

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, *Va'etchanan*, we learn of one of the Torah's positive commandments, which is to recite "Shema," the central proclamation of our faith, twice each day.

The Torah specifies when we must say it: "when you lie down," i.e., at night, and "when you rise," i.e., during the day.

"Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One. And you shall love...and you shall speak of them...when you lie down and when you rise...and upon your gates."

With the declaration of "Shema Yisrael," the Jew testifies that G-d is One, and that nothing else exists except for Him.

The word "*echad*" (one), is composed of three Hebrew letters: *alef*, *chet* and *dalet*.

The numerical equivalent of *alef* is one. G-d is alone and unique in the universe.

The numerical equivalent of *chet* is eight. Only G-d is Ruler over all seven firmaments and the earth below.

The numerical equivalent of *dalet* is four. This expresses the concept that G-d is the sole Sovereign over all four directions: east, west, north and south.

By saying the "Shema," the Jew negates the independent existence of the world. He declares that all of creation – the celestial spheres, the earth below and the four winds – are completely nullified before Him. G-d is the One Who sustains and rules over them; without Him, they would not exist. G-d is One; there is nothing else but Him.

A Jew is obligated to recite the "Shema" by night and by day, two opposites that allude to the variety of situations and circumstances a Jew will encounter throughout his life.

Night time, in the allegorical sense, is a time of spiritual darkness, when G-d's light is hidden and concealed. At such times it is hard for the Jew to perceive G-dliness; his spiritual condition is as dark as night.

Daytime, by contrast, is a time when the sun illuminates. Symbolically, this alludes to the illumination of the Jew's soul, when G-dliness is readily perceived and apparent.

Yet regardless of one's spiritual condition, no matter if it is day or night, the Jew must always remember (and remind others) that the entire world is only G-dliness! G-d is the only King of the universe. G-d is One.

Indeed, a person's purpose is to reveal G-d's oneness within creation, and the obligation to nullify the world in His presence is independent of our personal situation and circumstances.

"Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One... when you lie down and when you rise."

Adapted for Maayan Chai from *Likutei Sichot*, Volume 4

Saying Good-Bye

We've all seen or been part of a scenario repeated dozens of times. At a family gathering, a synagogue event, a Jewish lecture, a simcha, someone says, "I'm leaving," and moves to get his coat. Twenty minutes later he's still there. Either in to an all-new conversation, still hugging the Bubbies and Zeidies, or noticing an old friend/relative he didn't have a chance to chat with yet. This phenomenon transcends gender, age, and country of origin. But it does seem to be particularly prevalent among Jews.

It's called a Jewish good-bye and it seems to go on forever. Because Jews never really say "good-bye." We say "*shalom* – peace to you." Or we say in Hebrew "Go in peace." One whose background is more Yiddish might say, "*fort gezunterheit* – travel in health." But we never say "good-bye."

In fact, even were you to scour the modern Hebrew language, you wouldn't find a word for "good-bye." All you'd come up with is "*l'hitraot*," which means "see ya later." (Some Israelis do say, "bye-bye." But pronounced with that decidedly Hebrew accent you know that it's been borrowed from English.)

At a Jewish gathering, private or public, we take a long time to go because, after all, who wants to leave the warm embrace of family – and all Jews truly are one family. All Jews share in each others' simchas and each others' sorrows.

Is there any basis, though, in Jewish tradition, for this seeming inability

to just say "good-bye"?

The *Talmud* enjoins us, "Whatever your host tells you, do, except leave." One of the commentaries explains that a guest must immediately comply with everything the host tells him to do except when the host tells him it is time to leave. The guest should show the host his reluctance to take leave of his company!

In addition, Jewish teachings encourage us that when we part from a friend, we should share a *d'var halacha*, meaning a "word of Jewish law." But *d'var halacha* can also be interpreted as a "word for the way."

So, it's not hard to understand why Jews don't say good-bye. Firstly, we don't really want to leave. Secondly, even when we do realize that we absolutely must leave, we should show our reluctance to leave. And lastly, when we already have our coat on, we should share a thought for the journey (however short) with our friend.

Ultimately, though, one might speculate that not saying "good-bye" has a more eternal and confident message. For, deep within every Jew is the fundamental belief in better times, the best times, the times of Moshiach. In that era – the Era of the Redemption – we will see the fulfillment of one of the principles of Jewish belief, the revival of the dead. And at that time, we will all be reunited with our loved ones. And when we rejoice in being together again with them, we will fully understand why we never really said, "good-bye."

SLICE OF LIFE

Filling the Soul by Nosson Avrohom



Gil Barak was born in Petach Tikva, Israel, and grew up in Ramat Gan in a typical Israeli family.

Gil was extremely smart with a quick mental grasp. He was put in a class for the gifted students in elementary school. He also excelled in sports.

