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**Sichos in English Classics 7**

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# **Birthday Reflections & Celebrations**

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*Birthdays are for parties!*

*Gather young and old, family and friends to celebrate your birthday — emphasize Torah and mitzvos and make positive resolutions for the future. All your actions in the coming year will be greatly enhanced.*



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# IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

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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.

These weekly publications can be sponsored to honor a loved one, a Yortzeit or a simcha by contacting us at [sichosinenglish@gmail.com](mailto:sichosinenglish@gmail.com). If you would like to receive this weekly publication to your email, then please use the above email address as well, or you can sign up to receive it on WhatsApp at 917-868-6509.

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# THE ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAY PRINTED IN 5748

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During the months of Adar, Nissan and Iyar of 5748 the Rebbe, *Shlita*, devoted many of his *sichos* to the potential religious importance of birthday celebrations. Citing *Halachic* and *Aggadic* sources, as well as traditional *Chassidic* practices the Rebbe has urged everyone to make appropriate gatherings on birthdays and to encourage and emphasize more Torah study, more Tzedakah, etc.

This essay is based on several discourses from the 25th of Adar, Shabbos Mevorchim Nissan, the 11th & 13th of Nissan, Acharon Shel Pesach, Shabbos Shemini as well as the letter of Erev Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

In this publication we have endeavored to compose a digest of the various concepts and suggestions presented by the Rebbe, *Shlita*, in the hope of providing the English-speaking world with a clear idea of this important subject. We have been forced to edit and condense some of the *Sichos* for the sake of continuity. We have also abstained from including all of the technical, halachic references and the copious footnotes which a more detailed translation should include.

Our goal is to present a clear and concise picture of the Rebbe's ideas on the importance of birthday observance. We hope this will encourage more and more people to follow the Rebbe's advice. And in the merit of the increased Torah and mitzvos — we will create the ultimate dwelling place for the *Shechinah* and the ultimate salvation, through our righteous Moshiach — Now!

As an introduction to the essay we are printing the *sicha* of the 25th of Adar, 5748, the anniversary of the birth of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson *v”n*, (5661-5748), which marked the initiation of the Campaign to celebrate birthdays.

## SICHOS IN ENGLISH

*Lag B’Omer, 5748*

# BIRTHDAY REFLECTIONS

## & CELEBRATIONS

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On the 25th of Adar, the anniversary of the birth of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, o.b.m. (5661-5748), the Rebbe Shlita spoke (after Shacharis) about the lesson to be drawn from the special day — the birthday of the world according to one opinion. He also used the opportunity to suggest that everyone should celebrate his/her birthday in the manner taught by the Previous Rebbe, with introspection, Teshuvah and increased Tzedakah, Torah and prayer.

Adults and small children should also be encouraged to invite their friends to their birthday gatherings and use the opportunity to encourage others to increase Torah and mitzvos.

A birthday represents the esoteric force of “ascending fortune.” Since the living must take to heart the lessons of the past, here, too, we can draw inspiration from this birthday to increase Yiddishkeit, Torah and mitzvos.

Every Jew is important and indispensable, and must say: “The world was created for me!” But the 25th of Adar has unique significance.

R. Yehoshua holds that the world was created in the month of Nissan; man was created on the first of Nissan and the first stages of creation — *Bereishis* — began on the 25th of Adar. According to this opinion, this day, the 25th of Adar, is the birthday of the world.

Chassidus explains the rapprochement of the two opinions (Rabbi Eliezer was of the opinion that the world was created in Elul-Tishrei,) in the following way. The supernal *thought* to create the world blossomed in the Nissan season, while the reality came in Tishrei. The “creation” of Nissan therefore carries the quality of thought over action. Years later, when the Tabernacle was first

erected on the first day of Nissan it also brought greater stability to the world (see Bereishis Rabbah 12:11).

This year, the 25th of Adar falls in the Torah portion of Vayikra when G-d spoke to Moshe from the Tabernacle; here we see the function of the Mishkan and the means by which the world is supported.

