
Sichos in English Classics 45

**Every Jew
Has a Silver Lining**



**Tenth of Teves and
Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, 5751 (1991)**



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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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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

5751 (1991)

There are times at which you feel, while listening to an address, that history is in the making; that the words being spoken, though poignantly relevant to the audience which is hearing them immediately, are meaningful to a wider range of listeners over a greater scope of time.

Exactly this was felt by those who heard the recent public addresses of the Lubavitcher Rebbe *Shlita* on the Tenth of Teves and on *Shabbos Parshas Vayechi*. They sensed that the Rebbe was directing his words to the spiritual realms: he was espousing the cause of the Jewish people, pointing out their virtues, and ensuring that no harm would befall them, heaven forbid.

Simultaneously, however, his words are a classic exposition of the underlying principles that have motivated Lubavitch outreach activities for years. In the most powerful manner, the Rebbe explains the unique spiritual potential each Jew possesses, and how that potential can be activated when one reaches out with love and joy. Conversely, the Rebbe notes how fruitless, inappropriate and incorrect are harsh criticism of one's fellow Jew and threats of Divine retribution. Within the context of his remarks, the Rebbe also dwells on the luminous legacy bequeathed to us by the holy martyrs of the Holocaust.

On these two occasions, the Rebbe spoke for some three hours. In this essay, we have attempted to summarize and highlight the major points of these addresses. A detailed, documented and authoritative transcript of the Rebbe's message has been published in Hebrew. This has been translated and is also available from *Sichos In English*.

It is our prayer that an appreciation of the virtues of every Jew will lead us all to true Jewish unity, the key to Divine blessings. In a celebrated teaching, the Baal Shem Tov compared the relationship of G-d with the Jewish people to that of a father with many children. Nothing brings the father greater joy than seeing his children together in loving harmony. Similarly, when Jews join together in joy and unity this brings happiness to G-d, and encourages Him to grant us abundant blessings — including the greatest blessing of all, the coming of *Mashiach*. May this take place in the immediate future.

EVERY JEW HAS A SILVER LINING



Tenth of Teves and Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, 5751 (1991)

“G-d loves every Jew more than parents love an only child born to them in their old age.”¹

This teaching of the Baal Shem Tov applies to every member of our people without distinction. Even a Jew’s failure to observe the Torah and its commandments cannot detract from this love, for it is rooted in the very essence of his being and that of G-d, as it were. The essence of every Jew is his soul, which is “an actual part of G-d from above.”² This defines his fundamental personality.

A person’s failure to manifest this dimension in his actual conduct does not affect this essential connection. A Jew always remains a Jew. Thus Maimonides rules that *every* Jew, even one who protests the contrary, “wants to be part of the Jewish people and desires to fulfill all the *mitzvos* and separate himself from sin, and it is only his Evil Inclination which forces him [to do otherwise].”³

What does a Jew really desire? — To fulfill G-d’s will. And if he does not conduct himself accordingly, we should realize that he is momentarily not in control of his behavior: it is his *yetzer hara* which is forcing him to act contrary to his true self.

G-D LOVES EVERY JEW AS HE IS

It is therefore utterly out of place to belittle the virtues of those of our people who do not yet fully observe the Torah. Moreover, unloving rebuke is likely to break their spirit and dampen their innate Jewish zeal. With a more positive approach, however, the response is heartening indeed. In the last few decades, thousands

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1. See Addenda to *Keser Shem Tov*, sec. 133.
 2. *Tanya*, ch. 2.
 3. *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Geirushin* 2:20.

of individuals and families have chosen to return to a lifestyle inspired by the Torah. In overwhelming proportions, the immediate reason for their choice is that someone reached out to them warmly and lovingly; a fellow Jew showed them how the practice of Judaism can infuse joy and meaning into their lives — because it attunes them to their innermost selves.

G-D ALONE CAN JUDGE

There is a yet more fundamental flaw in criticizing the conduct of one's fellow man. No person has the right to sit in judgment over his colleagues. Maimonides writes:⁴ “The reckoning [of sins and merits] is not calculated on the basis of the mere number of merits and sins, but on the basis of their magnitude as well. Some solitary merits can outweigh many sins. The weighing of sins and merits can be carried out only according to the wisdom of the All-Knowing G-d: He alone knows how to measure merits against sins.”

