

And Rejoice in Your Holidays

Tales of Lytin

(translated from Hebrew)

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Esther Publications, 1984

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granddaughter of Moshe Mandel*

At the end of Yom Kipur, after the feast, the older hassids would begin to build the succah in order to keep “*Yelchu hial el hial*”¹; and when they had completed the required placing of the first stake or placing a board, they would go to a party at the house of Reb Yeheskel the sochet, where a couple of bottles of new wine would be waiting for them, wine that was still fermenting from its yeast, that had arrived just a day or two ago from Bessarbia. (It was customary among the wine sellers to get large empty wine barrels, to load them on the wagons and send them to Bessarbia, where they would be returned full of new wine, and each wine seller was interested that his wine should be tasted and an opinion be offered about it. Upon these opinions the price of the wine would be set for the whole year; and the most honored “tasting station” was the party in the house of Reb Yeheskel.) At the same time, the influence of Simchat Torah began. Around the table sat the elders and honoraries and drank “*lechaim*” and blessed one another for a good year, that there should be rain and spirituality, a conversation of the following kind: on the fast that had just finished, on etrogim; on hassids that had already come back from “Squarer”², of the travels of the Rabbi for the holiday days, they would tell in detail, when Rabbi “Zy”a”³, entered to pray “*musaf*”⁴, from which paragraph he started to say aloud the “*LeMenazaach LeB’nei Korach*” (when the audience finished seven repetitions, the Rabbi would usually still be in the middle of the sixth time, and then he would raise his voice and finish the the sixth and seventh repetitions; and the hassids would pay attention at which paragraph the Rabbi would begin to recite aloud), the blowing of the shofar, and the praying of “*musaf*” by Ahrohleh Hominer, and what was the new melody brought to Squarer; when the prayers ended, and what was the mood of the visitors, and what the Rabbi said in his conversation at the meal, about the Torah and about politics, and what he blessed so and so with when he received the notes. In the meantime the party grew. The bottles were emptied and the hearts were warmed, the throats opened in song and the feet flew and they would dance around the table. The bottles were refilled and emptied until midnight.

During the days between Yom Kipur and Succot the hassids would spend only a little of their time drinking a bit of brandy at the “*cloz*”⁵ after prayers, in telling tales and learning the new melody of “*Mikalkel Chaim*”, because of the partaking of the building of the succah, choosing the etrog, and creating the lulav. On the first day of the holiday, at noon, there would be a small party; but the main celebration was in the evening of the same day, after the meal. It began with the “Feast of Water Drawing”

¹ “*Yehlchu hial el hial*” – will gain virtue and strength

² “Squarer” - a certain court of Hassids

³ “Zy”a” - May his virtue stand us in good stead!

⁴ “*musaf*” – additional prayers for Shabat and holidays

⁵ “*cloz*” - place of worship and study for a group of hassids.

(*Simhat Beit Hashouvah*). The home of Reb Yeheskel would fill to its capacity, and the pouring of wine into the throats began, as did the pouring of water on the elders who sat in their succot who didn't appreciate it, and preferred the rest over celebrating. And amidst the celebration a few would sit and discuss what the holy "*Or Chaim*" would say on a specific paragraph in "*Veyichee*" or go over an article of "*Ohev Yisrael*" or "*Kedusat Levy*"; and others would tell a tale about the wonderful rabbi, or discuss the special etrogs. In the meantime one of the celebrators would rise and ask, "who would go to so and so's home and take the marmalade that stood in a certain place, and explain in detail how to accomplish this with the wife noticing. Sometimes two would go, each to the other one's home. By the way, at the time of the "kidnapping" of the jar of marmalade, other things would be taken such as: bottles of vishnak, cooked fish, and the celebrators would drink and eat and make merry till the late hours.

On the afternoon of the second day of the holiday they would again drink "*lechaim*", sing and dance until after the maariv prayers. Every evening of "*Chol Hamoed*"⁶, one of the group whose name was that of one of the "*auspiz*"⁷ that evening would invite the group to his succah, to celebrate the "*auspizin*"; and on the evening that the "*auspizin*" was as the name of the Rabbi "*Zy*"^a the celebration would be the greatest.

On the night of "*Hoshanah-Raba*" all the synagogues were filled with people. One would read the book of Deuteronomy or the Zohar of that night, and in another they would finish the liturgy of the Zohar, that they hadn't been able to finish on Yom Kipur, or complete the Zohar of the Book of Deuteronomy that they hadn't completed yet, in order to start again with Genesis.

The youth were also awake on the night of Hoshanah-Raba. Some made rings and chains from the lulav, and others looked at the book, or fooled around, or teased each other with questions in gamara, usually the younger ones to the older ones to show that they were just as good.

