



Reb Yekutiel the salt merchant was a true Chasid, one who served G-d with his whole heart and soul. Unfortunately, Reb Yekutiel had not been blessed with a superior intellect. His knowledge of Torah in general and Chasidut in particular was extremely limited, despite having attained the age of 40.

For 15 years Reb Yekutiel had been a follower of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism. At least once each year he had traveled from Lepli in White Russia to the Rebbe in Liadi, and absorbed as much as he could of the Rebbe's teachings.

Years passed, and the Alter Rebbe's son, Rabbi Dovber, was now Rebbe. The center of Chabad Chasidim had moved to the town of Lubavitch, and the study of Chasidut was rapidly gaining momentum. Reb Yekutiel, however, had only heard of these things secondhand. He had yet to actually visit the new Rebbe, who was also known as the Mittlerer Rebbe.

One day a young man arrived in Lepli who had just come from Lubavitch, and he repeated the Chasidic discourses he had heard there to the local Chasidim. The young man was an unusually gifted speaker, and his words made a great impression on his audience. Even the deepest philosophical concepts were explained in simple language and came alive. Everyone in Lepli was soon discussing what they had learned and begging for more.

Reb Yekutiel did not miss one opportunity to hear the young man speak. He listened to every word of each discourse, and recognized that very lofty concepts were involved. But try as he might, he could not understand them.

It was so confounding! Reb Yekutiel was no youngster, and had already heard numerous Chasidic discourses directly from Rabbi Shneur Zalman. His inability to comprehend what everyone else seemed to grasp just fine was a source of much anguish and grief.

From day to day his depression increased. The more he listened to the young man's lectures without understanding them, the greater his pain and frustration grew. After every Chasidic discourse he would lock himself in his room and weep, and castigate himself for being dull-witted. "You're nothing but a block of wood," he cried. "An ignoramus and a simpleton."

But the desire to understand Chasidut burned in Reb Yekutiel's heart. He might not be a scholar, but he was certainly stubborn. He asked the young man to become his personal tutor, and he agreed and moved into his house.

For three consecutive weeks the young man sat and explained the Chasidic discourses to Reb Yekutiel. The older Chasid made a superhuman effort to understand – but alas, it was simply beyond his ability.

There was no alternative but to allow the young man to move on. Reb Yekutiel was completely broken. For days and nights he wept and recited Psalms, fasting and imploring G-d to open up his impenetrable mind.

Eventually he concluded that he had to go to Lubavitch. And indeed, a whole new world awaited him there. He had never seen so many people sitting and studying Chasidut.

That Friday night the Rebbe delivered a Chasidic discourse, and much to his amazement, Reb Yekutiel was able to understand and even repeat parts of it from memory. But on Shabbat afternoon the Rebbe delivered an explanatory discourse that was deeper than the first, and this one proved too difficult for him to follow.

Reb Yekutiel stayed up the whole night crying and saying Psalms, and resolved that he would fast the next day. The day after that he had his first private audience with the Mittlerer Rebbe, in which he poured out his heart.

"There is nothing that stands in the face of determination," the Rebbe told him. "If a person really wants to do something, his natural abilities will expand and become broader."

When Reb Yekutiel heard these words he knew that he would one day achieve his goal. He sent word to his family that he was staying in Lubavitch.

For the next four months Reb Yekutiel pushed himself almost beyond endurance. He trained himself to concentrate on a single thought for hours, and repeated whatever he learned dozens of times. The younger Chasidim sometimes helped him study, but most of his time was spent secluded in the synagogue's basement or attic.

At the end of the four months Reb Yekutiel was completely transformed. His mind could grasp even the deepest and most esoteric ideas and concepts. He returned to his family and resumed his business.

In the course of time Reb Yekutiel became one of the greatest authorities on Chasidic philosophy. In fact, the Mittlerer Rebbe's work, *Imrei Bina*, was written especially for him.

Reb Yekutiel lived to the age of 100, having been blessed by Rabbi Shneur Zalman with longevity. In his later years he was a Chasid of the Tzemach Tzedek (Rabbi Menachem Mendel, third Chabad Rebbe) and the Rebbe Maharash (Rabbi Shmuel, fourth Chabad Rebbe). Indeed, the Tzemach Tzedek said of him, "Reb Yekutiel is a living example of our Sages' words: If someone says he has expended effort and found what he was looking for, you can believe him!"

