

“Sweet Songs I Shall Weave”

For nine years, from 1955 to 1963, towards the end of the Simchat Torah celebrations in 770 (Eastern Parkway -- ‘Lubavitch World Headquarters’ in Brooklyn) the Lubavitcher Rebbe would teach a new *niggun* (chasic song) to the large crowd assembled there. These tunes have become a significant part of the Chabad musical classics. One of them [from 1961] is a version of *Anim Zemirot*¹ which had never been heard before. The Rebbe began with an introductory story and then proceeded to teach the melody for the words of the first stanza.

(Translation:)

*Pleasant songs and hymns I shall weave
because my soul longs for You.
My soul desires the shade of Your hand,
to know and internalize each of Your mysteries.*

The story was about a holy Jew in synagogue on Yom Kippur. As the congregation was praying *Maariv* (the Evening Prayer) at the termination of the 25+ hours fast, he put one foot on a bench and, still covered by his *tallit* (prayer shawl), began singing *Anim Zemirot* to the said tune. When the *gabbai* (*shul* manager) opened the *shul* for the morning prayers, the holy Jew was still in the same position and still singing the same tune [not yet having broken his fast].

Within a short time after the session with the Rebbe, a lively discussion arose among the chasidim as to who this Jew was. The general consensus was that he must have been the Rebbe himself, but there were many differing opinions. So they turned to the famous chasid Reuven Dunin, who had a particularly close relationship with the Rebbe, and begged him to ask the Rebbe who the person in the story was.

Reuven Dunin fulfilled his mission faithfully. With a smile the Rebbe replied, “No it wasn’t me; I don’t know who it was. But I do know that he was not a Chabad chasid,² as I will explain.”

¹ Sung in most Askenazic synagogues at the end of the Shabbat morning prayer service with the Holy Ark open. The words reference several high themes of Kabbalah, so chasidim relate to them with reverence [which is reflected in their tunes for it. For example, see the link at the end of the story].

² Other sources report that it was a chasid, but not Chabad.

There was once a poor Jew living in Russia, who eked out a living by going from door to door selling haberdashery. It occurred to him that if he could ever save enough money to open his own factory he could make a larger profit on his sales and become rich. So for many years he put aside a few coins every day until he had saved up enough to buy a plot of land on which to build his factory.

On the way to sign the contract with the seller and purchase the chosen plot he passed by a Jewish inn. Outside the inn stood a desperately distraught woman surrounded by her children, crying hysterically. He asked her what the problem was and she answered that her husband had just passed away leaving them without a penny. She told him that her wicked and heartless landlord was threatening to evict them and throw them in jail if they did not pay the rent immediately. He asked her how much she needed and she quoted the exact sum of money that he had in his pocket.

Without hesitating for a second, and with a big smile, he gave her all of his money. His factory was not to be, but that was of no consequence in comparison to having merited to save a Jewish family from destitution.

A storm broke out in Heaven as a result of this amazing act of *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice), and it was decreed that Elijah the Prophet should go down to earth and reward the generous Jew with a choice of either untold riches or a visit to the heavenly *Gan Eden* [to hear how a *niggun* is sung there]. He chose the latter and [this came to be for him when] immediately after Yom Kippur, he was singing An'im Zemirot throughout the night until the following morning.³

The Rebbe then looked at Reuven Dunin, smiled and said, “But if he would have been a Lubavitcher, he would have opted to take the money in order to establish and maintain Chabad institutions all over the world.”

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the written version of **Yaakov Cass**, which he heard on Simchat Torah last year (5780/2019) from his dear friend, Rabbi Yitzchak-Yirmiyahu ben Moshe-Lipa, who passed away exactly two months later at the age of 54 on Kislev 22. First published in the popular Israeli English language weekly, “Living Jewish” (#720). The additions in square [ ] brackets and the footnotes are based on the version in //chabadpedia.co.il.

Rabbi Yaakov Cass is a Lubavitcher chasid living in Jerusalem. Before his recent retirement, he was a senior official in the Israel Ministry of Health.

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<sup>3</sup> In another version, he was singing the niggun and dancing to it in the back of the shul from the beginning of Yom Kippur till the end, the *gabbai* had to remind him to break his fast.

*Bonus:*

To hear this exceptionally spiritual tune, go to: <https://www.chabad.org/140702> .