The Previous Rebbe revealed that on a birthday one should review his life history and seek ways to improve the areas that need improvement through Teshuvah. It is also customary to increase Tzedakah before Shacharis and Minchah, and likewise to study more Torah — revealed and esoteric — on one's birthday.

It is therefore appropriate on this birthday to publicize all the good customs of birthdays: to increase Tzedakah on this day, to study more Torah and to intensify the Divine service of prayer — these are the three pillars of the world. Also, good resolutions should be accepted for the rest of the year.

It would be appropriate that families should gather (with friends) in a joyous mood, so that the good resolutions will be accepted on this day, with a sense of happiness and gladness. This will increase the observance of these good deeds.

Children should be taught the spiritual importance of a birthday and they should celebrate their birthdays with their friends in a way that they will increase Torah and mitzvos and good resolutions. Small children will be even more impressed by this suggestion and will be more enthusiastic in carrying it out.

This is not a new custom, rather an extension of the responsibility everyone has to encourage others to increase Torah and mitzvos among friends, in a happy and friendly way.

To start off in a positive way I will distribute *Shliach Mitzvah* dollars to all, so that they may give the money to Tzedakah with their personal addition.

This acceptance of good resolutions in connection with this birthday should speed up the “birth” of the Jewish people in the complete redemption. Tzedakah will bring the redemption closer, may it be soon: “Today, if you heed My voice” (Tehillim 95:7).

May it be truly “Today,” and may “the night [of the gulos] be illuminated like the day” (*Ibid.* 139:12).

### THE BIRTHDAY OF THE WORLD

In discussing the creation of the world the Talmud describes the different opinions as to the time of creation. R. Yehoshua holds that the world was created in the Nissan season; man was created on the first of Nissan and the first stages of creation — *Bereishis* — began on the 25th of Adar. According to this opinion, the 25th of Adar, is the **birthday of the world**.

Rabbi Eliezer was of the opinion that the world was created in Elul-Tishrei. Chassidus explains the rapprochement of the two opinions in the following way. The supernal *thought* to create the world blossomed in the Nissan season, while the reality came in Tishrei. The “creation” of Nissan therefore possesses the quality of thought over action. Years later, when the Tabernacle was first erected on the first day of Nissan it also brought greater stability to the world for the thought was combined with the action (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 12:11).

### THE BIRTHDAY OF A NATION

The Holiday of Pesach which commemorates the liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt has often been referred to as the **birthday of the Jewish nation**. The prophet Yechezkel expressed this analogy quite graphically: “And as for your birth, on the day you were born....” Rashi explains that because the Exodus was seen as the birth of the Jewish people the prophet speaks metaphorically of the Exodus in the terms of a newborn baby (See *Yechezkel* 16:4ff).

### PRE-NATAL NATIONHOOD

A fetus in his mother’s womb, near birth, is a complete, growing, living being, with a completely formed body. It is true, however, it has no independent existence at all: it is nourished by

the food the mother eats, and wherever the mother goes, there the unborn baby is *automatically* carried.

From the moment the baby is born, it begins to freely move its limbs, sound its voice, and generally begins its *own* development, in an entirely new manner, both physically and spiritually.

So it was also with the Jews in Egypt before the redemption:

They were a “nation” in many respects, even being “distinguished” and distinct from the Egyptians in terms of language, dress, etc., even with a territory of their own, in the *Land of Goshen*. At the same time, however, they were enslaved and “swallowed up” by the Egyptians, so that they seemed to be engulfed “within the Egyptian nation” also in essential aspects, very much like the Egyptians themselves.

Then came the time when Hashem “took unto Himself a nation from within [the entrails of] another nation” — drawing the Jews to Himself (also) as a nation, from a state of the most abject enslavement to the height of freedom, to become Hashem’s nation, with the status of “a Kingdom of *Kohanim* and a Holy Nation” in their everyday life.

