

ROSH CHODESH KISLEV

*THE REBBE RETURNS HOME
FOR THE FIRST TIME
AFTER HIS HEART ATTACK
OF SIMCHAS TORAH*

*Simcha Poretz Geder —
Happiness breaks
all boundaries*

Thursday night, the eve of *Rosh Chodesh Kislev* 5738 (jWka,-November 10, 1977), is an evening that will remain with chassidim forever — for on that evening, the Rebbe went home for the first time after his heart attack on Simchas Torah.

Spontaneously, chassidim the world over began celebrating and *farbrenging* with singing and dancing far into the night, thanking Hashem for giving the Rebbe such a speedy and complete recovery. Since then, chassidim celebrate *Rosh Chodesh Kislev* every year with a special *Seudas Hodaah*, thanking Hashem for the Rebbe's good health.

Today, after *Gimmel Tammuz*, we appreciate *Rosh Chodesh Kislev* even more and thank Hashem with a deeper understanding. Not only did the Rebbe regain his health at that time, but we were blessed with his *nesius* (*b'gashmias*) for an additional seventeen¹ years.

During these years, many of us developed our personal *hiskashrus* — bond — to the Rebbe. For others, it gave them the opportunity to visit the Rebbe and receive his guidance and blessings.

The Rebbe worked tirelessly during these years to uplift the world and succeeded to the point where he was able to make the ground breaking declaration: “The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

It is our hope and prayer that from celebrating the Rebbe’s initial recovery, we will speedily merit to celebrate the moment that we see the Rebbe once again with the *hisgalus* of *Melech HaMoshiach*.

1. Chassidim always look to the Rebbe’s words to see if there is something to which he is hinting. At the *Yud Gimmel Tishrei farbrengen* of that year, the Rebbe mentioned that the Frierdiker Rebbe was already extremely ill in 5693 (dWmr,-1933), yet he lived for another seventeen years.

Also at that *farbrengen*, when the Rebbe sang the song, *Tzoma Lecha Nafshi*, instead of singing the words of *Lir'os Uzcho U'chivodecho* (to see Your strength and glory), the Rebbe sang *Liros Nafshi* — which means “to see my soul.”

The moments that one spends together with his Rebbe are uniquely precious times that every chassid treasures. He eagerly awaits his next opportunity to be with his Rebbe, to be inspired by the holiness that radiates from the *tzaddik's* very being.

While this is true of every occasion that one is privileged to be with his Rebbe, there are some occasions that have a special place in the heart of every chassid. One of these times is the *Hakofos* of Simchas Torah.

It is no wonder, then, that chassidim would flock to Crown Heights to fulfill the *mitzvah* of greeting one's Rebbe on the *Yom Tov* of Sukkos.² Even if someone couldn't come for the entire *Yom Tov*, he made every effort to be there for at least the last days of Sukkos, to participate in the Rebbe's *Hakofos*.

One cannot describe the sheer joy which glowed from everyone's face, or imagine the lively dancing, or hear the singing that vibrated throughout the *shul*, and spilled out into the streets — unless he was there, at the *Hakofos* of the Rebbe. All felt as if the Rebbe had picked them up and carried them to a new level of joy, to a higher place in their service to *Hashem*. Their spirit was rejuvenated, and this strength took you through the year, as you anxiously awaited the next *Simchas Torah* — when you would join the Rebbe once again.

5738 (jwwka,-1977) was no different. Guests in greater numbers than ever converged on Crown Heights from all over the world, all prepared to join in the Rebbe's *Hakofos*.

On Sunday night, the night of *Hoshanah Rabbah*, the Rebbe came downstairs to recite the *Sefer Tehillim* at 1:00 a.m. The entire *Tehillim* was completed by 2:45 am.

The next morning, after *Shacharis*, the Rebbe stood in the *sukkah* and personally gave *lechach* to every person on the seemingly endless line. Finally, every last person had the

2. *Rambam, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 5 halacha 7.

opportunity to receive *lechach* from the Rebbe and be blessed by him for a good and sweet year. The Rebbe then reentered 770 to *daven Mincha*. After *Mincha*, the Rebbe was to go home to eat the *Seudah*.