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And you shall know that I am the L-rd your G-d, Who brings you out (Ex. 6:7)

G-d promised the Jewish people that not only would He take them out of Egypt, but also that they would know it was He Who had redeemed them; the redemption itself would serve to deepen their understanding and faith in G-d. Indeed, this is the purpose of all redemptions and salvations: that through them we come to recognize the true Redeemer and Savior. (*Sefat Emet*)

The L-rd ... gave them a charge to the Children of Israel (Ex. 6:13)

Though the Jewish people hadn't listened "because of their anguished spirit and the cruel slavery," G-d commanded Moses and Aaron to keep on talking. For the word of G-d always makes an impression and has an effect: if not immediately, then sometime later. Holy words are never wasted, and are always ultimately heard. (*Sefat Emet*)

And she bore him Aaron and Moses (Ex. 6:20)

The Torah specifically tells us that Moses and Aaron were born like any other mortals, to "regular" parents; the fact that they became prophets and leaders of the Jewish nation was due to their own actions and choices, not because they descended from on high like celestial angels. From this we learn that every individual, through his own efforts and free will, can reach even the highest spiritual levels – even as lofty as Moses and Aaron. (*Ma'ayana Shel Torah*)

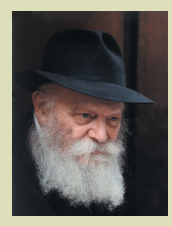
It is not proper to do so...shall we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us (Ex. 8:22)

The Egyptians were extremely careful to avoid hurting animals; according to the Ibn Ezra, they did not eat meat and would not even use any animal products. It is therefore "not proper" when such "humanitarians," who are so filled with pity for four-legged creatures, think nothing about enslaving Jews and throwing their babies into the river. (*Imrei Chein*)



4:36 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
2 Shevat/Jan 15
Torah Portion Va'eira
Shabbat ends 5:39 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In last week's Torah portion, G-d had sent Moses to tell the Jewish people that He would soon redeem them. Moses did as he was told, and the suffering under Pharaoh only got worse.

Moses cried out to G-d: "Why have You mistreated this people?"

In this week's Torah portion, *Va'eira*, G-d answers Moses' question. G-d reveals Himself to Moses in a way that He did not reveal Himself to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

G-d states, "I am *Havaya*," a name signifying the very essence of the Divine.

How does G-d's revelation of His name *Havaya* answer Moses' outcry?

Great revelation comes through great effort, sometimes even suffering. The greater the toil, the greater the accomplishment.

We are here to reveal G-d's essence in the world. Essence is revealed only under enormous pressure. Like diamonds that are formed at high temperature and pressure, our time in Egypt was the "smelting pot" and "pressure cooker" that enabled us, when we left Egypt, to become diamond-like and to acquire an exquisitely precious connection to G-d.

This is G-d's reply to Moses. "I'm honing out a deeper connection with you, and that comes through suffering."

But that was just the beginning. Because after the Exodus from Egypt we served G-d "in the wilderness," receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai – the marriage of the Jewish people to G-d.

At the beginning of marriage, there is a powerful connection. However, over years of struggle and hardship, the couple forges a connection which is infinitely deeper than it was to start.

So it is with our relationship to G-d. When we left Egypt, our bond was powerful. However, now that we have endured at times unimaginable hardship and suffering in this exile, 2,000 years worth, think how incredible our connection has become.

Soon, when Moshiach will come, we will experience the fruit of our labor. G-d will reveal His essence, and we will be one.

Adapted 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.

The Soul Springs Eternal

by Yehudis Cohen

"Who has time?" I said to myself, as I placed the box with "Holland's Best Quality Appleblossom Amaryllis" on the little counter near the window. Just reading the simple instructions for the pre-potted bulb warned me that this was not a project for my already overextended life.

Sure, I had silently admired the flowering plant at a friend's house. And I was pleasantly surprised when a second friend had presented me with the green, pink and white box containing the bulb. But what did I know from bulbs? It would just have to wait, I concluded, not exactly sure how long bulbs can actually wait before they begin to self-destruct.

