



## Hukat

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### ***In the Footsteps of His Voice: an ode to the Rebbe's soldiers, thirty-one years since Gimmel Tammuz***

*Litvacitus (@Litvacitus on X) is a pseudonymous writer whose work lives at the crossroads of Chabad thought, poetic reflection, Talmudic depth, and social critique.*

**D**edicated to the Shluchim—  
who walk the silence forward,  
who turn memory into mission,  
and whose lives speak the Rebbe's voice anew,  
every single day.

It has been thirty-one years.  
A number still uneven,  
still aching.  
Not quite a milestone,  
but already a legacy—  
a quiet code etched in the soul  
of those who walk his silence forward,

still listening for his footsteps.

On the 3rd of Tammuz, 5754,  
the Rebbe left this world.  
No more *farbrengens*, those spirited gatherings  
of song, Torah and transformation.  
No more letters.  
No more invigorating wave of the hand that  
could lift the most despondent soul.  
No more piercing gaze across a sea of Chassidim.  
No more *kos shel bracha*—that drop of blessing  
poured with love into waiting cups.

But though the Rebbe stopped speaking,  
his words kept walking.

Not sealed in books.  
Not carved in marble.  
But carried in footsteps.

That day, those footsteps moved outward.  
Past the sea of grief.  
Past 770 Eastern Parkway,  
Past the need to passionately but passively wait.

The voice that stirred a generation,  
that built communities from the ground up,  
that turned faith into motion,  
seemed to have fallen silent.

And yet,  
it never did.

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When the Rebbe stopped speaking,  
some listened harder.

His voice didn't vanish.  
It dispersed.  
It scattered.  
It settled into thousands of hearts,  
beating steadily on with quiet resolve.

The silence became a signal:  
to build, to teach, to illuminate—  
to live.

Not to move on,  
but to move forward.

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Into customs forms and passports,  
into shipping containers filled with *mezuzot* and  
*siddurim*,  
into living rooms in suburbs and cities  
that had never heard of the Living G-d.  
Into suitcases packed for places they couldn't  
pronounce.

Into tents pitched in deserts of Jewish forgetting.

Because they believed he was still with them.

Off they went,  
into kitchens and kindergartens  
and late-night heart-to-hearts  
where strangers became students,  
and students, emissaries.

Every *mezuzah* hung in a dorm room,  
every Chanukah *menorah* in a foreign kitchen,  
every child taught to say *Shema Yisrael*  
was a syllable in his living message.

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They lit candles  
in places where Shabbat had long since gone  
dark.

They taught *Alef* and *Bet*  
to children whose grandparents had forgotten  
the melody of Torah.

They built *mikvaot*  
in deserts — both physical and spiritual.

Because sometimes,  
when the director slips behind the curtain,  
it cues the actors to take the stage.

They did not wait for the Rebbe to return.  
They became his return.

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But others...  
others could not bear the silence.

Not all could move past their sorrow.  
So they stayed.

Holding tight to the last moment:  
His final smile,  
his image,  
his promise.

They clutched the last word he said.  
And every word, every phrase, before that.

They were paralyzed by their broken hearts,  
by the love it once carried  
that would never die,  
just bleed slowly  
from between the shards of souls.

And slowly,  
their waiting became their identity.

*Moshiach* was no longer a vision to build toward,  
but a banner to wave,  
a chant to repeat,  
a spell spoken into the wind.

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Thus, love can cling,  
or it can carry.

And when it clings too tightly,  
it risks turning a vision into a slogan,  
a mission into a monument,  
a living soul into a symbol.

The dream begins to rust,  
held too tightly in unmoving hands.

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Meanwhile, the others—  
who also never stopped loving—  
never stopped moving either.

They did not build to replace him,  
but to continue him.

Their belief isn't chanted,  
it is lived.

Their utopianism isn't shouted,  
it is planted.

They left their comfort zones,  
packed their lives into duffel bags and car trunks,  
and began building something eternal  
in places no one thought to look.

They walked forward,  
not because they forgot,  
but because they remembered so deeply  
they could no longer stay still.

They taught.

They built.

They argued with Apathy,  
long after the Shabbat candles burned out,  
when she assured them she would forever light  
her own.