During *Mincha*, a new line formed near the *sukkah*. A group of newly-arrived guests stood by, hoping that they, too, might receive *lechach* from the Rebbe.

As the Rebbe left 770 to go home, he noticed the line of people outside the *sukkah*. He returned to the *sukkah* and patiently and graciously distributed honey cake to all.

Finally, the Rebbe departed for his home on President Street. Barely half an hour later, however, the Rebbe returned to 770. Some people commented, "When did the Rebbe have a chance to eat?"

By *Maariv*, the *shul* was already full, but everyone knew that the many hundreds of people who went on *Tahalucha*³ to inspire other Jews with the joy of the *Yom Tov* would be joining those already waiting, for the highlight of the evening, or better yet, the year: the *Hakofos*.

By nine o'clock, 770 was packed to capacity — with people squeezed into their places — as a constant flow of newcomers struggled to find a toehold or a hand grip along the walls and on the bleachers. The singing swelled, becoming louder and louder, with those assembled jumping up and down in tune with the melody. The entire building seemed to shake as the dancing intensified.

Suddenly, at nine-thirty, a hush fell upon the sea of people, and the crowd parted to make way for the Rebbe to pass through. As soon as the Rebbe entered, the singing resumed with a new *chaiyus* — the Rebbe leading the *niggun* with vigorous movements of his arms.

3. The main *Tahalucha* was going to be the following night, on *Simchas Torah*, when all Jews celebrate *Hakafos*. On the night of *Shemini Atzeres*, only chassidim and Sephardim celebrate *Hakafos*, as it is not a *minhag Ashkenaz*.

The auction and recital of the seventeen *possukim* of *Atah Haraisa*, which usually took well over an hour were done in extreme haste. All three repetitions went by quickly and were finished in a mere half hour, much to the bewilderment of those assembled.

Some people openly questioned, "Why the rush this year?" Others approved of the arrangements, offering that the Rebbe barely had any time to eat that day, and that he had slept little the previous night.⁴ The following night, they reasoned, would also be a long one, with a *farbrengen* scheduled, followed by another set of *Hakofos* for *Simchas Torah*. And on Wednesday evening, another *farbrengen* would begin shortly before *shekiah* (sunset) and last for many hours. Then after *Maariv*, the Rebbe would say *Havdalah*, followed by the giving of *Kos Shel Bracha* to many thousands of *Yidden* — a tremendous feat in itself, lasting until the wee hours of the morning. Some even claimed that all this was done in a rush at the request of the *Rebbetzin*.

The first *Hakafah* began with everyone singing the *niggun* of Reb Levik — the Rebbe's father. As always, the first *Hakafah* was the Rebbe's, and he danced with his brother-in-law, the Rashag, as he did every year.

As he circled the *bimah*, the Rebbe looked around the packed room, looking intently at and inspiring the assembled. To sum up those brief few moments in the words of our Sages: "Lucky are the eyes who have beheld it"; and "Whoever did not see this rejoicing, did not see rejoicing in his life."⁵

The second and third *Hakofos* went as usual. Different individuals were honored with the privilege of carrying the *Sifrei Torah*. From the Rebbe's platform at *Mizrach*, the Rebbe led the singing with vigorous arm movements and clapping. Although the Rebbe showed great joy, it was noticeable that

4. This in addition to the Rebbe's custom of not sleeping Thursday and Friday night.

5. Tractate *Sukkah* 51a.

his motions — even with his strenuous efforts — were slower than in years past. This was proof that the *gabbaim*'s quick recital of the *possukim* was not uncalled for. However, we could never have imagined what was going to happen shortly afterwards, in front of our very eyes!

The fourth *Hakafah* began. As before, the Rebbe turned around to look at the *Sifrei Torah* and those carrying them. The singing began, and the Rebbe swung his arms in rhythm to the melody. Suddenly, the Rebbe stopped. His face became a sickly white. A moment later, he turned from his *shtender* to Rabbi Groner and asked that his chair be brought to him.

The *Hakafah* ended abruptly, and the people assembled began to feel the sense of urgency brought on by the Rebbe's alarming situation. Pandemonium broke out, as people began to shout, "Clear the *bimah*! Empty the *shul*! Bring the Rebbe water! Everyone leave! The Rebbe needs fresh air!"

