
Sichos in English Classics 17

Shavuos



**CONNECTING TO
& THROUGH THE REBBE**



Sichos In English
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IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

At the Shloshim of R' Yonah Avtzon A"H, Director of Sichos in English, a resolution was taken to reprint the original weekly Sichos in English publications.

To fulfill this, a weekly booklet including a translation of a *farbrengen* as it was first published will be distributed. Our intention is to reprint the entire set in the near future.

Following the Sichos we will include an addendum with pictures, notes, and insights into the process of its publication.

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INTRO

As we stand one month before Gimmel Tammuz we felt it appropriate to bring Sichos from the SIE set “Proceeding Together” which documents the Sichos of the early years, soon after the Histalkus of the Previous Rebbe.

This set was published by SIE soon after Gimmel Tammuz 5754, and offered strength and guidance to Chassidim at that difficult time.

This week we bring excerpts from the Rebbe's Farbrengen on Shavuos 5710.

Below we include excerpts from the overview to the “Proceeding Together” series:

A SOURCE OF GUIDANCE

After turning to the Rebbe for guidance in every conceivable situation for over forty years, where does a Lubavitcher chassid turn for guidance at a time like this? - Instinctively, he turns to the words of the Rebbe at a comparable time.

The earliest talks and letters of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, soon after the passing of his father-in-law and predecessor, the Rebbe Rayatz (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn) זצ"ל on *Yud Shvat* 5710 [1950], have been assembled in Hebrew in a work entitled *Toras Menachem*. Its chapter headings speak for themselves: The Shepherd Will Not Forsake His Flock; The Rebbe in Heaven Will Bring *Mashiach*; Connecting To and Through the Rebbe; How to Receive the Torah; Reason and Beyond; and so on.

The Rebbe once pointed out that when the Rebbe Rayatz cited the teaching of the Sages that “Mordechai in his generation was equivalent to Moshe in his generation,” he was in fact describing his own function, as the shepherd of faith for his contemporaries. In exactly the same way, it is self-evident that when, in the talks

and letters before us, the Rebbe was offering guidance for the situation of 5710 [1950], he is in fact also offering us guidance for the situation that began on the third of Tammuz, 5754 [1994]. In fact, many of the teachings in this book are so timely that to people of our generation they almost appear to have been delivered especially for us.

THE LINKS OF HISKASHRUS

The lifeblood that pulsates through these pages is *hiskashrus*, the bond of heart, mind and soul that connects chassid and Rebbe. A spiritually mature *Chabad* -Lubavitch chassid, so we are reminded, does not allow himself to be over-impressed by external manifestations of his Rebbe's greatness: stepping beyond this, his *hiskashrus* is nurtured by elements that are of the *essence* of his Rebbe, and the essence of a Rebbe is distilled in his teachings. Even when his Rebbe is in the other world, a mature chassid maintains the freshness of his bond with him by remaining steeped in these teachings, and by energetically fulfilling the Rebbe's directives in this world.

SOULS IN FLIGHT, FEET ON THE GROUND

Another recurring theme: On the one hand, we are urged to transcend ourselves; at the same moment, we are reminded to keep our feet on the ground. Thus, for example, we are encouraged to seek order and intelligibility when we are studying a text of *Chassidus*; to fulfill *mitzvos* not merely on a metaphysical level but within the parameters of the natural order; to discover and elevate the holy sparks hidden in the materiality of the world; and throughout our divine service, to maintain a balance between reasoned understanding and unquestioning *kabbalas ol*.

To be continued...

SHAVUOS: CONNECTING TO & THROUGH THE REBBE

1. Humility Is Not Worthlessness. In¹ the *maamar* of Shavuot² that begins with the verse,³ ויספו עניים בה' שמחה — “The humble ones shall increase [their] joy in G-d,” my late revered father-in-law, the Rebbe [Rayatz], clarifies the relation between humility and joy: not only do they not conflict, but moreover they encourage each other.