And then, as I was grabbing a cookbook near the box, I noticed it.

The amaryllis stem was protruding a good six inches from the box!

Somehow, without water or light, without love or caring, the bulb had managed to grow, had even succeeded in pushing its way out of the closed box. Without my help. Without my prodding. Unbeknownst to me!

So here I sit, with the Appleblossom Amaryllis (still in the box) now atop my printer, contemplating its tenacity and thinking that it is somehow very similar to the Jewish soul.

There's the soul, deposited in a "decorative planter." Our souls are invested in bodies, bodies that we sometimes adore and adore, often forgetting that they are not the be-all and end-all of our existence.

But our souls are "grown from cultivated stock"; we are descendants of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Leah and Rachel. And whether we unknowingly deprive ourselves or purposefully deny ourselves the light and water of Torah and mitzvot, our

souls will ultimately push their way up through the dirt. And they will even peek their heads out of the coarse container in which they have been planted and concealed, reaching for the light, demanding water.

Every Jew is as full of mitzvot as a pomegranate is full of seeds, the Talmud states. Even if that Jew's soul is not watered or given light it will persevere. It will reach toward its Source. It is indefatigable.

"Even if he sins, he is a Jew" our Sages teach. Even a Jew who haphazardly leaves his soul on a nondescript countertop, consciously or subconsciously not really caring if that soul will ever grow or flower. He is a Jew, and his soul-stem will eventually appear. At that time, "as the bud and leaves become more visible, the Amaryllis gradually needs more water." He must take his soul out of the box and give it Torah, the "living waters."

"After that, the stem will grow rapidly...flowers start to develop." Once the soul is given the water and light it needs it will grow rapidly and its innate beauty will develop for all to see, enjoy and admire.

"All Jews have a share in the world to come as it says, 'Your people are all righteous ... they are the branch of My planting...'" states the Talmud. Every Jew has a spark of G-dliness, literally a piece of G-d, that was planted within him by the Primary Gardener. And by the mere fact that his soul exists, he will experience the ultimate reward of the resurrection of the dead. At that time, in the Messianic Era, our potted souls will be properly placed in a "warm place with direct light," the ultimate G-dly light which has been concealed since the six days of creation. May it take place immediately.

SLICE OF LIFE

Morah Mira
by Robin Garbose



Have you ever been to a house during the seven days of mourning that you didn't want to leave? It must happen. You want to hold on to the loved one whose *neshama* (soul) hovers nearby. You know that walking out that door, back into your life, carries with it an unwelcome hit of reality... separation. But while there, in her home, sitting with her grieving family, you sense her presence with visceral aliveness. The walls radiate her countless good deeds. An invisible tsunami of holiness washes over, filling you with quiet awe. The magnificence of her holy life is revealed. You can perceive, as the *Zohar* explains, that a righteous person is here with us after her passing even more than before.

That was my experience last week when I went to say goodbye to our beloved Morah Mira Labkowsky. The Los Angeles community reels, stricken with heartache by her untimely passing. The blessings that descended from above through this noble woman, touching myriad lives, are infinite and eternal, and especially live on through her beautiful and

gifted children and grandchildren.

I can see her clearly in my mind's eye; hear her smart, funny warmth and wisdom. When my daughter was three, Gan Chabad rebbetzin Faye Yemini said, "Oh, Chaya Solika's going to have the famous Morah Mira next year, the legend of Los Angeles!" True to the reputation that preceded her, Morah Mira planted in my children, and generations of children, seeds of love; love of Torah, love of Chasidic teachings, love of the Rebbe, love of their fellow Jew, along with the passion to do good.

At parent-teacher conferences Morah Mira would light up with detailed reports of her students' accomplishments. "Menachem is such a sweet boy. He plays so nicely with Shully and Yonah." She'd been teaching preschool for years, yet her thrill and delight were as fresh as if she'd just discovered her true calling. Hundreds of little ones from all walks of Judaism were privileged to pass through her hallowed classroom, permeated by her unique brand of encouragement, at the tender beginning of their journeys into Jewish life.