Inside the *shul*, the body heat that had been generated by the tremendous crowd was intense, and the air was stuffy and humid. The crowd made an urgent rush for the door, and people poured out into the street to allow the air to better circulate inside the *shul*.

The *shul* was now virtually empty. The chassidim congregated outside the *shul* in small groups, speechless with worry and concern for the Rebbe. They began to recite *Tehillim* for the Rebbe's health.⁶

Meanwhile, inside 770, the chassidim who were medical professionals rushed to the Rebbe's side. Dr. Seligson, the Rebbe's personal physician, took the Rebbe's pulse and continued doing so until specialists arrived. Since the Rebbe insisted that the remaining *Hakofos* be performed in the *shul*, they were done in a hurried fashion. For the seventh *Hakafah*, which is also the Rebbe's, he refused to do it on his platform, but insisted on going to the middle of the *shul* where he

6. Somehow Jews all over the world heard about this, and they all participated in the saying of *Tehillim*.

danced the *Hakafah* with the Rashag. However, after going around only a few times, the Rashag feigned fatigue and stopped, ending the *Hakafah*.

After *Hakofos*, the Rebbe went upstairs and secluded himself in his room. Only after a few long and anxious minutes did the Rebbe reopen the door.⁷ Shortly afterwards, the Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka came to 770.

Those in the Rebbe's room tried to persuade the Rebbe to eat something, but the Rebbe said he must first make *Kiddush* – on wine – in the *sukkah*.⁸

On the way out of the *sukkah*, the Rebbe's face regained some color. His clapping and arm movements seemed stronger, but the chassidim were still worried. What had happened to the Rebbe in *shul*? Was he well?

The Rebbe's secretaries then announced, as the Rebbe had requested them to, that everyone should rejoice in the happiness of the *Yom Tov*, and the remaining *Hakofos* should be done with great joy.

While the dancing and singing did continue and grow in intensity as many chassidim danced throughout the night, a feeling of uneasiness remained. This feeling intensified with the arrival of many doctors to 770; some even came with a police escort.

Only later did the full extent of the Rebbe's condition become known: He had suffered a major heart attack.⁹

While the doctors claimed that the Rebbe could only receive the care he needed in a hospital;¹⁰ the Rebbe was firm in his decision to remain in 770.

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- 7. After the insistant knocking of Chana, the Rashag's wife.
 - 8. After the Rebbe stated that he needed to make *Kiddush*, they offered him grape juice, but the Rebbe insisted on wine. Then, when they brought the wine, the Rebbe said he would make *Kiddush* only in the *sukkah*.
 - 9. At that time it was learned that on the twelfth of *Kislev*, fourteen years earlier, in 1963, the Rebbe had had a minor heart attack.

They then turned to the Rebbetzin and asked her permission that they be allowed to take the Rebbe to the hospital, as they felt it was the only way to properly care for the Rebbe. However the Rebbetzin told them not to go against the Rebbe's wishes.

A few hours later, at 5:00 in the morning, the Rebbe's condition took a critical turn, and once again there was a discussion whether or not the Rebbe should go to the hospital.

Seeing that the Rebbe wished to remain in 770, Dr. Seligson told the Rabbonim (who were considering if they should *pasken* that *halachically* the Rebbe must listen to the doctor's advice of going to a hospital), he is of the opinion that medically, staying in 770 is good for the Rebbe.

He explained that while being in a hospital has advantages over being in the patient's home, the doctors must take into consideration the patient's feelings. By abiding by his wishes to remain in 770, the effects of being there would help the Rebbe to speedily regain his health.

Dr. Ira Weiss, a renowned heart specialist who flew in from Chicago, concurred with this opinion. He said that since he has some understanding of the lifestyle of a chassid, he could appreciate, to an extent, the role of a Rebbe. He also noted, from his own experience with his other patients, that when they would follow the Rebbe's instructions, they were guaranteed a recovery.

He concluded that while a hospital would be the proper place for a person in the Rebbe's condition, the Rebbe's desire to remain in 770 with his chassidim must be taken into consideration. They would therefore try to make the Rebbe as comfortable as possible, which is, in itself, an important part

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10. Some were so firm in their conviction that the Rebbe be taken to the hospital, that they asked to be replaced by other doctors if their request was not carried out. They said that the Rebbe could not receive proper medical care unless he was taken to the hospital, and as such, they could not take responsibility for his care.

of the recovery. As for the necessity of being in a hospital, all the necessary medical equipment was already brought to 770, by doctors Lev and Richter, thus they are prepared for any medical situation.