Essentially, as is explained there, “a humble person (*anav*) is strong in his convictions and in whatever he consequently does,” because “his lowliness is not a submissiveness that results from being in fact lowly, for the humble person recognizes his own qualities and their considerable worth. However, since he knows the truth, he does not consider these qualities to be his *own*.” Rather, “he knows the truth — that whatever is positive within himself is not of his own doing, but has reached him as a heritage from our forefathers; accordingly, he is humble. This *bittul* of his is not a sense of personal lowliness, but rather (since he recognizes the truth) a *setting aside of his own self* to the point that he does not take himself into consideration at all,” because he regards his own self as nothing. And this *bittul* — humility — is a means to attaining an elevated degree of joy.

2. Mortal Initiative: A Divine Gift. Let us examine the relation between humility and Shavuot.

Discussing the change of direction brought about by the Giving of the Torah, the *Midrash*⁴ offers a parable: “A king once

1. The above *sichah* dates from the Second Day of Shavuot, 5710 [1950]. Sec. 1-5 were checked and approved by the Rebbe.

2. *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5710 [1950], p. 237; the *maamar* was originally delivered on the Second Day of Shavuot, 5697 [1937].

3. *Yeshayahu* 29:19.

4. *Tanchuma, Parshas Vaeira*, sec. 15; *Shmos Rabbah* 12:3; and elsewhere.

decreed, ‘The inhabitants of Rome shall not go down to Syria and the inhabitants of Syria shall not go up to Rome.’ In the same way, when G-d created the universe He decreed,⁵ ‘The heavens are G-d’s, but the earth He gave to the children of man.’ When He later desired to give the Torah He annulled that original decree and declared, ‘Those who are below shall ascend to those who are above, and those who are above shall descend to those who are below.’”

In other words, before the Giving of the Torah there was a chasm — for the root of *gezeirah* (“a decree”) also means “to cleave” — between those who are above and those who are below. This is the meaning of “Rome” and “Syria” in the parable. The exalted state of the heavenly realm is suggested by the very name “Rome” (רומי in Hebrew, suggesting רוממות, which means “exaltedness”), while “Syria” [as its opposite] stands for the lowly state of the worldly realm. With the Giving of the Torah, the chasm between the heavenly realm and the worldly realm was bridged, so that the worldly realm became connected and related to the heavenly realm.⁶

Let us express this more specifically in the terms of *Chassidus*. As explained in the first *maamar* of Shavuot [5697]⁷ (which begins with the verse,⁸ וְכָל הָעָם רוֹאִים — “And all the people witnessed”), with the Giving of the Torah a new direction in divine service was brought about — a heavenward uplifting initiated from below.⁹ For all the revelations until the time of the Giving of the Torah resulted from Divine initiative,¹⁰ rather than from an initiative generated by the worldly *avodah* of man,¹¹ because man at that time had no connection with this. Even the Patriarchs, who¹²

5. *Tehillim* 115:16.

6. See also: the *maamar* beginning *VaYeired Havayah* that was first delivered on *Shabbos Parshas Yisro*, 5643 [1883]; the *maamar* based on the same verse that was first delivered on *Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecha*, 5654 [1893]; and elsewhere.

7. *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5710 [1950], p. 223.

8. *Shmos* 20:15.

9. In the original, *haalaah milematah lemaalah*.

10. In the original Aram., *isarusa dil'eila* (lit., “an arousal from above”).

11. In the original Aram., *isarusa dilesata* (lit., “an arousal from below”).

12. *Yoma* 28b, and sources enumerated there.

“observed the entire Torah even before it was given,” did so in spiritual terms. And even those commandments which they did fulfill on the material plane did not draw down holiness into the actual materiality of the objects with which they observed those *mitzvos*. This materiality thus remained after the performance of the *mitzvah* exactly as it was before its performance; holiness was elicited only on a spiritual plane.¹³ At the time of *Matan Torah*, however, when the Torah and the commandments were given materially, the possibility was created for an upward elevation initiated by man — so that the “arousal from above” should *result* from an “arousal from below,” for mortal man below was henceforth to be related and connected to the heavenly realm above.