## THE BIRTH OF MAN

For a human being birth is a joyous time. It is a time of fulfillment for the parents who were blessed with a son or daughter, for the Jewish people who gained another member, and for the child himself/herself who came into existence. Therefore, when a person reaches maturity, each year on his/her birthday, it is appropriate to express gratitude to the Holy One, Blessed be He, the Giver of life.

Just as the birthday of a people is celebrated each year with rites and a ritual, so too, the birthday of an individual Jew should be appropriately observed. An individual’s birthday can be utilized to strengthen and increase all aspects of Yiddishkeit, Torah and mitzvos, starting with the three pillars which uphold the world: Torah, prayer and charity. These good practices should be

observed on the birthday and good resolutions for the future should be accepted.

Most importantly, gather your family or friends for a festive gathering (to celebrate the mitzvah) on your birthday and the joyous party will encourage others to accept good resolutions — and the happiness that is generated will imbue your future observance with enthusiasm and zeal.

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

What is the celebration all about?

Well, fundamentally one should rejoice on a birthday and give thanks and praise to G-d for giving him life. The birth of a child brings happiness to the parents, to the Jewish people and to the individual, and for this should one give praise.

Ostensibly, birthdays are quite secular affairs, every person (Jew or gentile) has one once a year, in which his “fortune rises.” In fact, in Torah the only birthday singled out for any mention was Pharaoh’s birthday!

Nevertheless, a Jew has the ability to utilize his birthday — instead of letting it pass as just another day — he can make it a holiday with emphasis on more Torah and mitzvos. One’s birthday is a time for reflection, when one may “remember and think about those aspects of his life which need improvement and repentance” (HaYom Yom, 11th Nissan). This should be achieved by increasing Torah and prayer on the birthday, as well as charity and other mitzvos. Add to this a happy gathering of family and friends with the goal of accepting good resolutions and the power of the birthday will guarantee the fulfillment of the good promises in the future.

## BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

The *Midrash* relates:

Most people cherish the day on which they were born and make a party on that day. (*Midrash Sechel Tov, Bereishis* 40:20)

[See also *Ginze Yosef* ch. 4; *Ben Ish Chai Halachos*, Year 1, *Re'ey* par. 17]

The Zohar relates that on the day of R. Elazar's (*Rashbi*'s son's) Bar Mitzvah *Rashbi* made a great celebration. The Zohar further explains that the day of a Bar Mitzvah is analogous to the joyous day of a wedding (See *Zohar Chadosh*, Bereishis).

The Previous Rebbe revealed that on a birthday one should review his life history and seek ways to improve the areas that need improvement through Teshuvah. [Just as the Exodus was a form of repentance so, too, every birthday must bring repentance.] It is also customary to increase Tzedakah before Shacharis and Minchah, and likewise to study more Torah — revealed and esoteric — on one's birthday.

### BIRTHDAY — REBIRTH — RESOLVE

It is therefore appropriate to publicize all the good customs of birthdays: to increase Tzedakah on this day, to study more Torah and to intensify the Divine service of prayer — these are the three pillars of the world. Also, good resolutions should be accepted for the rest of the year.

It would be appropriate that families should gather (with friends) in a joyous mood, so that the good resolutions will be accepted on this day, with a sense of happiness and gladness. This will increase the observance of these good deeds.

Children should be taught the spiritual importance of a birthday and they should celebrate their birthdays with their friends in a way that they will increase Torah and mitzvos and good resolutions. Small children will be even more impressed by this suggestion and will be more enthusiastic in carrying it out.

Now on one's birthday one can rejoice in the knowledge that on this day his soul descended to the corporeal existence in order to serve the Creator through Torah and mitzvos. This commemoration crystalizes in the fact that at the celebration itself there will be more Torah and mitzvos and more good resolutions for the future. This joyous jubilee may be observed by young and old — for as soon as

the child is able to understand and appreciate the importance of good acts his or her birthday party will become the focal point for commemoration of the past and solemnization of the future.

## **ANNIVERSARY OF PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL BIRTH**

Such a celebration is also connected to the fact that on his 13th birthday a boy enters the age of maturity and is responsible to observe the 613 mitzvos. The same is true of a girl on her 12th birthday. Since every Jew has the “presumption of righteousness” the assumption is that this young boy or girl will certainly grow up to fulfill the dictates of the Torah.