And on Simchat Torah,  
they danced with Doubt,  
until, with tears in his eyes, he promised to  
marry Jewish.

Their loyalty was not loud,  
it was luminous.

It carried his fire  
without needing to name it.

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The Rebbe's legacy was not a statue to be  
polished,  
but a seed to be planted—

in soil, in sweat,  
in stubborn, sacred work,  
laced with love.

So perhaps the real divide  
is not between those who believe and those who  
build,  
but between those who only believe  
and those who build belief  
by building communities.

Those who stepped forward  
carry him farther  
than those who simply refuse  
to ever walk without him.

Because true faith  
is not just waiting for a miracle.  
True faith is digging with your hands in hard soil,  
because he told you  
with certainty  
that a tree would grow.

Because only one who loves  
can remember so well.  
And only one who remembers so fiercely  
can carry the silence forward  
until it gives the world its loudest sound.

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The Rebbe left no successor,  
only successors.  
No throne,  
only blueprints.

And so they went.  
Thousands of torch-bearers  
carrying his light.

They walk through the silence.  
To plant, to teach, to listen, to love.

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They do not need to chant his name to feel his  
presence.  
Each mitzvah is a syllable of his vision.  
Each soul reached another note  
in his endless *niggun*.

They do not deny his absence.  
They sanctify it.  
They do not build a golden image of a returning  
king.  
They educate, share and exemplify.

They build bridges between worlds,  
collecting sparks,  
brick by spiritual brick.

And in this movement,  
practical, joyful, unrelenting,  
he lives.

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Not all who wait are idle.  
Not all who build have moved on.

There are those who believe—  
fiercely, deeply—  
that he will return.  
And precisely because they believe,  
they build.

They wait like gardeners wait:  
planting,  
watering,  
tending.

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Because redemption is not a waiting room.  
Longing is not a passive endeavor.  
Redemption is not a throne descending from  
heaven.  
It is a world that ascends, made ready from  
below.

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And so we ask,  
not *why did he leave?*  
But *with what did he leave us?*

And we answer  
not with words,  
but with a world  
slowly, stubbornly  
becoming better.

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And if you ask them:  
Where is the Rebbe now?

They will not point to a photo,  
or a chant,  
or a banner.

They will point to  
a preschool in Prague,  
a *mikvah* in Montana,  
a Jew in Seoul wrapping *tefillin* for the first time.

They will point to the Rebbe walking  
quietly,  
constantly,  
through them.

Because what he began in the heart of Brooklyn  
now beats in every corner of the world.

---

That is why his voice never dies.  
Because his life  
did not end.  
It entered ours  
and continues—  
not repeated,  
but multiplied.

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### ***My Zeidy Gluck***

*Nechama Sternberg is a poet known for her love of  
nature and exploration of emotions.*

**H**e was born in Serench, Hungary in the early 1900s, but in his words, “I was never born. They just opened the door and I flew in.” My grandfather Menachem Mendel Gluck was the second child to his parents. He had an older brother Yosep, and he was followed by a brother, Pinchas, whom he was especially close to and loved, twin brothers Dovid and Amram Yishai, and a baby sister Malka. A smallpox epidemic swept through the area, and in one night, Pinchas, the twins, and the baby were gone. Most of the victims were the elderly and the young. His mother couldn’t handle the grief, so his father told them they would go to the U.S., where there were vaccines against these diseases, and one could hope that one’s children would grow to adulthood. Before they left, his brother Gedaliah was born, and youngest brother Heshy was born

in America.

My earliest memories of him include the top drawer of his armoire where I could rummage through his socks and handkerchiefs to find the sesame candies and the colorful sugar candies that you could almost look through and see on the other side. I remember the musty sweet smell in the armoire too, and wish I could inhale that scent again, but my mother has been gone for nine years, so I can't even ask her which detergent she used.

I recall his humorous comments as if he just said them yesterday. When asked how old he was, he'd say, "I'm eleventy-seven or eleventy-nine," and when asked how he was doing, he'd say, "Fair to muddy." Or, when in a more pensive mood, he would say, "Don't be a yokel."