Even after this time, however, it should be realized that ascent initiated by mortal man below is made possible not by virtue of his innate worth, but by virtue of the heavenly Partner (by way of a gift or bequest), Whose Will it is — that as a result of an arousal from below there should be a reciprocal arousal from above.¹⁴ This realization is the essential meaning of the above-mentioned humility (*anavah*): one “knows the truth — that whatever is positive within himself is not of his own doing, but has reached him as a heritage,” and so on.

3. Delaying the Redemption. What does the above realization teach us? We need to know that whatever qualities and strengths we have are only what my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe [Rayatz], has granted us. We should therefore be in a state of utter *bittul* (self-effacement), in order to fulfill his mission in the most determined way possible. For, as stated above, a humble person is essentially strong in his convictions, undeterred by any interference or obscurity.

13. See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5706 [1946], p. 95ff.; and elsewhere.

14. See *Torah Or*, end of *Parshas Vayeitzei*; *Toras Chayim*, *loc. cit.*; the *maamar* beginning *LeRoka* 5562 [1802], which appears as an Appendix to *Derech Mitzvosecha* by the *Tzemach Tzedek*.

The mission with which the Rebbe has entrusted us must be carried out without taking anything else into consideration. One should not consider any of the questions and queries: Why is *Kaddish* being said, Why is *הרני כפרת משכבו* (“May I serve as an atonement for his resting place”)¹⁵ being written after his name, and so on. One should conduct himself like an *anav*, a truly humble person, who is strong in his convictions and allows nothing to distract him.

A certain chassid wrote me that since the *histalkus* he is very brokenhearted, and sometimes, when he is alone, he breaks into tears.

The question remains, however: What did he accomplish by his weeping? Is *this* the Rebbe’s intention — that he wants him to cry?! It is almost certain that his tears accomplish nothing, besides fulfilling the teaching of the Sages¹⁶ that “when one sheds tears over [the passing of] an upright man (and how much more so in our case), G-d counts them and stores them in His treasure-house.” In the meantime, however, the work of fulfilling the mission given by the Rebbe is not being done!

Or, to express it in the Rebbe’s own words (in the *sichah* of Shavuot¹⁷): “What are people waiting for? The Redemption is being held up! It’s already past noon on *erev Shabbos*!”

By his lack of *avodah* the above-mentioned individual is (G-d forbid) delaying the Redemption; delaying the Holy One, blessed be He; delaying the Rebbe; — and because of this the Jewish people are being detained in *galus* one moment longer!

6. A Rare Opportunity. With the approach of Shavuot, 5700 [1940], my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe [Rayatz], wrote a letter addressed to the *yeshivah* students,¹⁸ which includes the following passage:¹⁹

15. Abbreviated as *הכ"מ*.

16. *Shabbos* 105b, and see the *Chiddushim* of the *Maharsha* there.

17. From a *sichah* of the Second Day of Shavuot, 5709 [1949], sec. 19, appearing in *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5710 [1950], p. 245.

18. *Igros Kodesh* (Letters) of the Rebbe Rayatz, Vol. V, p. 76ff.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 78; appears also in *HaYom Yom*, entries for 3 and 4 Sivan.

Shavuot is a time of Divine favor:²⁰ G-d confuses the Prosecuting Angel²¹ who accuses the Jewish people,²² just as He confuses him at the time of the Sounding of the *Shofar* on Rosh HaShanah, and on the Holy Day, the Fast of Yom Kippur. This means that Shavuot is an auspicious time to concentrate one's endeavors in Torah study and *avodah* as inspired by the awe of heaven, and to engage in *teshuvah* as it relates to Torah [study] — without being disturbed by Satan, the Prosecuting Angel, just as at the time of the Sounding of the *Shofar* on Rosh HaShanah, and on the Holy Day, the Fast of Yom Kippur.