"My mother, like all of her family, was an accountant, and my father was a successful contractor. Materially, I lacked for nothing but regarding Judaism, even growing up in Israel, I knew nothing about Torah and its commandments."

Gil was accepted to the exclusive Bleich High School while he continued with his successful sports career. At his mother's request, he concentrated on biology. After the army he worked as a mega-event planner in Tel Aviv and was tremendously successful.

"Anyone looking at me would think I had it all. But when I would return to my apartment in the wee hours of the morning after an event, I would feel totally empty.

"My friends thought I was crazy. 'You have half of Tel Aviv in your pocket. Why can't you enjoy it?' they would ask me. I didn't have an answer for them."

As time passed, the emptiness became more unbearable until one day I felt I had to make a

change."

Gil shocked everyone. He announced that he was taking time off to examine his feelings, and was leaving the business registered in his name to his partners.

"My first stop was Bangkok, Thailand. All the Israelis I met directed me to the Chabad House where I was invited to come for the Friday night meal.

"I showed up and loved it. It was the first time in my life that I was exposed to Kiddush and a Shabbat meal with singing. I enjoyed it tremendously but it didn't touch me. I didn't think for a moment that I could slake my inner thirst in the Chabad House. I had planned a long trip and the next day I went into isolation on the beaches of Thailand. There too, at first I enjoyed the experience and was excited but then the empty feeling returned."

As Gil sat and contemplated the wonders of nature on one of the gorgeous beaches of Thailand, he picked up a book.

"It was about a person who had plenty of material wealth but he threw it all away and found happiness in mysticism. The pleasures of the world are transient while spirituality offers something that remains forever. This appealed to me and I decided to listen to the advice in the book and leave Thailand for India. I kept referring to the book during that time. I considered it the oracle that guided my life.

"My first stop was an ashram in Puna. I quickly became an integral part of the place. I shaved off my long hair and I was there day and night, reading books and doing yoga and meditation.

"This was the first time in my life that I felt good. For quite a while I felt calm and serene. I had the feeling that I had found inner happiness. I felt removed from the world and was no longer in the rat race but was completely immersed in spirituality.

"This feeling was eviscerated suddenly one evening when there was a special party. All members of the ashram were asked to don white robes. Music played and we all danced. When excitement reached a peak frenzy, the organizers suddenly removed a white curtain which revealed a statue of the deceased founder of the ashram. People began bowing to him. But I couldn't do that. I had this indescribable feeling. I had to escape from there.

"Suddenly, all the feelings of emptiness returned and struck me harder than ever. I threw off the white robe

and ran to where I lived. I collected my things and fled from Puna."

Gil's next stop was Pushkar. "I met a friend who was becoming religious. He took me to the Chabad House. I was very skeptical at first. What touched me more than anything else was the class in the Rebbe's talks. I was there for nine straight days. Every night we learned another talk of the Rebbe and I felt that this was filling me up. In the Chabad House I understood what the difference is between Judaism and the mysticism of the nations of the world. Here you operate within the world while there you seek to disconnect from reality.

"Even after I understood in my heart that Torah is true and Chasidic philosophy is the path that leads a Jew to serve his Maker, the question persisted on an intellectual level. Eventually someone in the Chabad House shared with me a lecture that explained systematically how everything is derived from Torah.

"I remember that night I really understood not just emotionally but intellectually as well that Torah is true. I couldn't sleep. My soul had finally found it's home. I cried until the morning. This time, they were tears of joy upon discovering my Creator."

After a stay in Pushkar in which he acquired the basics, Gil decided to travel to Australia as planned. As soon as he landed in Melbourne, he visited Rabbi Dudu Lieder's Chabad House, which caters specifically to Israelis, where he studied for two months.

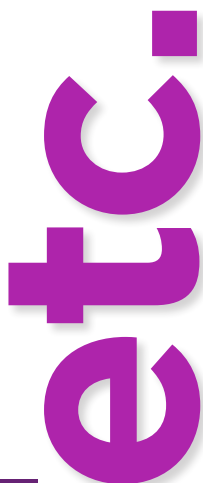
When Gil returned to Israel, his parents, family and friends were surprised at the change in him. But they soon realized he was serious about his observance and they respected his decision.

Gil went to study in the Chabad yeshiva in Ramat Aviv. During those years he also studied psychology at the Open University.

After seven years, Gil married and settled in Ramat Gan. "On our first date, my wife told me that she also visited the Chabad House in Pushkar. She showed me a picture that she took there and told me about a young man who was there and teaching Torah who impressed her. I looked at the picture and was astounded. It was me! Some time after becoming Torah observant, I had flown back to India again to help out at the Chabad House and that is when my picture was taken!"

Today Gil is a marriage counselor. He combines Chasidut and psychology in his work with couples. He has also written two books on the subject.