His was a gentle face and warm smile framed by his gray beard, a welcome presence in my parents' home that spoke of love and acceptance. In my childhood mind, he was the person to find after getting off the school bus. With my father's parents across the ocean and my maternal grandmother passing away when I was just a toddler, he was the only grandparent I would know until my teenage years, when my paternal grandmother came to visit.

I recall his firm stance between two of my brothers engaged in a sibling battle, and how he stopped it just by standing there.

So when my older son was born, my husband and I tossed his name back and forth between ourselves in the hospital room, but agreed that the name didn't suit him. Because Menachem Mendel is all about seriousness tied with a lively personality, and my older son is more about spreading justice and light all around. When baby boy number two came and cried for the first fifteen minutes after his arrival in this world, I knew that he was the one to carry the name. As per one of my sisters-in-law, the child you name after someone will most likely carry their personality and mannerisms. And I strongly believe that you can already see some of that after they are born.

Interestingly, it came to light after some of my older nephews were also given his name that his given name at birth was Menachem, and he was nicknamed Mendel, the Yiddish version of the name. That is how he was named at his *bris*, was called to the Torah at his Bar Mitzvah, and was married. His *ketubah* (religious marriage contract) says *Menachem Mekhuneh* (nicknamed) *Mendel*. However, all his grandchildren named for him were given both names, and are called by different nicknames.

And when our baby was two weeks old, my mother passed away, and he was a source of comfort to me and my sisters. I am so glad that I had the privilege of naming a child after him in the time when I needed that tangible reminder of my grandfather and my mother the most.

There have been so many times that I've been asked if he is named after the Rebbe of Lubavitch, and I then gently remind people that Menachem Mendel is a common eastern European name. And in my grandfather's words, "The Lubavitcher Rebbe and I were probably named after the same person."

Later in his life, he had Alzheimer's disease, and would often be brought home by caring members in our community who found him wandering around several blocks away. This is before cell phones and social media. I recall how frantic my mother would be as she stood by the door waiting for him.

As the story goes, he passed peacefully in his sleep on the couch in our basement. My older brother found him lying there so we never got to say goodbye. It was the first time in my young life that I encountered loss, and I didn't fully understand that he wouldn't be coming back. It was also the first time I recall having a babysitter stay with younger siblings and me while all the older ones went to the funeral.

I wonder if I would be able to find the candies in the grocery store, and what would they taste like today: fair or muddy?

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### **Little Boy**

*Judy Taubes Serman is the coauthor of [The Rarest Blue: The Remarkable Story of an Ancient Color Lost to History and Rediscovered](#) (Lyons Press), which won the Jewish Journal Book Prize, and co-editor of [Hokhma LeShlomo: Essays in Honor of Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin \(Maggid\)](#), together with Baruch Serman. Leo Taubes, was born in Austria in 1934 and spent his childhood during the war years in Holland.*

In November 1938, when my grandfather—along with countless other Austrian Jews—was arrested and interned in Dachau, my father, then just four years old, was sent alone on a Red Cross Kindertransport to Holland. There he lived with various families—some Jewish, others not—with no forewarning as to when he would suddenly be moved again, or to where, or why. These years were marked by loneliness, confusion, and fear. Eventually, an uncle arranged for him to stay in a religious orphanage for boys, which had its own school and synagogue.

As life became more precarious in Amsterdam—the orphanage was eventually raided, and many of the boys were murdered by the Nazis—his uncle secured a place for him in a small village on the sea in northern Holland with a non-Jewish woman who had several others living with her as well. During the harsh years of the war, they endured the great [Dutch Hunger Winter](#), with no gas, no electricity, and barely any food. Alone and with no support, he went abruptly from a rich Jewish way of life to chopping logs into firewood on Shabbat with no clear grasp as to why, or as to what his future would be.

The RAF occasionally strafed the area, and German soldiers often stole the food packages the planes would drop for the villagers. But even though he was poor, hungry, and in danger, when my father would retell his experiences, all we sensed was an air of adventure. Any feelings of difficulty or uncertainty went over our heads. A prize-winning short story he wrote in college, which I stumbled upon accidentally, describing his wartime experiences, was published [here](#) several months ago.<sup>1</sup>

When the war ended, my father moved from place to place with no explanation until somehow his father, who had escaped to England, managed to locate him through the Red Cross in 1946. A British soldier appeared one day at the door of the house in which he was staying (in The Hague) and arranged for him to fly on an RAF plane to London, where he was finally reunited with his parents.