In addition, there is a difference here between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. On Rosh HaShanah, G-d merely confuses and distracts Satan, the Prosecuting Angel, whereas on Yom Kippur, he simply does not exist. As the *Gemara* writes,²³ “The numerical value of the name שטן (Satan) is 364. For 364 days [Satan] is permitted to accuse; on Yom Kippur he has no permission to accuse.” Accordingly, since the Rebbe [Rayatz] likens Shavuot to Rosh HaShanah *and* Yom Kippur, it would appear that on Shavuot G-d confuses the Prosecuting Angel to such a point that at that time he does not exist.

The above-quoted letter needs to be studied, and to be publicized among those who do not know of it.

7. The Rebbe Before Our Eyes. Another vital point: The Rebbe's letter (and so too all his teachings) should be studied in the spirit of the directive of our Sages, that²⁴ “Whoever cites a teaching in the name of its author should visualize that mentor standing before him.”

First of all, it should be noted that the *Tzemach Tzedek* explains²⁵ that this directive of our Sages applies to Torah study in

20. In the original, *eis ratzon*.

21. In the original, *hamekatreg*.

22. See *Shabbos* 89a, *Tosafos s.v. Torah heichan hi*.

23. *Yoma* 20a; and elsewhere.

24. *Talmud Yerushalmi: Shabbos* 1:2; *Shekalim* 2:5; *Kiddushin* 1:7.

25. *Yahel Or*, p. 148.

general, for since “the Torah comprises the teachings of the Holy One, blessed be He,” one should therefore keep in mind “that Mentor (viz., the Holy One, blessed be He) standing before him.” This means that when studying Torah one should remember that the Torah is G-d’s wisdom and His will; moreover, as our Sages teach,²⁶ whenever a man studies the Written or Oral Law, G-d is (as it were) opposite him, and studies in pace with him.

The plain meaning of the Sages’ directive relates, however, to the *mortal* mentor whose teaching is being cited: one should visualize his face as if he were standing before him.

As is well known,²⁷ the *Tzemach Tzedek* once asked his chassidim to sing the Alter Rebbe’s *Niggun* of Four Themes,²⁸ and quoted the above directive of the Sages that⁵⁷¹ “Whoever cites a teaching in the name of its author should visualize that mentor standing before him.” Then, as he went on to sing the melody, all the chassidim present found themselves looking around the room in search of the Alter Rebbe....

As far as we are concerned, then, it is clear that when one is studying a *maamar* or a *sichah* or a memorandum or a letter written by the Rebbe [Rayatz], one should meditate and recall the appearance of the Rebbe — and this includes those who never saw him, who should visualize him by means of a picture — as if he were standing before him.

The Alter Rebbe once asked his son the Mittlerer Rebbe with what theme for meditation he had prayed on Rosh HaShanah. The Mittlerer Rebbe answered that he had prayed with this theme in mind — that²⁹ “all that stand erect shall prostrate themselves before You.”

“And you, father,” asked the Mittlerer Rebbe, “with what meditation did you *daven*?”

26. Cf. *Tanna dvei Eliyahu Rabbah*, sec. 18; *Yalkut Shimoni* on *Eichah*, Remez 1034.

27. *Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. III, p. 1000 (and in English translation: Vol. III, p. 283); see also *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 204 (and in English translation: Vol. I, p. 213ff.); *Sefer HaSichos* 5702, p. 138; *Igros Kodesh* (Letters) of the Rebbe Rayatz, Vol. II, p. 210ff.

28. See *Sefer HaNiggunim* (Nichoach, N.Y., 1948), Vol. I, p. 1 (Notation 1), and explanatory notes (Heb.) on p. גמ.

29. *Siddur Tehillat HaShem*, p. 167.

“I *davened* with the lectern....,”³⁰ replied his father.³¹

These matters are beyond our reach, but at least we can look at the *stender* at which the Rebbe *davened*....

9. Connected To the Rebbe and Through the Rebbe. One does not cultivate a bond with the Rebbe because of this or that particular quality, but because he is a Rebbe.

The Rashbatz³² was once asked whether the Rebbe Rashab was Divinely inspired by *ruach hakodesh*.