Before midnight they would begin to say portions of the Book of Psalms. All awoke and poured their heart into prayer and pleading, in a pleasant voice. In the midst of this appeared the elder Reb Moshe Aharon and on his shoulders Essel and two pails of spicy apples, sweet and cold, and between the reading of each book he would distribute them free to whomever asked, to refresh his soul. And when the pails were empty he would refill them. After reciting Psalms, they would enter the succah, next to the "*cloz*", and those who had recited "*Yahar Zeit*" that same day would honor those present with brandy and pieces of cake "*lemezonot*", drank "*lechaim*" and remembered those who had died, and blessed each other "*Begmar Hatima Tova*"⁸, and separated, each going to his home. And the "*miyan*" of elders went to the succah of a friend, to eat supper and continue celebrating the last dances of happiness of the "Feast of Water Drawing".

⁶ "*Chol Hamoed*" - the second through the sixth day of Succoth

⁷ "*auspiz*" "*auspizin*" - forefathers who legendarily visit the tabernacles in Succoth.

⁸ "*Begmar Hatima Tova*" - May you be signed and sealed with happiness.

On *Sh'mini Atzereth*⁹ after evening prayers, the *melamud*¹⁰ Reb Moshe Meir would get up on the stage, the greatest of clowns in Litin, and announce in importance and rejoicing:

- With the permission of the rabbis and all the holy tools I warn all those praying in the “*cloz*”, that they must command their household not to waste, for G_d’s sake, all their cabbage on the preparation of “*holchips*”¹¹, but should leave some cabbage for cabbage borscht in the winter; and also, they should not waste all the garlic in the frying of the meat, but should leave some for spreading on bread, on the winter nights ...¹²

The next day after morning prayers, they would divide into groups. Some would go to “*kiddush*” in the house of one, and others in a different house, so that each would celebrate the happiness of a holiday in his home, and so that no one missed saying “*kiddush*” by having to wait too long, this *kiddush* was not lengthy.

In the afternoon they would gather in the homes of the rabbis and private homes, and above all in the home of Reb Yeshkel the ritual slaughterer. In this home the hassids would gather, those that study and the noble ones, and from there the singing would encircle the whole city.

On *Shimchat Torah* the rejoicing was doubled and tripled. Even those who watched their drinking during the year, especially excessive drinking, on this day drank a good amount; among them those Jews learned in Torah and piety; even those who didn’t know how to play a melody, sang aloud on this day and didn’t stop; and those who didn’t know how to dance cursed their legs on this day... and not from light headedness, but from excitement and “*additional soul*”¹³, in honor of the Torah they studied and kept its commandments all year long and succeeded in finishing it and starting it afresh.

The rejoicing was as usual at Reb Yeheskel’s home. There was no song that wasn’t heard there that day, especially the melodies of the prayers of the “*Yamim Hanoraiim*”¹⁴; and above all “*Kadosh, Adir Be’alito*”¹⁵, that was sung forwards and backwards according to the alphabet, accompanied by the public between each portion: Ai, Ai, Ai, Holy!

Brili and Dudoleh would artistically mimic the singing of the elderly gentiles asking for donations, as they went around the city with their instruments; and the song of the shepherd with his flute, looking for his lost sheep; and they wouldn’t rest until they took off their coats and would burst out in a dance with lots of movement, varied with

⁹ *Sh'mini Atzereth* – eight day of Succoth

¹⁰ “*melamud*” - teacher

¹¹ “*holchips*” pancakes of cabbage.

¹² Loaves of rye bread, baked in the oven in the home, were coarse and perfect for the spreading of garlic. A piece of rye spread with garlic with a cup of tea after it, was an excellent meal for many families.

¹³ “*additional soul*” – the extra soul every Jew acquires on Sabbath, according to legend.

¹⁴ “*Yamim Hanoraiim*” – the period starting with Rosh Hashonah and ending with Yom Kipur.

¹⁵ liturgy to the “*creator*” sung specially on Yom Kipur, askenaz melody

charming strutting, around the table. And when there were so many dancing that the circle filled the room – it would burst outside and continue around the house.

On the eve of Simchat Torah they would pray in two minions¹⁶; the first minion at the regular hour, and the second minion at 10 or 11, at night.

The floor of the “*cloz*” was cleared of the benches. Some were taken out and some were placed close to the walls where the women and virgins stood. On this evening the young males studying in the “*cloz*” were allowed to look at the girls without fear. The greatest enjoyment was to take the scrolls of the Torah from the hands of the elders and bring them to the women and virgins to kiss them... the smart ones used this opportunity to become acquainted with the girls, which sometimes ended in a match-making, or a broken heart for a year or two.