Though he started off speaking not a word of English, my father quickly learned the language in a Jewish school in England, and wrote this short story, an assignment for English class, in 1950, when he was 16 years old. Although many of the details don't match, I think it is loosely based on his experience after the war ended and before he was reunited with his parents, when he was in The Hague. The story portrays the harsh realities of war's aftermath through a child who, despite his

young age, has been forced to grow up too quickly, and one small but transcendent act of genuine human connection. It depicts the tentative first steps toward reclaiming humanity after great trauma. I believe this authentic voice of childhood survival deserves preservation as both historical testimony and literary legacy.



### **“Little Boy”**

I turned the corner and braked the jeep to a standstill as I saw the little boy stick out his hand. “Lift?” he asked in English, giving it a German sound, but seemingly indifferent as to whether I gave him the lift or not. I motioned him in. He was a little boy, undernourished, dressed in rags, with filthy bare legs and a pair of ancient tennis shoes tied to his feet with string. His hands were dirty, as was his face, which had the stamp of age and experience on it, and his eyes were hollow and expressed mad horror. His hair was dirty, long, and unkempt. “Probably lousy with lice,” I thought with a weary smile. He couldn't have been more than nine years old. He got into the jeep, looking sullen as if he took the favor for granted. We drove on through the ruins and rubble of conquered Berlin, over shattered roads, swerving past an occasional fenced off bomb crater. Past bombed houses with some walls still standing with clouds of dust pouring on them, looking grim and bleak

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Taubes, [“Saturday Afternoon,”](#) *The Lehrhaus.com* (September 08, 2024).

and deserted.

I had seen towns like this before, picked up kids like him before, but somehow I got the impression that he was different. The other kids were hardened, brutal little gangsters trading in black market goods and not caring a damn for anybody but themselves. The little lad hadn't reached that stage yet. He was still soft at heart, longing for a home and parents, though he was ashamed to admit the fact and tried hard to hide it. You can't get along in the world without being tough.

He opened the box in his hand, took out some cigarette butts which he had picked up off the street, and carefully tore off the paper, letting the tobacco spill back into the box. I addressed him in German, which surprised him. "What are you doing with that?" "Sell it," he replied. "What are you going to do with the money?" I asked. "Get food" was the answer. "Who do you live with?" "My aunt and uncle," despisingly and bitterly. "Where do they live?" He told me and we drove up to their house. The roof had caved in and only the first floor was still complete, minus the windows, of course. The kid got off, and I watched him disappear into the dark house. "Probably going to get a beating," I thought, remembering the hate when he spoke of his aunt and uncle.

The next time I saw him, he was walking along with the bowed head, occasionally stooping to pick up a cigarette butt. I drove up and stopped. "Lift?" I asked, smiling. He got in without a smile. We drove

around a bit and chattered, and suddenly a thought entered my mind. I had an old uniform, and, looking at the kid's ragged clothes, I decided to get some pants for him. I didn't tell him about it.

A few days later I waited around his house till I saw him coming. I showed him two pairs of pants and a pair of shoes which I dug up somewhere. The smile of gratitude and the way his eyes lit up was almost pathetic.

Unconsciously he moved his hands to his hair and tried to smooth it, then saw how dirty he was and blushed with shame. "This is probably the last time I'll see you," I told him. "I'm going to be transferred." He looked at me, put out his hand for the clothes, then, when I'd given them to him, rushed into the house. "Thanks," he shouted from the door.

The following day I was scheduled to leave and I was the last one to climb onto the truck. Slowly we drove away and I watched the receding barracks. We drove through the city and turned into the street where I first met the little kid. I looked out half expectantly, and there he was in his new pants and shoes, with a clean shirt, clean face and hands, and combed hair. He waved as he saw me and smiled sadly, then turned around and walked off. I saw him bend down slowly and pick something up from the street. Then wildly, angrily, he threw it down and ground it with his new shoes.

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