He replied: “What does *ruach hakodesh* matter to me? I know that he’s a Rebbe. So if a Rebbe needs *ruach hakodesh*, then of course he’s got it, and if he doesn’t need *ruach hakodesh*, then why get so excited about *ruach hakodesh*...?”

This suggests a comparison between Adam³³ and Avraham Avinu. On the one hand, the Sages extol Adam to the point of saying that³⁴ “His heel dimmed the orb of the sun.” At the same time, however, the Sages teach that³⁵ “Until Avraham the world was conducted in darkness; Avraham appeared, and light began to appear.”³⁶ Since what concerns us is how “light began to appear,” the subject that concerns us is Avraham Avinu and not Adam, even though “His heel dimmed the orb of the sun.” The same principle is true with relation to our Rebbeim,³⁷ through whom “light began to appear” with the revelation of the *pnimiyus* — the inner, mystical dimension — of the Torah. What concerns us,

30. In the Yid. original, *stender*.

31. *Kuntreis Toras HaChassidus*, p. 7.

Chassidic tradition understands that the Alter Rebbe’s reply alluded to his direct perception (while *davenen*) of a classic insight discussed in the teachings of *Chassidus* — that ultimately, the real essence of Divinity (*Yesh haamiti*) becomes manifest in material entities (*yesh hanivra*).

32. Acronym for R. Shmuel Betzalel, a revered elder chassid; his biography appears in *HaTamim*, Vol. I, p. 67ff.

33. In the original, *Adam HaRishon* (lit., “the first man”).

34. *Vayikra Rabbah* 20:2.

35. Cf. *Bereishis Rabbah* 2:3.

36. This subject is discussed at length in the memorandum that appeared in the *Kuntreis* of Shavuot and was reprinted in *Sefer HaMaamarim 5710 [1950]*, p. 248ff.

37. In the original, *rabboseinu nesieinu*.

therefore, is being connected with the Rebbeim, and not whether there exists someone whose heel dims the orb of the sun.

A Rebbe is someone who is connected with the very Essence and Being of the Infinite One, blessed be He.³⁸ The only thing that concerns us, therefore, is to be connected with the Rebbe, and through the Rebbe we become connected with the very Essence and Being of the Infinite One, blessed be He.

A certain individual recently wrote me a letter lauding the Rebbe's lofty qualities. In the course of his praises he writes that once when he was visiting the Rebbe in Leningrad, the Rebbe stood up, and it suddenly seemed to him that the Rebbe Rashab was standing before him. (Likewise, when the Rebbe [Rayatz] was in *Eretz Yisrael* he was visited by an elderly Jew who was privileged to have seen the Rebbe Maharash,³⁹ but when he caught sight of the Rebbe [Rayatz] he fainted. When he came to, he explained that as he entered the Rebbe's room he saw in him the Rebbe Maharash....)

The chassid who had been connected to the Rebbe Rashab or the Rebbe Maharash held it to be to the advantage of the Rebbe [Rayatz] that in him he saw the Rebbe Rashab or the Rebbe Maharash. In truth, however, his similarity or comparison to the Rebbe Rashab or the Rebbe Maharash is of no account. What matters is only that he is the Rebbe, who is connected with the Essence and Being of the Infinite One, blessed be He, and by being connected with him one becomes connected with the Essence and Being of the Infinite One, blessed be He.

A certain chassid recently told me⁴⁰ — quite excitedly — that the Rebbe [Rayatz] had once said to him, “Be bound to me, and through me you will be bound to Him to Whom I am bound.”

The young man thought that the Rebbe intended the last phrase as an allusion to (say) his father, the Rebbe Rashab, and that was what caused his excitement. In truth, however, the Rebbe

38. In the original, *Atzmus U'Mehus Ein Sof, Baruch Hu*.

39. This incident took place in 1929; the Rebbe Maharash had passed away in 1882.

40. See also the *sichah* of *Beis Iyar*, 5710 [1950], sec. 4 (p. 63 above).

was speaking of a bond with the Essence and Being of the Infinite One, blessed be He.