I became a mother later than many women. I'd been on a career trajectory that prioritized and derived self-esteem from professional and financial success. As a *baalat teshuva* (returnee to Jewish observance), I recognized in Mira the essential qualities that drew me to Judasim – intelligence wrapped in humility, wisdom and modesty.

I admired her close-knit family. Her children valued their parents' guidance and even wanted to live near them. When I was growing up, I was eager to leave home. I thought I knew it all. A family that wasn't impressed with celebrity culture, wealth or fame inspired me. Their currency was mitzvot and their connection with the Rebbe. Mira's children were proud of who they were, confident, compassionate, but most of all humble, in a real way, derived from reverence for G-d, not the false humility I'd encountered in my Ivy-League bubble that was arrogance in disguise.

Morah Mira could easily relate to people from different backgrounds. A thoroughly contemporary woman yet steeped in Chasidic teachings, she fused old world with new world in a style entirely unique to Chabad.

On a frigid Brooklyn morning 12 or so years ago, I spotted Mira walking down a Crown Heights, Brooklyn street. I was in town directing a production for Ten Yad – a local organization that helps brides in need set up their homes. Delighted to run into my friend from Los Angeles, I opened my arms, ready to give her a hug as I got closer. But oddly enough, Mira didn't return my look of recognition. Why was she pretending not to know me? "Oh, you think I'm Mira, right?" she said. "I'm her twin, Zlata." I burst out laughing. I couldn't believe it! G-d blessed us with two of them? A few months later, I ran into Zlata again in Crown Heights, this time walking arm in arm with Mira. They were a beaming vision to behold, their bond of sisterly love deep, almost otherworldly.

The last time I saw Mira, she was standing watch over the happy squeals of recess at her thriving pre-school, Zlata's Little Lights – named for her sister Zlata who had passed away in 2010. We talked about my stepson, Rabbi Shimon Garbose. With vivid recollection, Mira described teaching him more than 35 years ago! She recalled his determined character and with pride told me that her nephew had recently received Rabbinic Ordination from Rabbi Garbose in Jerusalem!

Dear Mira, the seeds you planted, tended to, nurtured with water and sunshine in the Garden of Chabad, will continue to blossom and bear fruit, now and forever, till the coming of Moshiach.

Robin Garbose, a graduate of Brown University with a B.A. in Theater Arts and English Literature, is an Artistic Director, filmmaker and Acting Teacher who directed some 40 plays at theaters in New York and Los Angeles.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

15 Av, 5735 (1975)

I was pleased to be informed about your steady advancement in matters of Torah, called *Toras Chaim* [the Torah of Life], because it is the Jew's guide in life, and also *Toras Emes* [the Torah of Truth], because it is the truth. This is doubly gratifying inasmuch as persons of your standing have an impact on the community, for people look up to you and try to emulate you. Thus, your going from strength to strength in matters of Torah and *Mitzvot* [commandments] is greatly multiplied through those who are inspired by your example, not to mention direct impact on children and through them on their children in an everlasting chain reaction.

In light of the above, even if there are some difficulties to overcome, it is surely worthwhile to make the effort, inasmuch as the effort involves only the individual, while the benefit is for many. Add to this also the fact that this is also the channel to receive G-d's blessings in all needs, and that G-d rewards in kind and in a most generous measure.

The above refers to all matters of Torah and *Mitzvot*, but has a special significance in regard to *kashrus* [the Jewish dietary laws]. As a doctor you know the immense knowledge that has been accumulated recently in the area of nutrition and diet, and how much the quality of food affects physical and mental health. For Jews the Dietary Laws have come down with the Torah itself, which revealed the true meaning of monotheism, of which the Jewish People have been the bearers ever since. It was relevant not only in those days of old, when paganism and idolatry were the general practice in the world, but it is just as relevant in the present day and age, since it is only the Torah and *Mitzvot* that are the basis of pure monotheism, rooted in the absolute unity of G-d. This means that the Jew brings unity and

harmony in this, the physical world, eliminating any departmentalization in the daily life, or having occasional practices; or, as some misguided and misconceived individuals might think, that they can practice Judaism at home, but must make concessions and compromises outside the home. All such differentiations are contrary to true unity, pure monotheism. For the concept of pure monotheism is not confined to One G-d, but at the same it requires unity in the personal life of each and every Jew, who is a member of the One People, of which it is said that it is "One People on earth." According to the explanation of the *Alter Rebbe* [Rabbi Shneur Zalman], founder of Chabad, "One People on earth" means that they bring oneness and unity also in earthly things, and it is only in this way that the individual can achieve complete personal harmony and unity of the body and soul, at all times, whether in the synagogue, at home, or in the office.