Children stood on benches with flags in their hands, with a red apple with a candle in it on top of the flag.

After each and every circling of the room the hazan¹⁷ and those with a good voice would burst in song, and those carrying the scrolls would dance joyously to their voices, and after them all the public; and those that didn't dance, clapped. After the celebration many of the celebrators would go to Rev Yeheskel's house to continue celebrating, and at a late hour they would return to the “*cloz*”, to have second “*hakafot*”¹⁸; and on their way to the “*cloz*” they called by their singing to a large crowd, that hurried to the “*cloz*” to get a good place.

The group brought with them a few large bottles of wine or a barrel of beer, and anyone who wanted to, took a drink. In the meantime a large circle formed around the stage. One of the nobles, Moshe Yacobson, took his coat off and his shoes, and in his white stockings he got up on the table to sing “*Ozer Daliim, Hodeeah Na!*”. Many of those present did the same thing, and together with him danced in a circle going up and down, from the dirt floor to the table, from the table to the dirt floor.

And here came the hazan and called in the melodious voice of Rosh Hashanah: “Bless!”. And the second minion prayed the evening prayers.

And after the evening prayers again they would say “*Attah Harait*” verse after verse, but this time differently from the first, because it was said with more warmth and joy and sometimes with a little boisterousness. For example: On the verse “to he that makes large wonders by himself” two would approach the hazan wrap their arms around him and turn him around two or three times, and then return him to his place.. and when they got to the verse “G_d is king”, the crowd would begin to sing the melody of Rosh Hashanah. And again: “the Torah champion, Reb Yankel son of Reb Chaim, give respect to the Torah!” and between each parade with the scrolls to the next, exhilarated singing and dancing. And it warmed the heart to see the Rabbi with Reb Yeheskel, as they danced with the scrolls, with their arms entwined, and

¹⁶ “minion”, a group of at least 10 are required to recite the prayers together.

¹⁷ “hazan” cantor

¹⁸ “hakafot” going around the synagogue with the Scrolls of the Law.

separately, to the clapping of the crowd, that could be heard from one end of the city to the other.

Part of the crowd dispersed. But the women and virgins, and especially those who still desired to see a certain boy, stayed rooted to their places...

After the reading of "*Alenu*" everyone dispersed to his home.

The next day the people divided up into different groups that prayed in their homes, and each "*minion*" conducted its own kiddish, with great generosity. 57% proof brandy and 96% proof brandy and plain wine along with honey cakes, fish, pickles, "*krapin*" "*holpzhips*", and various other dishes for dessert. After kiddish the holiday visits would begin of the members of the group in the homes of those he had prayed with.

Immediately following the meal, they came to the home of Reb Yeheskel. Some snoozed a bit while sitting on the bench and others drank and sang:

- The glory and the belief !
- To whom? To whom ?
- Forever and ever !
- The wisdom and the blessing !
- To whom? To whom?
- Forever and ever !

or: Glorious , beautiful G_d the glory of the world

- or: Ohm I am a wall !
- Another virtue ! Another virtue !
 - Created as a source of warmth
 - Another virture ! Another virtue !
 - She is compared to a pillar ! and so on, and so forth.

And Brili and Dudoleh danced the gypsy dance, the cossak dance and the polish dance.

And around the house men, women, children, and non Jews would gather, and they would clap for the dancers and the poets, especially for Brili and Dudoleh, who astounded all with their lightness of foot and their heart warming dances. Everyone crowded closer to see the elders dance.

And after afternoon prayers, that were prayed there, everything started again: endless amounts of wine, and dancing till the heart of heaven. And the great dancers took off their coats and the poets were hoarse... but who paid attention to such little things? Today was a holiday to G_d! Simhat Torah!

After “*havdalah*”¹⁹ they would sing songs made of the final couplets of the havdalah, using their first letters which were: el, michal, teneh (aleph, mem, tet)²⁰, and disperse while singing.

Before midnight, they would gather again at the home of Reb Yehekel, and conduct a sort of “Melveh Malkah”, eat “*vernichikips*”²¹, drink and sing and dance till the light of morning. And the policemen roaming the city were witness to the storm of “*Simhat Torah*”.

And the next day, they began again to study from “Genesis”, and again to carry the weight of the Torah, that “her ways are the way of courage and all her paths of peace”...

¹⁹ “havdalah” the benediction over the wine at the conclusion of the Shabbath or a festival

²⁰ the end of the verse of havdalah, according to sephardic custom.

²¹ “vernichikips” a filled ravioli