12. Tasks for Vacation. One of those tasks which the Rebbe [Rayatz] wanted the *yeshivah* students to engage in, is traveling out of town during the summer as emissaries of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch.⁴¹

Last year, for various reasons, this project was somewhat neglected. Efforts should therefore be made this year to compensate for what was lacking then.

In fact, of course, this *shlichus* cannot be compensated for, just as with the obligation to study Torah. Since the obligation to study Torah applies every day and at every moment, at any time that a person studies Torah he is fulfilling the obligation of that particular time, not compensating for some preceding time. (This has been explained on another occasion.⁴²)

Instead of crying over spilt milk, today's expectation has to do with the conscientious fulfillment of this year's tasks. As far as compensation for last year is concerned, this year's young emissaries can work more energetically and more extensively.

41. Organization founded by the Rebbe Rayatz in 1942 for the dissemination of *Yiddishkeit* and *Chassidus* and entrusted to the direction of the Rebbe. In Lubavitch parlance, the above-mentioned countrywide itineraries came to be known as "Merkos-*shlichus*."

42. See the *sichah* of Lag BaOmer, 5710 [1950], sec. 13 (p. 108 above).

ADDENDUM

Behind the Scenes of Sichos in English

In the past two weeks, we presented the Rebbe's edits on the sicha of Lag Baomer 5750. Below is another edit to a footnote at the sicha's conclusion.

The Rebbe explained that the special silver coin that had been minted and would be distributed in honor of the parade would remind the participants to use everything in the material world, especially money, for the service of Hashem.

A footnote on that paragraph noted that this was in line with Chassidus' unique perspective of focusing on the good in the world, rather than the negative, and utilizing that good for positive ends.

10. The above concepts are reinforced by one of the fundamental points of Chassidic philosophy which teaches that the world is essentially good. Other approaches teach that one has to fight against the world to improve it. In contrast, Chassidic philosophy trains us to appreciate the good in the world and use it for ~~A~~ positive purpose(s).

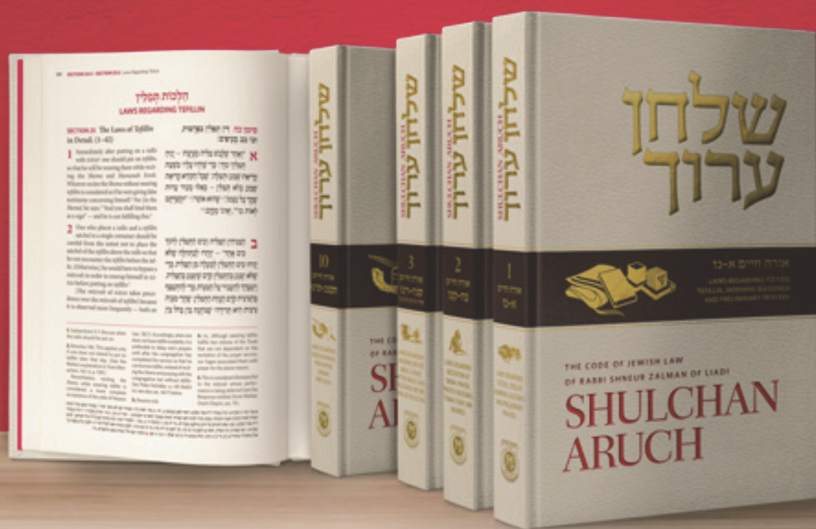
*and all
the world*

The footnote reads, in part: "... Chassidic philosophy trains us to appreciate the good in the world and use it for (*here the Rebbe deleted "a" and inserted the words "and all the world"*) for positive purpose(s)."

With this edit the Rebbe seems to add a much deeper, even revolutionary understanding of Chassidus' approach: Having been trained to see the good, one can then use everything in the world, even elements that may seem useless for goodness, for their ultimate positive purposes. It is not only a question of focus; Chassidus empowers one to truly transform the entire world.

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