Consequently, there is reason to rejoice at the time he or she accepts the yoke of mitzvos.

For this reason men and women above Bar/Bas Mitzvah should see in their birthdays additional significance: (1) It is the anniversary of physical birth, (2) it is the anniversary of maturity, or Spiritual birth.

As the Shulchan Aruch explains:

The consummate indwelling of the holy soul in a person takes place on the 13th birthday [lit: 13 years and a day] for a male and the 12th birthday for a female. For this reason they become responsible by Biblical law to fulfill the mitzvos of the Torah. (*Shulchan Aruch Harav* end ch. 4)

With this in mind, whether you are 13, 30 or 83 you have a reason to celebrate your birthday. And at each age you can find satisfaction and growth when you become one year older.

## **WHY WERE YOU BORN? TO MAKE A SANCTUARY!**

How do we carry out the command “Make Me a sanctuary” in a way that even the mundane aspects of a Jew’s life will be holy? One suggestion is for every Jew, man, woman or child to carry out the good custom of celebrating their birthday in a manner that connects it with Torah and mitzvos.

There is a golden opportunity on a birthday to influence a person to increased Torah and mitzvos, for it is a time when one's *mazal* is strong.

The suggestion is directed to everyone, even small children, and their parents should explain to them that on their birthdays there should be a renewal of all aspects of good and holiness. A happy celebration should be organized for the child when he and his friends will joyously accept good resolutions in Torah and mitzvos.

Use the birthday as a time to increase goodness and holiness in Torah and mitzvos. We are at the close of the diaspora and we must finish the remaining steps of purification of the mundane. A birthday is a plain day — no holiday — yet it is a day in which one's "fortune ascends." A Jew's inner spirituality has the power to eclipse his mundanity and he becomes completely nullified (attached) to the Holy One, Blessed be He.

May this proposal be accepted among the Jewish people — young and old — to celebrate individual birthdays by making joyous parties in a manner that will enhance and increase Torah and mitzvos.

### A CUSTOM OF OLD — RENEWED

This is not a new custom, rather an extension of the responsibility everyone has to encourage others to increase Torah and mitzvos among friends, in a happy and friendly way.

If for some reason this was not so common until now, it is needed now, and as we have seen, it is based on the practices of the great Jewish leaders. In the darkness of the pre-Messianic diaspora — we need more good deeds that will radiate light. And this activity is tried, tested and true; it will increase good deeds, Torah and mitzvos.

Since the golus is seen as the time of *incubation* and the salvation as the time of *birth*, may our good actions on birthdays speedily bring the ultimate birth of the Jewish people — the true redemption.

## BIRTHDAY CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES\*

1. It is customary to be called to the Torah on the Shabbos preceding your birthday. When the birthday occurs on a day that the Torah is read you should also be called to the Torah on that day.
2. On your Birthday increase your contribution to Tzedakah before morning service and afternoon services. When the birthday is on Shabbos or Yom Tov — give the extra Tzedakah before Shabbos (preferably — also after).
3. Put more time and effort into your prayer. Pray with greater concentration, meditate on the greatness of the Creator and put more intensity in your recitation of psalms as well. (If possible, read at least one complete book of Tehillim.)
4. Study the psalm which corresponds to your new age,<sup>1</sup> and which you will be saying daily through the coming year.<sup>2</sup> (E.g. when one reaches the age of 20 he begins reciting Psalm 21.)
5. In addition to your regular, daily study periods — on your birthday study an extra lesson in revealed Torah — *Nigleh* — and esoteric teachings — *Chassidus*. This is in addition to the daily quota of Chumash, Tehillim, Tanya and Rambam.
6. Study a Chassidic discourse by heart<sup>3</sup> (or at least a part thereof) and review it in the presence of a group of people on the birthday. This may also be done at another auspicious time in connection with your birthday; especially at the Shalosh Seudah meal of the following Shabbos.

