



BADERECH

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Vayigash: Shanah Tovah

The streets beyond the shtetl were loud—music, drunken laughter, shouts that rose into the cold sky. Fireworks lit up the dark. A night of noise, of escape, of people losing themselves in the revelry of escapism and partying. In the big city, it was rumored that a giant mirrored ball made of crystals and reflective glass would be lowered from the sky, a sphere of descending light. Taverns were full of merrymakers, and peasants by the thousands gathered to prepare for the *Różana Miska*, the great ‘Rose Bowl’ athletic competition on the morrow.

Inside, in the warm glow of the *beis medrash*, the chassidim of the Ohev Yisrael of Apta sat bent over their sefarim, trying to drown out the obnoxious sounds of the outside. As the windows panes shook, the pressure of the raucous sounds pushed inward, until suddenly the *tzadik* entered.

Without a word, the Ohev Yisrael walked to the frost-covered window, opened it a crack, and let the noise pour in. The chasidim were startled. Why allow the disruptive, impure

tumult of the street into the fortress of sanctity, their beloved *beis medrash*? The Rebbe stood still, eyes half-closed, smiling, as if he were listening for something deeper beneath the chaos. After a long pause, the Ohev Yisrael closed the window gently and turned to his chasidim:

“Kinderlach...do you hear them celebrating? This is how the nations begin their year—noise, confusion, intoxication and escape. And look at us: when a Yid begins the year, he stands in awe. He prepares with a full month of focus, *selichos* and listening to the wake up call and cry of the Shofar. He pours himself into *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, *tzedakah*. With a trembling heart, he embarks on a journey across the seas of the world to his Master, to coronate the *Mel-ech*, electrified by the lofty atmosphere of the Yamim Nora'im, the Days of Awe!”

The Rebbe paused, the silence of the study hall suddenly overpowering the noise outside. “When you hear their shouting,” he said softly, “let it remind us of who we are!”

The noise outside then dropped, becoming a background to a different kind of sound: the quiet pulse of Jewish life, the heartbeat of a people carrying the privilege and responsibility of a covenantal life of holiness and obligation, as they pass through a world that often forgets its own.

The proprietor of Hecht’s sefarim store on Coney Island in Flatbush, Rav Sholom Hecht, once entered into a Yechidus (private meeting)

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with the Lubavitcher Rebbe on the morning of January 1st. At some point during the Yechidus the Rebbe wished him “a happy new year”. Rabbi Hecht was very surprised. The Rebbe informed him that on the secular new year, the *heilige* Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev would bless his *kehillah* with such a greeting”, and explained the Berdichever’s practice as based on “*Kapitel Pey Zayin*” in Tehillim:

ה' יספר בכתוב עמים זה ילד-שם סלה

“[When] Hashem counts in the script of the peoples forever, [He will say,] ‘This one was born there.’” (*Tehillim*, 87:6)

Rashi explains that in the future, when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* inscribes the nations for *dira'on*, an abhorrence, He will count the Jews who are assimilated among them and those who were coerced to abandon Judaism among them, and extract them from their midst. “Then (Hashem shall) say, ‘This one was born of those of Zion,’ and He will choose them for Himself.... taking those assimilated among them and bringing them for a tribute... there will be among them Kohanim and Levi'im who are unrecognizable, ‘but they are revealed to Me’, for אלקינו לה' הנסתרות, ‘The secret things belong to Hashem, our God (*Devarim*, 29:28).”

Rama (149:12 in non-censored editions) suggests that practically, most people do not associate New Year's with any specific religious observance, and are not even aware of its religious history. Indeed, for the majority of the westernized world, it is simply a day to celebrate the start of the new year on the calendar, make new year resolutions, purchase a gym membership and enjoy sales at department stores and online. For Yidden, however, January 1st actually marks the culmination of a wondrous *tekufah* of giving and generosity, since practically every Jewish institution, yeshivah and organization, has sent



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out 'last licks' fundraising emails encouraging end-of-year tax deductible charitable giving. And that alone is a *sibah l'mesibah*, 'a valid reason to celebrate this day'.

One of the most moving and powerful *nigunim* of the Kedushas Levi, a love song to awaken merit for Klal Yisrael, begins with the words, *Lomir dertzeilen di mailehs fin Yiddishe kinder*, “Let us relate the positive attributes of the Jewish People...” It has been a long December, and there's reason to believe that *b'ezras Hashem*, this year will be better than the last. As the civil calendar shifts to 2026, let us resolve to “relate the positive attributes” of our nation, to remember all the good times and hold on to these moments as they pass, counting these final moments toward *Geulah*.

May this be a *good g'bentched yohr* for Am Yisrael and all the good people of the world! *L'chaim!* ■

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