After *Shacharis* the following morning, an announcement was made that the Rebbe had said, "The custom of going on *Tahalucha* and spreading the joy of the *chag* to other *shuls* in the outlying areas of New York City should not be stopped. Chassidim should go on *Tahalucha* as usual, with even greater vigor. Those who wish to aid in my recovery should bring happiness to other Jews...."

During the day, the Rebbe gave Rabbi S.A. Kazarnovsky, an elderly and distinguished chassid, two bottles of vodka to distribute among those that would be assembled at the *farbrengen* that evening preceding the *Hakofos* of *Simchas Torah*. The Rebbe later added that, "The chassidim should visualize that the one who usually sits on the chair is not missing...."

Needless to say, what had happened to the Rebbe had shocked the chassidim to the core. Yet they went on to fulfill his requests, knowing that this would bring true *nachas* and *gezunt* to the Rebbe. Indeed, in many *shuls* that were visited, the members were doubly shocked; first, that the chassidim came when the Rebbe was not well, and secondly, that they had the ability to dance this year with even greater vigor than in previous years.

After the *farbrengen*, everyone joined in the *Hakofos* of *Simchas Torah* in 770. They sang one song almost continuously, exchanging the well-known words, "zol shoin zein di Geulah, Moshiach zol shoin kumen," "The Redemption should be already, Moshiach should come already," with a new phrase: "Di Rebbe zol gezunt zein," the Rebbe should be well. A short time later, they changed the words to "Der Rebbe is gezunt!" — the Rebbe is healthy! They sang this song the entire *Simchas Torah*, tears flowing down many faces as they thought of the pain that the Rebbe was undergoing.

The fervent singing of this song was so loud and clear that it could be heard upstairs in the Rebbe's room. After standing up briefly, the Rebbe told Rabbi Groner to tell the chassidim that one can virtually see the improvement the Rebbe was feeling. When one doctor, concerned about the noise level, asked the Rebbe if the singing was bothering him, the Rebbe replied: "But this is such sweet music..."

On Simchas Torah in the morning, after *Hakofos* and *davening* which took place in the Rebbe's room,¹¹ the Rebbe told Rabbi Groner to instruct everyone to wash for bread before that evening's the *farbrengen*. The Rebbe then told Rabbi Groner exactly what to say during that *farbrengen*. The Rebbe ended with the words, "As joyous as the singing was yesterday [on Shemini Atzeres], it should be twice as *lebedig* today on Simchas Torah!"

At the *farbrengen*, Rabbi Groner repeated what the Rebbe had told him: "When something is missing, it should be viewed as a temporary situation, one which is [necessary] to bring us to a higher level. This is exemplified in my present state: When doctors need to draw blood to obtain vital information, they take a syringe, and by creating a vacuum in the tube, this causes the blood they need to flow into it.¹² So, too, this situation should bring us to a higher level."

As per the Rebbe's instructions, Reb Yoel Kahan expounded on the Rebbe's message, bringing various insights from different *maamarim* to explain what the Rebbe had meant.

At around 11 p.m., while the *farbrengen* was still in progress, Rabbi Groner brought down the Rebbe's *becher*, which had some wine left over in it from *Havdalah*, and a bottle of wine. The Rebbe had instructed that *Kos Shel Bracha* be given from his cup to those who were attending the *farbrengen*.

11. We should mention that that Simchas Torah the Rebbe took the *aliyah* of *Chasan Bereishis* as he does every year.

12. This is in essence what Yonason told Dovid [*HaMelech*] "You will be remembered because your place would be empty." Shmuel 1, ch. 20:19.

He also mentioned that the Rebbe had asked him to make a special announcement after *Maariv*, before *Havdalah*.

After *Maariv* Rabbi Groner announced, to the delight and surprise of the assembled, that the Rebbe would be saying a brief *sicha* from his room. The talk would be broadcast through the loudspeakers throughout the *shul*.

