

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

This week's Torah portion, *Ki Tavo*, is always read on the second Shabbat before Rosh Hashana. There must be a message here to help us, in preparation for the great day.

The portion opens with the commandment of *bikkurim*, the first fruits that were marked, later to be brought in a basket to the Holy Temple and placed near the altar. The *Kohen* (priest) would then enjoy the fruit.

The wealthy brought their fruits in a silver basket, while the common folk brought theirs in wicker baskets. Those who brought silver baskets would later take them home. However, those who brought wicker baskets, would leave them in the Temple.

One would think that it should be the other way around. The wealthy, who could afford it, should leave their silver baskets. The poor, who struggle, should be able to take their baskets home.

For the wealthy businessman, the *mitzva* (commandment) of *bikkurim* was special. But being busy, he didn't have time. He just grabbed his silver basket, put the fruit in and went.

For the common folk, this *mitzva* was so precious. The thrill included, "I get to bring a gift to the Temple." Lovingly they handcrafted their baskets, especially for this *mitzva*.

These wicker baskets were so precious to G-d because of all the love, time and effort that went into them. Therefore, He wanted them. The silver baskets, beautiful as they are, did not have the same love, time and effort. Therefore, take them home.

How will you prepare for Rosh Hashana?

Will you lovingly collect your fruit? Will you take the time to consider your past years performance of mitzvot and how you can improve in the coming year? Will you spend time preparing yourself for the holiday. Or will you grab your basket and show up?

Your effort is important and precious to G-d. He wants it, He appreciates it, He loves it.

The same is true for our relationships. In our busy lives many of our gestures are last minute. Nice as they are, they are not the same as those we put time and effort into. While both are positive, the effort, time and love adds dimension, depth, and meaning. Try it, and you will see.

somAdapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

As Good as New

"You can't even tell where the damage was," the French weaver says, handing you the bill of \$65 together with your jacket that had only a pea-sized hole but in a very noticeable spot. This highly skilled expert has magically rewoven the fabric and the garment literally looks "good as new."

In these days before Rosh Hashana, when we are considering the past and looking toward the future, we are presented with the concept of *teshuvah* – a return to our G-dly source and a return of our soul to its original, pristine state.

Teshuva is about how a sullied soul can come clean. It's the directions as to how the tears and snags of the "garments" of the soul (as thoughts, speech and actions are termed by Chasidic thought) can be mended or even rewoven. *Teshuva's* effect is so great that something which has been "damaged" can be transformed into "good as new."

How can *teshuvah* have any real effect? In his book, *The Long Shorter Way*, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (of blessed memory) answers this question:

"There are actually two levels of repentance.

"One is that related to those sins committed in error, which includes sins for which the individual is held responsible, just as though they had been committed deliberately.

"As the Baal Shem Tov said, when a person repents he places himself on another level of consciousness: "What I know now I was previously unconscious of."

"One rises to a higher level, in which

sins are seen as mistakes.

"That which was previously considered an action performed in full awareness is now viewed as having been performed in ignorance.

"As it has been said, "A person does not sin unless the spirit of folly enters into him."

"With the passing of folly comes the recognition of error.

"That is one level of repentance, the one in which a person extricates himself from a certain way of life and saves himself from his past in order to reach another level of being.

"The second level of repentance is the one in which deliberate sins are transmuted into virtues, when every transgression one has committed is reckoned as though it were a *mitzvah*.

"To reach this very high level of repentance, the individual must reach a point in his life equivalent to "the end of days," the end of time and world.

"He must change the very essence of himself so drastically that all the facts of his existence, all thoughts or actions, assume an entirely different meaning."

All forms of *teshuvah*, however diverse and complex, have a common core: the belief that human beings have it in their power to effect inward change. According to the Talmudic Sages, this possibility of altering reality after the fact, which is one of the mysteries of all being, was created before the world itself. Before the laws of nature came into existence, principle even more fundamental and more exalted was proclaimed: that change – *teshuvah* – is possible.

