is quite different to that represented by pearls. Coal is found in the earth, pearls in the sea. The difference between the earth and the sea is seen in the difference between land creatures and sea creatures.¹² Fish must live in the sea or die,¹³ for the sea is their life. Animals, too, depend on their habitat, the earth, for life. But that the earth is their source of life is not nearly so apparent as that the sea is the source of life for fish.

So, too, with the earth and the sea themselves. Everything exists only because of the G-dly power invested therein. But this G-dliness is not always apparent. “Sea” represents those spiritual worlds where G-dliness is manifest, and therefore the creatures of those worlds feel the constant necessity to remain connected with G-d, their source of life. If not, they sense, they will cease to exist. Such worlds are termed “hidden worlds,” for their creatures do not feel independent. Their existence is “hidden” in their source, just as fish are hidden in and dependent on the sea.

“Earth” represents those worlds the creatures of which do not feel the G-dly power that created them. They do not realize or feel that their existence is dependent on their source. These worlds are therefore termed “revealed worlds,” for their creatures feel independent; their existence is not hidden.

“Earth” and “Sea” in *Chassidus*

Coal in the earth and pearls in the sea represent two aspects to the study of *Chassidus*. The type of study represented by coal gives warmth and life to a person’s service to G-d (as explained above). But it does not radically change the person. Although through the study of *Chassidus* a Jew draws on the powers of the soul and he now serves G-d with vigor and warmth beyond his normal capabilities, he and G-dliness remain separate, for he is still an independent entity. This dimension of *Chassidus* is therefore only on the level of “earth,” for even after such study a person is still in a state of “revelation,”¹⁴ with his existence not hidden in G-dliness.

This is where the higher dimension of *Chassidus* as represented by “sea” takes its place. A Jew must totally immerse himself in his source of life, in G-dliness, to the extent that he is “hidden.” He no longer has an independent existence.

This is achieved when one studies *Chassidus* in *abundant* measure, not sparingly. Unlike the study of the revealed realm of Torah, which does not always lead one to recognition of G-dliness,¹⁵ *Chassidus* is the knowledge of G-d. When a Jew totally immerses himself in the *wellsprings* of Torah — *Chassidus* — he is immersed in, and feels, G-dliness. This is similar to the Messianic age, when “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the L-rd as the waters *cover the sea*.”¹⁶

That *Chassidus* infuses warmth and vitality in one’s fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos is of utmost importance, for, without it, the darkness of the exile may overpower a Jew’s defenses. In the words of the Previous Rebbe: “He will become lifeless.” It is therefore compared to coal, which generates warmth and light, things vital for life. The second outcome of *Chassidus*, that a Jew, by completely immersing himself in *Chassidus*, thereby unites his soul with G-d, is not so crucial. It is thus compared to pearls, which are not necessities for life but luxuries. The Previous Rebbe in his parable therefore elaborated on the parable of coal more than on pearls.

That, however, was in his times, when Moshiach’s coming was not so imminent and thus the necessity to prepare for the Messianic age not so urgent. The crucial issue in his day was to ensure that Jews did not fall prey to the intense darkness of the exile. *Chassidus* as a means of revitalizing Jews’ commitment to Torah was more important than *Chassidus* as an end in itself (knowledge of G-d). Coal was a necessity; pearls a luxury.

Pearls for the Wedding

But pearls are not a luxury when one stands before a king in his royal court. Respect and honor for royalty requires more than ordinary clothes; one must also wear jewels and pearls.

Moshiach is coming very soon. The darkness of exile will end and the true and complete redemption will begin. The redemption, our Sages say, is the “wedding” between the Jewish people and G-d, the Supreme King of kings, when they will be united together.¹⁷ And a wedding needs preparation — the pearls necessary to adorn the bride. We therefore must learn *Chassidus* in abundance.

The *Zohar* states that Jews in exile are like a bride in a tannery.¹⁸ Because of His great love for her, G-d, the groom, is willing to overlook the foul smell — the exile — and enter therein. But that is only in exile. Now, when the exile is rapidly coming to an end, we must stand *prepared* for the redemption. Can we go to the wedding with clothes fit for a tannery? We must acquire the necessary pearls.

Through filling the world with the study of *Chassidus* “as the waters cover the sea,” we hasten the wedding between G-d and the Jewish people.¹⁹ Very soon Jews and G-d will be united together, in the true and complete redemption.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Toras Shalom*, p. 112.
2. *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 152a.
3. *Shabbos* 112b; *Talmud Yerushalmi, Demai* 1:3.
4. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XV, pp. 281-288.
5. See *Sotah* 49a.
6. *Kuntres Etz HaChayim*, ch. 13, p. 42.
7. Similar to the instruction that on *erev Shabbos* we should taste the foods prepared for *Shabbos*. (*Shulchan Aruch Admur HaZakein, Orach Chayim* 250:8) The last generations before *Moshiach's* coming are the *erev Shabbos* of the “day which will be all *Shabbos*” — the Messianic age. Hence a taste of the revelations of the Messianic age — *Chassidus* — is given now.
8. *Zechariah* 13:2.
9. *Sefer HaSichos* 5705, p. 50.
10. See *Tanya*, ch. 26.
11. Unlike those who maintain that it is enough to rely wholly on the *tzaddik*. They interpret the verse “a *tzaddik* lives by his faith” to mean “a *tzaddik* makes alive by his faith” — that the *tzaddik* will make his followers “alive.” Chabad, however, maintains that each individual must, through his own service, have his own “air-hose.” See *Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. I, p. 282.
12. See *Likkutei Torah, Parshas Tzav*, p. 14b, for an extensive coverage of this subject.
13. *Avodah Zarah* 3b; *Berachos* 61b.
14. See *Tanya*, ch. 35.
15. See *Kuntres Etz HaChayim*, ch. 11, p. 38; see *Ran, Nedarim* 81b; commentary of *Bach, Tur, Orach Chayim*, ch. 4.
16. *Yeshayahu* 11:9.
17. *Shemos Rabbah* 15:31.
18. *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 115b.
19. As the *Baal Shem Tov* was promised: “The master (*Moshiach*) will come when your wellsprings will spread forth to the outside” (beginning of *Kesser Shem Tov*).

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