

**The Shul**  
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October 10, 2020

Shemini Atzeret

22 Tishrei, 5781

### R. Levi Yitzchak's "Atah Hareisa"

The synagogue was packed to the rafters. The whole town had gathered as one for the annual Simchat Torah celebration. Only moments to go, and the stirring sounds of the ancient "Atah Hareisa" prayer would ring forth throughout the synagogue. People looked at each other in nervous anticipation; from among all those assembled, who would be chosen to lead the community in prayer?

Years before he had won worldwide fame as the rabbi of Berditchev, the young Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was widely respected for his erudition and unique path to spirituality. He was treasured for his dedication to others and his commitment to G-dliness. Unfortunately, one of the only people not fully enamored of the youthful prodigy was his own father-in-law.



Painting by Alex Levin (www.ArtLevin.com)

Undeterred by convention, and determined to follow his own path in Judaism, Levi Yitzchak had only just returned to town after months spent exploring the nascent chassidic movement, meeting its leaders and committing to the chassidic way of life. His father-in-law was livid; he mistrusted these revolutionary ideas and new-fangled methods of serving G-d, and worried about his son-in-law's prospects. Was this the end of all his hopes for his beloved daughter?

The other townsfolk were more forgiving of Levi Yitzchak's impetuositities and fervor. As proof of their regard, they selected him to recite the "Atah Hareisa" prayer leading off the Simchat Torah service.

Levi Yitzchak approached the central podium in a state of constrained ecstasy, and picked up the tallit (prayer shawl) preparatory to commencing the ritual. However, to the bemusement of the assembled crowd, he paused for a moment of contemplation, and then placed the tallit back in its place.

After a short while he again picked up the prayer shawl, only to once again replace it on the lectern.

When he picked up the tallit for the third time, an uneasy murmur filled the synagogue. The young rabbi seemed to be fighting a silent battle with an unseen opponent. Finally, in a dramatic denouement, Levi Yitzchak placed the tallit firmly back in its place, and announced: "If you're a chassid and a scholar, then you lead the prayers!" and stalked back to his seat near the side wall of the synagogue.

His father-in-law was mortified. Bad enough that the young man insisted on adopting the chassidic lifestyle with its attendant new customs, but did he have to disgrace himself with public exhibitionism as well?

When asked for a justification of his unusual behavior, Levi Yitzchak explained that as he had approached the podium, he had suddenly realized that he was not alone; his yetzer hara (evil inclination) wished to accompany him in prayer.

"You don't belong here," he challenged the tempter. "I have been selected to represent the community because I am a scholar. What legitimacy do you have?"

"If you are a scholar, then I'm a scholar too," the evil one replied. "Wherever you studied, whichever yeshivahs you attended, I was right there with you."

"But I am a chassid," Levi Yitzchak counterclaimed. "I have just returned from the rebbe's court, where I learned to pray as a Jew should and devote myself to G-dliness."

"I too am a chassid. When you traveled to the rebbe, I accompanied you. When you were initiated in the ways of faith, I came along for the ride. I have every right to join you in prayer tonight and keep you company under that tallit."

"I could not win," Levi Yitzchak confessed. "He was right. I admitted to myself that I had been living a lie. He and I were partners in crime. The ties that bound me to evil were as strong as they were when I first began my journey of faith. I was almost ready to concede in despair, when I was seized by one last inspiration. With my remaining strength, I turned on my tormentor and cried, 'If you are a chassid and a scholar as you claim, then you lead the prayers, and leave me out of your foul plots,' and I ran from the stage."

*(continued on the other side)*

What does this all mean?

I first heard this story as a child, and have always been fascinated by it, yet it occurred to me recently that I had no real understanding of the deeper meaning behind the whole bizarre episode.

Upon reflection, I would suggest that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was making a fundamental argument about man's attempt at self-improvement.

We go through the motions, we try to change ourselves for the better, yet how many can claim to have truly reformed? The sad reality is that we bring all our peccadilloes and character flaws along with us on our journey through life.

It is not enough to meander along the sterile pathways of aseptic existence, waiting and hoping to spontaneously combust. We've got to practice shock therapy, either bodily throwing away our ego and evil, or fleeing in a totally new direction, leaving the old us behind.

Rosh Hashanah has come and gone; Yom Kippur is now just a memory. We gathered in synagogues and cried and prayed to G-d. I promised to change, to become a new person inspired by new purpose, but I'm still the same facile fraud that I always was.

Simchat Torah is my hope for self-transformation. The High Holidays were all about prayer and performance; Simchat Torah is our chance for passion and purpose. We may have spent the hours of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur praying, but are we sure that our inclination towards evil wasn't with us all along, under the tallit?

On Simchat Torah, we close our minds and open up our hearts. We dance till we drop, and allow the spirit of the day to permeate our souls. We refuse to allow even a thin veneer of sham spirituality to distract us from our journey towards G-d.

Unconcerned by public opinion, dedicated to nothing but the truth, on Simchat Torah we let our inner Jew hang out and proudly proclaim that nothing in our life exists other than our union with G-d.

*(By Elisha Greenbaum from www.chabad.org)*

**A Special thank you to Sarala Tarshish for assembling several hundred candy bags for Simchas Torah.**

**Yahrzeits This Week:**

Yossi Statman      26 Tishrei - Tuesday night / Wednesday      for father      Tzvi ben Naftali Meyer

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**DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE**

**Friday– Hoshana Rabba, 10/9 — 21 Tishrei**

Shacharit — 6:15 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.  
Candles — 6:17 p.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 6:15 p.m.

**Shabbat – Shemini Atzeret, 10/10 — 22 Tishrei**

Shacharit – 9:00 a.m.  
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 10:00 a.m.  
Yizkor — approximately 10:30 a.m.  
Minchah — 6:10 p.m.  
Candles & Ma'ariv — 7:16 p.m.  
Followed by limited Hakofot outside

**Sunday– Simchat Torah, 10/11 — 23 Tishrei**

Shacharit — 9:30 a.m.  
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 10:01 a.m.  
Limited Hakofot  
Minchah — Immediately after Mussaf  
Ma'ariv — 7:14 p.m.

**Monday, 10/12 — 24 Tishrei**

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 6:15 p.m.

**Tuesday, 10/13 — 25 Tishrei**

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 6:15 p.m.

**Wednesday, 10/14 — 26 Tishrei**

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 6:15 p.m.

**Thursday, 10/15 — 27 Tishrei**

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 6:15 p.m.

**Friday, 10/16 — 28 Tishrei**

Shacharit — 7:00  
Candles — 6:06 p.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 6:10 p.m.