SLICE OF LIFE

Be An Original Not a Copy
with Rabbi Adin Even-Yisrael Steinsaltz



Rabbi Adin Even-Yisrael Steinsaltz, of whom the Rebbe wrote, in 1970, “I found in him far greater capabilities than were told to me, written to me, and described to me,” passed away last month. He had a unique relationship with, and perspectives on, the Rebbe which he described in two JEM interviews. Here’s My Story shares several stories he recounted of his interactions with the Rebbe. Presented with permission from JEM’s My Encounter with the Rebbe oral history project, which is dedicated to recording first-person testimonies documenting the life and guidance of the Rebbe.

When I began translating the Babylonian Talmud from Aramaic into modern Hebrew, one of the basic decisions I had to make was the format of the Gemara.

The problem I faced was that, when I added commentary to the translation, the pages became too long to publish with the traditional pagination. Back in 1965 when I first started doing this, the printing options were very limited, so I was struggling to find the right format.

It was the Rebbe who gave me the advice to keep the pages as they are but to cut them in two. And this was most helpful to me because I had an answer from a respected authority and I didn’t have to worry about it anymore. Although I was the subject of some criticism for changing

the traditional format of the Talmud, I wasn’t bothered since I knew that the Rebbe supported this choice.

As I completed each volume, I sent it to the Rebbe, but I didn’t want to bother him with everything. I didn’t agree with those who thought that they could exhaust the Rebbe with all manner of minutiae. Maybe I was wrong, but I thought that burdening the Rebbe with small matters was simply unfair. It bordered on violating the commandment to “love your fellow Jew as yourself.”

But the Rebbe didn’t see it that way. From time to time, when an article of mine appeared somewhere, he would send a note with an implied complaint: “It is strange that you have written something and you didn’t send it to me.”

Why should the Rebbe be interested in a piece that I published in some kind of a journal? Well, the Rebbe was interested in everything.

On one occasion, I did send the Rebbe a little book I wrote about the men in the Tanach, the Hebrew Bible, which was published by the Israeli army. The Rebbe thanked me for sending it to him and remarked that the picture of Moses on the cover depicted him holding the Tablets of the Ten Commandments with rounded tops, when they should be square. So I had to apologize and explain that nobody had asked me, and they just reproduced an old picture they found. But I was pleased to see that he critiqued the cover and not the contents, as I knew that he would not have hesitated to state his opinion.

On another occasion, I received an offer to write a column for a magazine with a significant secular readership. And I asked the Rebbe: “What can I tell these people? If I write about mitzvot and the need to keep the Torah, who will even pay attention? Certainly, my words won’t change anything. So maybe I shouldn’t even accept this offer.”

The Rebbe’s answer to me was that nobody is exempt from keeping the mitzvot of the Torah. Even Yerovoam ben Nevat – who was responsible for splitting Israel into two nations and who erected idols to divert Jews from coming to Jerusalem – will have to give account, not just for the great transgressions he committed, but for small mitzvot he failed to keep.

I understood that it was my responsibility to

use this venue to encourage people – even those who were estranged from their faith – to grow in their observance of mitzvot. It is important for all Jews, regardless of who they are, to keep the commandments of the Torah.

Often, the Rebbe would encourage me to find my own path. On one occasion he was talking about the seven branches of the Temple Menorah – they were not copies of each other, he said; each had its own place and its own function, just as each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel had its own function. So I, too, had my mission in life and did not need to act like a carbon copy of someone else.

Once, I wrote to the Rebbe that I was just overwhelmed by work. I was involved in three major projects in addition to dozens of small ones, and although they were all important, it was simply too much for one person to manage. So I asked him to help me decide what to drop.

His answer was: “You should continue to do all these things and try to do even more things.” He made a similar point the last time I saw him on Shavuot of 1991 before he – who never stopped taking on additional responsibilities – suffered a stroke. He told me, “Vee lang m’ken, darf men arayn chapen – As long as you can, make the most of every opportunity.”

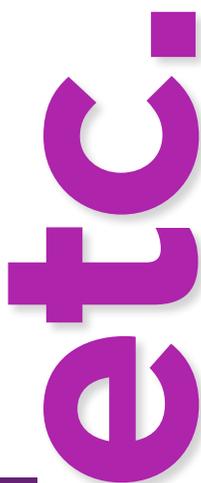
I took this to heart and I have often spoken about it. The metaphor I like to use comes from physics:

We assume there is only so much matter that can be squeezed into a box before the box reaches its limit. And this is true on one level. But if we apply additional pressure – not the usual amount of pressure but ten thousand or a hundred times as much – then the matter collapses and is rearranged. And, when that happens, there is almost no limit to how much more we can squeeze in. We see this phenomenon among the stars, where a stellar object of one centimeter has the weight of one ton. This is because all the vacant space has been squeezed out and what is left is pure matter.