Can any mortal presume to be capable of assessing a colleague's ultimate spiritual worth “according to the wisdom of the All-Knowing G-d”? This is particularly true in the present generation. In our days, a Jew whose performance of the commandments of the Torah is imperfect must be judged leniently, according to the principle of *tinok shenishba*. (In its original context, this phrase describes an individual who for no fault of his own was deprived of a childhood environment conducive to Torah observance.⁵) If, then, though pressured by tensions of time and place, a person does fulfill any *mitzvah* — and, of course, every Jew has numerous *mitzvos* to his credit — how dearly must it be cherished in the Heavenly Court.

4. *Ibid.*, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:2.

5. See *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchos Mamrim* 3:3, where Maimonides ascribes the failure of such people to observe the laws of the Torah to duress — and the *Talmud* (*Bava Kama* 28a) teaches that “the Merciful One absolves a person who acts under duress.”

Significantly, in *Hilchos Mamrim*, Maimonides states that the above applies even when such a person later comes in contact with Jews and is made aware of Jewish practice. Since he was not trained to follow this lifestyle as a child, even when he grows older he is not to be judged for his lapses.

COMPASSION FOR THE REMNANT OF OUR PEOPLE

Looking at *all* our fellow Jews with a favorable eye is in place especially now, for our generation is “a firebrand saved from the blaze,”⁶ the smouldering remnant preserved from the horrors of the Holocaust. After so many of our people have perished, we must try to appreciate — and in this manner, help reveal — the positive potential that *every* Jew possesses.

This potential is enhanced by the luminous legacy bequeathed to us by the martyrs of the previous generation. Our Sages⁷ teach that the very fact that a person dies *al Kiddush HaShem*, in sanctification of G-d’s Name, elevates him to such a level that “no creature can stand in his presence.” Thus, every man and woman who died in the Holocaust is a holy martyr.

Accordingly, to say that those very people were deserving of what transpired, that it was a punishment for their sins, heaven forbid, is unthinkable. We cannot *explain* the Holocaust, for we are limited by the earthbound perspective of mortal understanding. As G-d says, in a prophecy of Isaiah, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts.”⁸ No scales of judgment could ever condemn a people to such horrors.⁹

6. *Zechariah* 3:2. Note the interpretation of *Mahari Kra* on this verse: “That is to say, only a small remnant of Israel has survived,... and would you dare to point out their faults so that I should destroy them?!...”

7. *Pesachim* 50a.

8. *Yeshayahu* 55:8.

9. In general, when we confront undesirable events, we must realize that “the Holy One, blessed be He, does not render judgment without a reason” (*Berachos* 5b); i.e., these events result from faults in our conduct.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this rule. At various times in our history, the Jewish people have been subjected to oppression that is not a result of their failings. Thus, our Sages relate (*Menachos* 29b) that when Moshe Rabbeinu protested the cruel death which he saw (with prophetic foresight) was to be inflicted upon Rabbi Akiva, G-d told him, “Be silent. This is what has arisen in My thought.” In the classic instance of such suffering, G-d told Avraham that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. Far from being a result of their sins, this exile had already been ordained when G-d first initiated His covenant with Avraham, as an unfathomable Divine decree (cf. *Shmos Rabbah* 5:22).

The Torah promises that¹⁰ “[G-d] will avenge the blood of His servants,”¹¹ indicating that the death of these martyrs is against His will.¹² On the contrary, G-d is “the Master of mercy.” It is blasphemous to picture Him as a cruel king who punishes His people for their disobedience and then waits until it mounts again to the point at which it is fitting to punish them again.

The very opposite is true. As our Sages say,¹³ “What does G-d do since creation? — He arranges marriages”; i.e., He is involved in bringing joy and happiness to mankind, establishing families, “eternal structures” which produce ongoing joy in future generations.