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\* These customs (unless otherwise noted) are excerpted from *HaYom Yom* — 11th of Nissan; *Sefer HaMinhagim Chabad* pg. 81, *Letters of Lubavitcher Rebbe Shlita*, Vol. 6 Letters #1,548, #1,858; Vol. 7 #1,898, #1,929, #2,022, #2,066, #2097, #2116, # 2146, #2210, #2226, et.al.

1. “*Yechidus*” to Bar Mitzvah Boys — *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 20, pg. 578; vol. 26 pg. 347, etc.
2. In addition to the well-known custom: “On each Rosh Chodesh study...part of the psalm corresponding to your age” — “If the psalm has many verses study two or more verses each month. If there are fewer than 12 verses...repeat some verses, (so that you) study the entire psalm through the whole year.” (*Letters of Previous Rebbe*, Vol. 5 #1339).
3. Wherever your heart desires, but in a conscientious manner — *Letters of Lubavitcher Rebbe Shlita*, Vol. 7 #2097 — see next footnote.

7. Reach out to your fellow Jews and teach them Torah and Chassidus, with true Ahavas Yisroel.
8. Isolate yourself in seclusion for a while on the day of your birthday and retrospectively<sup>4</sup> review your conduct for the past year — see what needs repentance and improvement — and make good resolutions for the future years.
9. Accept upon yourself some new act of piety or more zealous observance in some area of action<sup>5</sup> — all within your grasp.<sup>6</sup>
10. Celebrate a happy party with your family and friends in honor of your birthday — give praise and thanks to the Holy One, Blessed Be He, — if possible say the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* on a new fruit — with happiness and the joy of a mitzvah.<sup>7</sup>

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4. See *Letters*, ibid. #2226: “Picture in your mind a *yechidus* that you had in the past, what you asked the Rebbe and what he answered — and then study his teachings.”
  5. Start by adding a new study period for Chassidus (*Letters*, ibid., # 2066).
  6. It is proper to accept a new aspect of religious zealousness on Rosh Hashanah, one may deduce from this that on an individual’s *personal Rosh Hashanah* — his birthday — when his individual new year begins the same should apply. (see Sicha, *Acharon Shel Pesach* 5748 fn. 33) — *Letters*, ibid.
  7. *Sichos*: 25 Adar; *Acharon Shel Pesach* (et. al.) 5748.

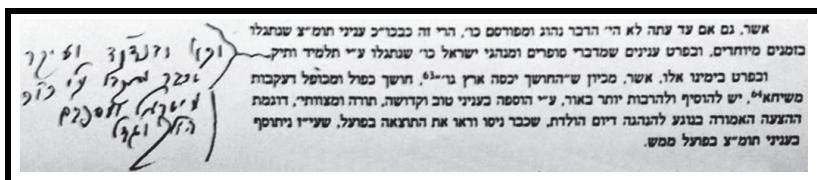
# ADDENDUM

## Behind the Scenes of Sichos in English

This week we bring you the Rebbe's edit on the original Sicha about the Birthday Campaign, which the above essay was based off. This is the Hebrew edition of the sicha which the Rebbe edited.

The context of the הagaahah is that the paragraph says, “even though it [birthdays] was not so practiced and publicized etc., nevertheless we find a similar idea in quite a few others areas of Torah and Mitzvos that they were revealed at auspicious times. Specifically, we find new things from our sages, and Jewish customs etc. which were revealed by a teacher תלמיד ותיק.”

Here the Rebbe added “etc. and in our scenario where it has already been accepted by many Jews whose numbers are growing steadily”.



לעלוי נשמה  
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' יונה  
בן הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' מאיר ע"ה  
**אבעז**

מנהל ועד שיחות באנגלית  
למעלה מארבעים שנה  
שבהמשך פעולותיו בהפצת המעיינות  
נזכה לאגולה השלימה תיכף ומיד ממש

נדפס על ידי חתנו ובתו  
**הר' יצחק וחנה ומשפחתם שיחיו וואלך**



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