



Joy of Generations

When a chassidic Jew saved Samarkand's economy to be able to celebrate Simchas Torah

The Good Soviet Citizen

Good Yom Tov!

During the World War II period and afterward, there lived in the city of Samarkand (one of the biggest and oldest cities of Uzbekistan) an energetic Jewish activist named Rafael Chudaitov. In those days, he succeeded in setting up a kolkhoz (a Communist collective farm) for hundreds of Jewish families, where they officially worked as the Communist government demands, along with also being able to keep Shabbos.

Most of the farm's output was fine wine. Trucks would regularly deliver large crates of grapes, and they would make wine of it at their on-site wineries.

So one fine day, a truck driver shows up with a truckload of grape crates, only to discover a sign on the gate of the kolkhoz reading, "At the occasion of a family celebration, our warehouses will be closed from today, Wednesday, October 18 until Sunday, October 22, at which point we will reopen at 7:00 a.m."

The driver never heard of a kolkhoz that closes for four consecutive days—and for a family celebration, at that—in the Soviet Union.

So the driver dropped the goods off at the gate—and immediately went to the regional official in charge of all the kolkhozes to report to him on the development.

Now, what really was the secret behind this strange closure? Well, that year, as you may have guessed, it was a Jewish holiday. Specifically, the holiday of Simchas Torah fell that year on Thursday and Friday, followed immediately by Shabbos. And so, Mr. Chudaitov decided to close his Jewish kolkhoz for the during of the holiday... and hope for the best.

Mr. Chudaitov knew very well that he was playing with fire. He understood good and well that closing a kolkhoz for four days straight in the Soviet Union was a very serious matter. But because he had good relationships with all the local authorities, he believed that somehow, it would ultimately all work out.

Well, the government inspector who was sent by the regional office in Samarkand to check out what was going on at the kolkhoz showed up at the farm Friday afternoon—right when all the kolkhoz residents were in the middle of Hakafo, the dancing with the Torah scrolls on Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. He also found the grape cartons left at the farm's gate, exactly like the driver said he had left them.

The inspector walks on to the farm and finds a suspicious silence everywhere. He proceeds further on to the farm and hears the sounds of singing and dancing from afar. He follows the sounds to a hall—which he discovers to be packed with kolkhoz residents singing and dancing and celebrating.

Well, Comrade Inspector here was a Bukharian Jewish Communist who was also employed as an undercover NKVD agent—and he immediately understood what was really happening here: these “shady” Jews went on strike to celebrate the holiday of Simchas Torah, having the “nerve” to not consider at all the “great damage” they

were “causing” to the Soviet economy!

He walked up to the person in charge, which would be Mr. Chudaitov, handing him a summons in which he was ordered to appear at the good offices of the NKVD to answer charges of negligent management of the kolkhoz.

But Mr. Chudaitov recognized Comrade Inspector and knew that he was Jewish. So he pulled close to him, hugged him and said to him, “We’re happy that you came to celebrate Simchas Torah with us! Come, celebrate together with us! Later we’ll deal with all the other problems.”

Mr. Chudaitov honored him with a cup of “L’chaim” (that’s code for a good and full serving of strong Russian vodka) and a full plate of holiday food, then a second cup, and a third... well, it wasn’t too long before Comrade Inspector was Comrade Seriously Drunk Inspector.

The next morning, however, the inspector came back to himself and remembered what had happened. He went back to his higher-ups and reported on what had happened at Chudaitov’s kolkhoz.

In those days, there was a serious shortage of tires in Samarkand. In turn, this caused a prolonged shutdown of one of the biggest factories in town. But in Samarkand, as throughout the Soviet Union, nobody expended too much energy in solving the problem—and so the factory remained shuttered for several weeks, affecting all of commerce and industry in Samarkand.

So that Sunday morning, immediately after the Shabbos following Simchas Torah, Rafael Chudaitov had a plan. Before going to answer his summons with the NKVD, he flew to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, where he met with a senior officer in the military echelons in town. Mr. Chudaitov had had a connection with the man for many years now, and he now asked him to do him a favor and sell him a

large quantity of tires that had until now been held as reserves in the army's warehouses. That very day, the tires arrived at the shuttered factory in Samarkand, and the factory reopened the very next morning.

The manager of the factory wrote a thank-you letter brimming with praises for the proud Soviet citizen, Rafael Chudaitov, who displayed such attentive caring and resourcefulness and thus saved the factory. Mr. Chudaitov then went to the NKVD offices proudly bearing the letter.

At those offices, he was greeted with a serious reprimand for having shut down his kolkhoz for four days without caring about the Soviet economy—and even getting drunk together with his friends on the Jewish holiday!

So Rafael Chudaitov immediately whipped out the letter and handed it over to the regional kolkhoz authority, yelling: “I’m the one who doesn’t care about the Soviet economy?! For weeks on end, this factory was just sitting there—and not one of you did anything about it! I’m the one who flew to Tashkent to bring in tires. I’m the one who saved the factory. And you try to accuse me of wanting to hurt the Soviet economy?!” The strong words had their effect, and the authorities, scared of getting in trouble themselves, quietly set him free.

Shehecheyanu

The Rebbe quoted the Previous Rebbe as saying that the brachah of “Shehechyanu” which we recite on Simchas Torah not only refers to the holiday itself but also on the Torah, too.

“Shehechyanu” is a very popular blessing. When you buy a new garment, you say “Shehechyanu.” When you move into a new house, you say “Shehechyanu.” On the holidays—for example, on Passover

night—you say “Shehechianu.” On Rosh Hashanah, you say “Shehechianu.” Even on a mitzvah that you only do once a year—for example, the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah—you say “Shehechianu.” So here, the Previous Rebbe comes along and innovates that the Shehechianu that we say on Simchas Torah refers to the Torah, too.

The Rebbe asks: seemingly, this isn’t understood! The Torah is not a new thing—it was given to us over 3,300 years ago! Neither is it something that we didn’t touch for an entire year (like the shofar that we only blow once a year on Rosh Hashanah). On the contrary: a Jew must study the Torah every morning and night—and so what exactly are we saying “Shehechianu” on when it comes to Simchas Torah? (See Sichas of Simchas Torah night, 5718, at length; Sichos Kodesh Vol. I, pg. 26.)

Rather, the explanation is that when a Jew comes to Hakafo on Simchas Torah and dances with the Torah, then, even though the Torah was given many years ago and the person himself studied the Torah itself yesterday and two days ago, he is filled with happiness that at least rivals that of getting a new car. And when he joins the entire community and celebrates with them over the gift that G-d gave us, and he dances like Rafael Chudaitov did on Simchas Torah on that kolkhoz, then he can definitely declare, “Shehechianu v’kiyimanu v’higianu lizman hazeh.”

We now stand before the prayer of Yizkor, when we bond with the souls of our loved ones for which we pray.

So I’d like to share with you an interesting fact. At the wedding of the Rebbe, his father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe, said: “It is a known fact that at a wedding, souls up to three generations back come from the World of Truth to attend. That’s true for all of the Jewish Nation, and with some, even more come to attend” (Drushei Chasuna pg. 71).

So when we come to shul to dance and be happy on Simchas Torah, if we celebrate with the Torah as if it's the wedding of one of our kids, we'll merit that even our parents from the World Above, on whom we say Yizkor, come and dance and be happy with us together on Simchas Torah.

Good Yom Tov!