NEIGHBORLY OUTREACH

We must seek to emulate this conduct and try to spread happiness among Jews, reaching out to all our brothers, regardless of their level of observance. In this manner, hopefully, “one will be able to draw them close to the Torah and the service of G-d, and even if one fails [in this goal], one has not forfeited the merit of loving one’s neighbor.”¹⁴

This is the direction in which we should focus our efforts, for, as our Sages taught,¹⁵ “The totality of the Torah is” — not to criticize, to chastise, nor to threaten with Divine retribution, but rather — “to ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”¹⁶ Furthermore, as mentioned above, brotherly efforts in reaching out to our fellow

The same applies to the Holocaust. So awesome was the cruelty to which our people were subjected that Satan himself could not find sins to justify such suffering. The only explanation is, “This is what arose in My thought.”

10. *Devarim* 32:43.
11. By using the term “servants,” the Torah teaches us a further lesson concerning the virtues of these martyrs. According to Jewish law, a servant has no identity independent of his master’s, and is in fact considered an extension of him. Similarly, each of the holy martyrs who perished in the Holocaust extended and revealed G-dliness here in this material world.
12. Although the death of the martyrs took place against His will, G-d’s turning from His people at this time raises the unresolved questions discussed in Note 9.
13. *Bereishis Rabbah* 68:4.
14. *Tanya*, ch. 32.
15. *Shabbos* 31a.
16. *Vayikra* 19:18.

Jews are meeting with ever-increasing success, and thousands are awakening to *teshuvah*, to repentance, and discovering their Jewish roots.

**PERSONAL RENEWAL:
UNIVERSAL RENAISSANCE**

The collective experience of these individuals is projecting its image on the cosmic canvas. The renewal of their personal connection to their Jewish heritage is a foretaste of the renewal to be experienced by the Jewish people and the world at large, for our Sages taught that “*teshuvah* brings the Redemption near.”¹⁷ Indeed, “All the appointed times [for the coming of *Mashiach*] have passed, and the matter now depends on *teshuvah* alone.”¹⁸

These teachings indicate that the Redemption is at hand, for *teshuvah* is an instantaneous process, which transpires “in one moment, in one turn.”¹⁹ This is reflected by the ruling of our Sages²⁰ that when a person consecrates a woman as his wife on the condition that he is a righteous man, the marriage bond is established even though he was known to be wicked. We assume that, at the time he made that condition, he had thoughts of *teshuvah* that were powerful enough to change his spiritual status from one extreme to the other at that very moment. Since every Jew has thoughts of *teshuvah*, which is the catalyst of the future Redemption, that day must surely be imminent.

Furthermore, G-d will bring about the ultimate Redemption speedily even when *teshuvah* is lacking. In the prayers of *Selichos* we say, *first*: “G-d, redeem Israel from all his afflictions;”²¹ and *afterwards*: “And He will redeem Israel from all his sins.”²² First G-d will redeem the Jews from their difficulties — including the greatest difficulty, the exile — and *then* He will redeem them from

17. *Yoma* 86b.

18. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

19. *Zohar* I, 129a.

20. *Kiddushin* 49b.

21. *Tehillim* 25:22.

22. *Ibid.* 130:8.

their sins. In this spirit our Sages²³ explain that, at the time of the ultimate Redemption, G-d will ignore the sins of the Jews and redeem them in His mercy.

There is heightened relevance to the above this year, a year when “I will show you wonders.”²⁴ This name implies that, not only will G-d perform miracles for the Jewish people, but that these wonders will be openly revealed.

Thus, in a time when “the entire world will panic and will be stricken with consternation,”²⁵ the Jews can remain at ease, confident that “all that I (G-d) have done, I have done only for your sake. Have no fear: the time for your redemption has arrived!”



23. See *Metzudas David* and the *Radak* on *Michah* 6:18.

24. *Michah* 7:15. See the essay published by Sichos In English entitled “The Message of the Year 5751.”

25. *Yalkut Shimoni* II:499, interpreting *Yeshayahu* 60:1. There the *Midrash* describes a crisis in the Persian Gulf which affects the entire world.

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הרוצה בעילום שמו



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