That’s what the Rebbe wanted to do with people. He tried to drive others – just as he drove himself – to exceed the limitations of this world and reach the world of the stars.

He understood that it wasn’t easy. That’s why he quoted the words of Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers: “According to the pain is the reward.”

Read more at myencounterblog.com



New Campus

The Chabad Center for Jewish Life at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, has been growing steadily since its inception 17 years ago. “Illini Chabad,” under the directorship of Rabbi Dovid and Goldie Tiechtel recently purchased a 27,000 sq ft property located in the center of campus. A former fraternity house, the new Chabad Center will be easily accessible for all in the community.

Giant Mitzva Mural

Chasidic Pop-art Rabbi Yitzchok Mouly came to Skokie, Illinois at the request of CTeen directors Rabbi Yochanan and Yona Posner. Together with local teens they created a giant mural on a wall of the Skokie Chabad House. The teens organized themselves into groups and took shifts scraping off old paint, priming the wall, and creating the artwork under Mouly’s skilled instruction.



WHO’S WHO?

Devora (Deborah) the prophetess (Judges 4-5) lived at a time when idol worship was rampant and the Jews were oppressed by the Canaanites. Devora prophesized, taught and judged the people under a palm tree. She was recognized by the entire Jewish people as the authority of her time. She encouraged Barak to assemble an army to overthrow the enemy. At Barak’s insistence, Devora accompanied him to war, and the Canaanites were routed. Devora is remembered also for the beautiful song she composed praising G-d and recounting the miraculous victory.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

13th of Elul, 5731 [1971]

To the Administration of Chabad House Buffalo, N.Y.

I was gratified to be informed about the forthcoming dedication of a *Sefer Torah* [Torah Scroll] in the Chabad House, which will take place on the auspicious day of the 18th of Elul, the birthday of the founder of general Chasidus, the Baal Shem Tov, and the birthday also of the founder of Chabad Chasidus, the *Alter Rebbe* [Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi], author of the *Tanya* and *Shulchan Aruch*.

Needless to say, the observance of this double birthday has the central purpose that their way of life, work and teachings should continue to illuminate the daily life of each and every one of us. Both the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe, who expanded the Chasidic teachings in a systematic way, brought the Chasidic experience to Jews of all backgrounds, made the embodiment of the three loves, love of G-d, love of the Torah and love of Israel, the cornerstone of their system, with emphasis on the fact that the said three loves are completely interlocked and integrated.

This system and way of life quickly began to spread and gain many followers, in an ever-growing measure in quantity and quality, from generation to generation to the present day, which has clearly demonstrated how viable and vital it has been for the Jewish people, for the individual as well as for *Klal Yisrael* [the entire Jewish people].

I have used the expression "illuminated" advisedly, since this does not necessarily mean the creation of new things, but to illuminate existing things which have not been fully appreciated, or which have been

altogether overlooked. Thus, the primary contribution of Chasidus is that it illuminates the Torah and Mitzvos, and their inner aspects, *Pnimius HaTorah*, and shows each and every one of us the way to bring them within our personal daily experience.

The above is particularly important in relation to the young generation, who are still at the threshold of independent life and have untapped resources of energy and dedication to face any challenge, to accept the truth and nothing but the whole truth, rejecting all compromise – in their search for the genuine article.

As for the teacher and mentor, while he must do his best to help those whom he teaches and guides to make the utmost progress, he also reckons with the capacity of the students. However, since it is the task of each and every Jew to follow the Torah way of life, with dedication and inspiration, as illuminated by the teachings of Chasidus – it is clear that this task, which has been given to every Jew as a duty and privilege by G-d, the Creator and Master of the world, is within the capacity of each and everyone, since G-d does not expect the impossible.

May G-d grant that the dedication of the *Sefer Torah* in the Chabad House should symbolize the dedication of the *Sefer Torah* in each and every Jewish home in the community, and strengthen adherence of the Torah and Mitzvos in the daily life, not only on special occasions or special days, but in accordance with the well-known commandment in the *Shema* – "And you shall teach them diligently to your children and speak them when you sit in the house or when you walk in the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up."