As a doctor you know the immense knowledge that has been accumulated recently in the area of nutrition and diet, and how much the quality of food affects physical and mental health.

Thus, it is obvious how important *kashrus* is for a Jew, since the food and beverages that he consumes become blood and tissue and energy, and food that is not suitable (*kosher*) for a Jew can only alienate him from matters of *Yiddishkeit* [Judaism], and only the right and *kosher* food can nourish him physically, mentally and spiritually. As already mentioned, there is no need to elaborate on this to you, a physician, although your specialty is not directly in the field of nutrition.

The most desirable blessing that can be expressed in this case is that you should indeed serve as a living and inspiring example for others to emulate, and that through your inspiration many others will go from strength to strength in matters of Torah and *Mitzvot* in daily life.

May G-d grant that you should always have good news to report.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This week, we began the month of Shevat. Shevat is the eleventh month of the Jewish year, counting from the month of Nisan (the first month for numbering the months). The number eleven is a very special number. For, while the number ten represents fulfillment and completion, eleven transcends all levels. It is even higher than completion.

Jewish mysticism explains that the number eleven refers to Keter - the Divine crown. Ten is connected with intellect and emotions. Just as a crown is placed on top of the king's head, the crown symbolizes the will and pleasure of G-d which transcends all limitations.

On the first day of Shevat, Moses began speaking to the Jewish people the words which are contained in the book of Deuteronomy, known as the repetition of the Torah. Moses spoke to the Jewish people for 37 days, admonishing them for their past behavior, inspiring them for the future, blessing. At the conclusion of these 37 days, on the seventh of Adar, Moses, the faithful shepherd of the Jewish people, passed away.

Other special days in the month of Shevat are: the tenth of Shevat, which is the anniversary of the passing of the Previous Rebbe and the ascent to leadership of the Rebbe; Tu B'Shevat or the 15th of Shevat which is the New Year for Trees; the 22nd of Shevat which is the anniversary of the passing of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson.

May we very soon see the actualization of the lofty concept of Shevat, eleven - completion, with the complete Redemption, NOW.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקה

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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WHO'S WHO?

Rava lived from 270-350 c.e. He was one of the most often quoted scholars in the Talmud. He was from amongst the fourth generation of scholars in Babylonia. Although his name was Abba ben Joseph bar Chama he is always referred to in the Talmud as Rava. When Rava began teaching he would always preface his discourses with a humorous remark, whereupon the students became cheerful and thereby more receptive and better able to understand the discourse.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

In this week's portion we read that G-d told Moses, "I will also fulfill the promise I made with them, to give them the Land of Israel."

"Them" refers literally to the Patriarchs. But if they had already passed away, how could they receive the land of Israel? From here we learn about *Techiat Hameytim* (Resurrection of the Dead). Even though they are no longer alive, the land will still be given to them because in the days of Moshiach, our forefathers, and all Jews, will come back to life. (*Yalkut Shimoni* 6176)



New Torah Scrolls

The Jewish community of Sokolniki, a neighborhood in eastern Moscow, Russia, welcomed a new Torah Scroll. The Sokolniki Chabad House is located on the campus of the Machon Chamesh Jewish University.

The writing of a new Torah Scroll, the first since the peace agreement was signed between Israel and the UAE, was begun this past month. Uri and Adina Krausz of Switzerland are sponsoring the Torah which when completed will be donated to Chabad of the United Arab Emirates under the directorship of Rabbi Levi Duchman.

New Facility

A new Chabad Lubavitch Center was dedicated this past month in Clamart, France. Clamart is one of the southwestern suburbs of Paris. The beautiful new Center which includes offices, a synagogue, classrooms and a mikva which is currently under construction, is directed by Rabbi Yaacov and Rivkie Chiche.