There was great rejoicing over this announcement: less than 48 hours after the Rebbe had suffered a heart attack, we would merit to hear him speak to us! Words cannot describe the happiness that those assembled felt upon hearing this good news.

While the doctors had set a limit of only five minutes for the Rebbe's talk, the Rebbe continued speaking for a total of twenty minutes. He elaborated on the idea he had directed Rabbi Groner to share at the *farbrengen* earlier. He also said: "Because I was unable to speak to you on *Yom Tov*, it allowed me now to speak, when Jews all over the world can listen via the hook-up."¹³

Towards the end of the *sicha*, he explained a concept of *Chassidus* — as is done in a *maamar*. At the end of the *sicha*, the Rebbe became very emotional and his voice choked with tears.

When asked by the doctors later on what he had spoken about, he said: "I was blessing the chassidim and speaking about *Moshiach*."

After the *sicha*, the Rebbe asked for the letters that came during *Yom Tov*. In response to the doctor's suggestion that he should wait a few weeks before resuming his custom of answering letters, the Rebbe said: "Does the Jew who writes to me now need less assistance than those who will write in the following weeks? Additionally, if I wait a few weeks, the letters will pile up and it will be a greater strain on me to answer all of them at once!"

13. This concept of utilizing a negative aspect for the positive is explained throughout *Chassidus*.

The following morning, Thursday, the 24th of *Tishrei*, the *mazkiros* (secretariat of the Rebbe) announced in the name of the Rebbe that his health was improving and that people should not stop writing to him. If they refrained from sending him mail, they would be withholding from the Rebbe something that he is accustomed to, and that could affect his health.

As astonished as the chassidim and doctors were by everything that happened so far, the next announcement took them completely by surprise. The Rebbe told Rabbi Groner that he would be accepting chassidim for *yechidus* that night.¹⁴ Initially, the doctors were opposed to it; but after seeing the Rebbe's determination and his improvement, they gave their consent.

That night, the *orchim* who were leaving before Sunday gave the Rebbe their *pidyon nefesh*. The Rebbe then gave each one of them a dollar and blessed them with a good trip and a successful year *b'gashmias* and *b'ruchnias*. He wished them further that “the concept of *v'Yaakov halach l'darko* — should be fulfilled in all aspects of life.”¹⁵

By Friday, the Rebbe also edited the *sicha* that he had said on Wednesday night (*motzo'ei Yom Tov*), which was then printed and distributed before *Shabbos*, much to everyone's delight.

After *Shabbos*, the Rebbe requested from the doctors that he be permitted to travel to the *Ohel* as was his holy custom every *Erev Rosh Chodesh*, promising that this time he would

14. It was the Rebbe's custom to accept the *orchim* for *yechidus* on the night following *Yom Tov*.

15. The origin of the concept of “*V'Yaakov halach l'darko*” is that when Yaakov Avinu left *Eretz Yisroel*, he took along with him the holiness of *Eretz Yisroel* so that he should not be affected by his new surroundings.

How this applies to our lives is that after *Tishrei*, a month full of holidays where we are rejuvenated and elevated, one goes back to his regular life and work. Nevertheless, the inspiration of *Tishrei* should remain with him throughout the entire year in order that he can continue to strive to elevate himself.

be there for only half an hour. However the doctors were firm in their decision not to grant permission.

Meanwhile, Doctor Weiss, who had been away from Chicago for over a week, was in a dilemma. Due to his extended absence, there was a possibility that his position in the hospital might suffer. On the other hand, he was totally committed to remain with the Rebbe until he regained his former health.

When the Rebbe heard that Doctor Weiss' wife wanted her husband to return, the Rebbe told him that he should explain to her the truth of the situation and then do as she asked. Once she realized that the Rebbe needed not just any doctor but her husband, she told him to stay. In addition, temporary arrangements were made to cover his absence at the hospital.

A week later, when arrangements were made for Dr. Levi Lev, a close friend and colleague of his, to take over,¹⁶ together with Dr. Meir Resnick, Dr. Weiss returned to Chicago, but came in as often as needed.

On the second day of *Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan*, the Rebbe instructed that the barricades that had been erected around 770 be removed,¹⁷ and that the *bochurim* should learn upstairs. In response to one of the doctors' concerns that perhaps the noise would disturb the Rebbe's rest, the Rebbe responded: "The sounds of *Torah* study do not disturb!"