I send my prayerful wishes to each and every one who is associated with the work of the Chabad House, for *Hatzlocho* [success] in all above, and in a growing measure and, with the approach of the New Year, to be blessed with a *Kesivo vachasimo Tova* [to be inscribed and sealed for good], for a good and pleasant year materially and spiritually.

the Torah states several chapter later (Deut. 30:7): "And the L-rd your G-d will place all these denunciations upon your enemies, and on those who hate you." This will reach its culmination in the Messianic era, when "I will cause the impure spirit to depart from the land." At that time, all of Israel's enemies, both within and without, will be destroyed. (*Ohr HaTorah*)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This Monday is Chai (the 18th of) Elul, the birthday of both the Baal Shem Tov (founder of the Chasidic movement) in 5458-1698 and the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism in 5505-1745. In the same way that the Chasidic movement revitalized Jewish life and introduced a new path in the service of G-d, so too does Chai Elul ("chai" – from the Hebrew word meaning "life") introduce an element of liveliness and vitality into our Divine service in the month of Elul, the main theme of which is repentance.

A basic fundamental of Chasidut is the joyful service of G-d. As surprising as it may seem, Chasidic philosophy teaches that even the mitzva of teshuva (repentance) should be approached with happiness rather than trepidation. If all of the Torah's mitzvot should be fulfilled with joy, how much more so the mitzva of teshuva, which is so great it has the power to perfect all other commandments!

At first glance, the combination of teshuva and joy appears unrealistic. Repentance is serious business: conducting an honest assessment of one's past behavior, feeling remorse for one's misdeeds, and begging G-d for forgiveness for transgressing His will. How are we to do this out of a sense of joy?

The answer is that joy, as defined by Chasidut, is not the opposite of seriousness. Joy does not mean frivolity, a life without responsibilities or mindless revelry. Rather, joy itself is serious business, a deep feeling created when a Jew contemplates the enormous merit he has to have been born Jewish, to be able to study G-d's Torah and to fulfill His commandments. When a Jew appreciates that he is never alone and that G-d is always with him, his joy becomes the impetus to draw even closer to the Infinite.

With Rosh Hashana approaching, what could make us happier than the knowledge that doing teshuva during Elul is easier than at any other time of year? For the gates of repentance are always open, and G-d always gives us the opportunity to return to Him.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Torah portion of Ki Tavo contains a section known as the "Reproof" – punishments that will be inflicted on Israel if they do not obey G-d. On a deeper level, however, these curses are directed at the Evil Inclination, as



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Baruch and his wife, Rivka, were followers of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chasidic movement. When they had been married for a year and were still not blessed with a child, they went to see the Baal Shem Tov during the month of Elul to ask for his blessing.

At his birthday celebration on the 18th of Elul, the Baal Shem Tov blessed Baruch and Rivka, saying that within the year they would have a son. The young couple remained with the Baal Shem Tov in Miedzibosz for the High Holidays. Before departing for home they were privileged to have an audience with the Baal Shem Tov once again. When the Baal Shem Tov repeated his blessing, Rivka fervently promised that she would consecrate her son to the dissemination of Torah and the Chasidic way of life as taught by the Baal Shem Tov.

Rivka was quite a learned women and decided to intensify her Torah studies. She asked Devora Leah, her learned sister-in-law for guidance as to prayer and study during her anticipated pregnancy.

Six months later, Baruch went to Miedzibosz again to inform the Baal Shem Tov that his wife was pregnant. The Baal Shem Tov wished him "mazel tov" and gave him certain instructions to convey to his wife. Baruch left for home in a blissful frame of mind.

On the 18th day of Elul that year, the Baal Shem Tov displayed an extraordinary elation. He personally led the prayers, which he chanted joyously. It was clear that the Baal Shem Tov was observing the day in an even more festive manner than was customary for his birthday. During the repast which followed the prayers, the Baal Shem Tov told his disciples:

"Today, a new soul descended to earth, a soul which will illuminate the world with the revealed and esoteric teachings of the Torah, and will successfully disseminate the Chasidic way with selfless dedication, preparing the way for the arrival of Moshiach."