Every *Motzo'ei Shabbos* in the month that followed, the Rebbe said a *sicha* from his room. During the week, the Rebbe would edit them, and by Friday they were published.

During *Cheshvan*, the Rebbe left his room twice: On one occasion, for *Kiddush Levanah*, and the second time on

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- 16. The Rebbe asked Dr. Weiss, "Who is now going to give me the injections?" When Dr. Weiss replied, "Dr. Lev," the Rebbe [knowing Dr. Lev's feelings as a chassid to a Rebbe] said, "Before he will give me an injection, someone might have to give him a tranquilizer."
 - 17. The Rebbe found out about the barricades from a picture in the *Algemeiner Journal*.

Thursday the twenty-second of *Cheshvan* at 2:40 p.m., when he went into the Frierdiker Rebbe's library — which was in the building next door — as five crates of the Frierdiker Rebbe's library were finally returned by the Polish Government.¹⁸

Finally, on Thursday night, *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, at around six in the evening, the Rebbe went to his home on President Street from 770. That night, the chassidim celebrated joyously,¹⁹ for they knew that the Rebbe was well on his way to a complete recovery.

On *Zos* (the last day of) *Chanukah*, the Rebbe called in Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda (J.J.) Hecht and instructed him to buy *challos*, as he wished to wash after *Mincha* and then personally give *kos shel brocha* [since he did not personally give *kos shel brocha* to everyone on *Motzo'ei Simchas Torah*]. However, he was not to inform anyone of this besides his brother, Rabbi Sholom Hecht²⁰ and Rabbi Junik (who always had the honor of giving the Rebbe the water and holding the basin when the Rebbe would wash *negel vasser*).

Three and a half months later, before Pesach, the Rebbe gave all the doctors some of his own *shemura Matza* and an envelope with payment. (Evidently, that is when the Rebbe felt completely healed). And on *Shivi'i* (the seventh day of) *shel Pesach*, the Rebbe came to the *shul* downstairs for *Krias Hatorah* for the first time since *Simchas Torah*.

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- 18. Special mention should be given to Rabbi A. Chitrik who went to Poland and verified that the *seforim* were from the Frierdiker Rebbe's library.
 - 19. The Rebbetzin observed the dancing from the window of the second floor of 770 and mentioned that she was touched by the true feelings of happiness of the Chassidim.
 - 20. Rabbi Sholom Hecht obtained the dollar bills that the Rebbe requested in order that he could give them to the chassidim. When he presented them to the Rebbe (in the Rebbe's room), the Rebbe told him to look at the introduction to the *Zohar*.

There it is recorded that the *Neshama* (soul) of Rav Chiya (a student of the Rashbi), was brought to the heavenly court for its final judgement. The *neshama* asked that it be allowed to return to the earth as there is still a lot to be accomplished.

The Heavenly court agreed and sent the *neshama* back to its earthly body for some more years.

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For chassidim, the month of *Kislev* is indeed an auspicious one, full of *Chassidishe Yomim Tovim*. It is called *Chodesh HaGeulah* – the month of Redemption – as both the Alter Rebbe and Mitteler Rebbe gained their freedom in this month.

It is also the month when *Chassidus* was revealed to the world: *Chassidus* explains the significance of it being revealed in the third month from *Tishrei* as compared to *Mattan Torah*, which is in *Sivan*, the third month from *Nissan*.²¹

On *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, the head and beginning of the month of *Geulah*, a day which is so connected with the Rebbe, it is only appropriate that through *Chassidishe farbrengens* we strengthen our commitment to fulfill all of the Rebbe's wishes, especially the last one, which is to do everything in our ability to bring the ultimate *Geulah*, through *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.

21. In *Chassidus*, the difference between *Nissan* and *Tishrei* is explained at length. *Nissan* is the month when Hashem redeemed us on His own. *Tishrei*, on the other hand, is the month when we elevate ourselves. Appropriately, *Mattan Torah*, when Hashem gave us the Torah, follows *Nissan*, and *Yud Tes Kislev*, which is the *Rosh Hashanah L'Chassidus*, whose purpose is to elevate the entire world, follows *Tishrei*.