On the 25th day of Elul the Baal Shem Tov arranged a feast. Three days later, on Shabbat, he again gave a discourse and was in an extremely elated frame of mind. All of this represented a mystery to his disciples.

What the Baal Shem Tov's disciples witnessed in those days was nothing less than their Rebbe celebrating the birth of Baruch and Rivka's first child, Shneur Zalman, his circumcision, and the critical third day after the circumcision. Moreover, the various discourses which the Baal Shem Tov delivered on those occasions were connected with the newborn's destiny.

For Yom Kippur that year, Baruch came to the Baal Shem Tov. He had been cautioned not to tell anybody about the birth of his son. Again, before leaving for home, he received from the Baal Shem Tov a set of instructions concerning the child, and the careful watch which was to be kept over him at all times.

The following year Baruch came, as usual, to the Baal Shem Tov for the High Holidays. The Baal Shem Tov inquired about the little boy in great detail, and repeated his admonition to take special care of the child.

After Sukot, when Baruch was ready to leave for home, the Baal Shem Tov again counseled him to shelter the boy, and not to boast about his cleverness nor even to repeat ingenious comments Shneur Zalman might make.

Another year passed. Once again Baruch made his annual pilgrimage to Miedzibosz. Baruch reported to the Baal Shem Tov that, upon returning home from Miedzibosz after Sukot the previous year, his wife had told him that there was a noticeable change in Shneur Zalman. His speech and vocabulary, which were already extraordinary, had considerably improved. They had discovered that the young child had an amazing memory, and whatever he heard once, he never forgot. The Baal Shem Tov gave Baruch further instructions concerning the child. Baruch requested permission to bring Shneur Zalman to the Baal Shem Tov on his third birthday for the traditional first haircut and the Baal Shem Tov agreed. He told Baruch that Shneur Zalman should be brought by his mother and his aunt Devora Leah, on the 18th of Elul, after the morning prayers.

Arriving home, Baruch found that his son had made further strides during his absence from home. Little Shneur Zalman could now recite many Psalms by heart, and his memory and

mental grasp were astonishing.

As prearranged, Rivka and Devora Leah brought Shneur Zalman on his third birthday, to the Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov cut off a few locks of hair, leaving peyot (side locks) according to custom, and he blessed him.

All the way home, little Shneur Zalman kept asking his mother who the elderly Jew was who had cut his hair. "That was Zaide," was her reply. Little did he then know that some day he would come to regard the Baal Shem Tov as his "grandfather" in a very real sense, namely, as the Rebbe of his Rebbe, the Maggid of Miezcricz. However, the Baal Shem Tov, for reasons best known to himself, kept himself out of direct contact with Shneur Zalman. He did not permit Baruch to take his son with him on subsequent visits to Miedzibosz and he enjoined Shneur Zalman's teacher from telling him anything about the Baal Shem Tov until he was 15 years old. "Shneur Zalman is not destined to be my disciple," the Baal Shem Tov said. "He belongs to my successor."

Adapted from Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Kehot Publication Society

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

Blessed will you be in the city, and blessed will you be in the field (Deut. 28:3)

A city has certain advantages over rural life, among them the pleasure of others' company and the availability of places of Torah and learning. Rural life also has its advantages, such as a more relaxed life-style, fresher air, and warmer relationships between neighbors. G-d's blessing is that we should be equally blessed in both locales. *(Chatam Sofer)*

And you shall go to the place which the L-rd your G-d will choose to place His name there (Deut. 26:2)

A Jew does not travel the face of the earth of his own volition; Divine Providence leads him from place to place for the sole purpose of "placing His name there" - sanctifying the name of G-d in that particular place. *(Hayom Yom)*

Because you did not serve the L-rd your G-d with joy and with gladness of heart... you will serve your enemies (Deut. 29:47)

Joy is such an important part of the Jew's service of G-d that the harsh consequence of "you will serve your enemies" does not result from a deficiency in the service, but from worshipping G-d without joy. When a Jew is happy, G-d is happy, as it were, and even the harshest decrees are annulled - analogous to an earthly king granting amnesty to his prisoners when he is in a cheerful mood. *(Chasidic Teachings)*

Dedicated in honor of
Rabbi Shneur Zalman and Mimi Fellig
 Miami Beach, Florida
 With best wishes for a *Kesivah Vachasimah Toivo*
 for a happy and sweet year



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