Condensed from Beis Moshiah Magazine



Completing Maimonides

When the Rebbe instituted the daily study of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in 1984, he explained that one of the intentions was to achieve unity by having the entire Jewish people learning the subject at the same time. The Rebbe had suggested a daily study regimen of three chapters, finishing the entire *Mishneh Torah* in under a year. For those unable to study three chapters on a daily basis, the Rebbe proposed learning one chapter a day, allowing the learner to finish the entire work in just under three years. For those who found even the daily chapter to be a challenge, the Rebbe instituted a third track: studying Maimonides' *Sefer Hamitzvot* ("book of commandments"). This past month, the 39th cycle of daily study came to its conclusion with three study tracks all concluding simultaneously. This trilogy of conclusions created a momentous occasion with hundreds of celebrations taking place all over the world in person and on Zoom.



WHO'S WHO?

Ruth was a descendant of the prophetess Miriam. She lived in Bethlehem together with her husband Elimelech and sons Machlon and Kilyon. During a famine she did not want to leave but felt it proper to follow her husband to Moab. There, her sons married the princesses Ruth and Orpa. Upon the passing of her husband and sons she returned to Israel and Ruth returned with her, becoming a righteous convert and the ancestress of King David and the eternal Jewish monarchy which will be re-established with the coming of Moshiah.

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Reb Nachum and Reb Gedalya were the two wealthiest citizens in their respective counties. Thus, when a match was arranged between the two families it was the talk of the town.

Several weeks passed as preparations were made for the celebration, an event that was already being referred to as “the” event of the year if not the decade. Then, all of a sudden, a rumor began to circulate that Reb Nachum, the father of the bride, had lost his fortune.

Eventually the bitter truth came out: Reb Nachum had been forced to declare bankruptcy. Not only had he lost his personal wealth but he had even had to sell his house to appease his creditors. With nowhere else to go the family moved into a tiny apartment paid for by the community.

When Reb Gedalya heard the news he immediately sent a messenger to Reb Nachum with a letter expressing his sympathy. Reb Nachum’s reversal of fortune sincerely touched his heart. At the same time, it was obvious to him that the match between their children could no longer take place; it was simply a mistake to be remedied as soon as possible.

However, what was obvious to Reb Gedalya was not all that obvious to Reb Nachum. “A match is a match,” he insisted, refusing to back out of the agreement. “It should have nothing at all to do with financial considerations.”

When the messenger returned to Reb Gedalya with Reb Nachum’s reply his compassion quickly turned to anger. Without a moment’s delay he set out for Reb Nachum’s house, taking with him all of his son’s engagement gifts so he could return them.

Reb Nachum, however, was equally adamant in person about refusing to annul the match. “It’s not my fault I lost all my money!” he exclaimed. “A person who sinned under compulsion, G-d exempts from punishment.”

Reb Gedalya thought long and hard about his frustrating dilemma; then an idea occurred to him. “How about a third party making the decision?” he asked. “The famous tzadik, Rebbe Chaim of Sanz, lives not far from here. Let us go to him together, tell him what happened and follow his advice.”

Reb Nachum was unmoved. “I am not calling off the match under any circumstances. It would never have been agreed to if it were not decreed from on high. If you want to go to the tzadik, fine. But I’m not going anywhere.” Annoyed, Reb Gedalya had no choice but to make the trip alone.

It was late Friday afternoon when he arrived in Sanz. Although the Rebbe did not usually receive visitors so close to Shabbat, an exception was made for Reb Gedalya.

It is most likely that the tzadik was already aware of Reb Gedalya’s story, as there was almost no one in the region who hadn’t heard it. Nonetheless, he listened attentively as Reb Gedalya poured out his tale of woe.

The Rebbe was silent for a few minutes before responding. “You are very fortunate to have come here,” he finally said. “However, as it is almost Shabbat, it is too late now to discuss it any further. Why don’t you stay here as my guest, and after Shabbat we will continue this conversation.”

Reb Gedalya left the Rebbe’s presence greatly encouraged and in a hopeful mood. The tzadik had listened to his every word and seemed to agree with him. Surely he would rule in his favor; hadn’t he told him that he was “very fortunate”? Reb Gedalya spent a delightful Shabbat in the Sanzer Rebbe’s courtyard.

Right after Havdala, Reb Gedalya was again admitted into the tzadik’s chamber. With awe and trepidation he awaited the Rebbe’s pronouncement.

“Reb Gedalya,” the Sanzer Rebbe told him, “I want you to leave immediately for Reb

Nachum’s house and deliver the following message:

Tell him that although he agreed to pay for half of the wedding, as he does not have even a penny left to his name, you, Reb Gedalya, will be happy to pay for the entire celebration, which will take place on the date already agreed upon.”

After Reb Gedalya had recovered from his shock he surprised himself by daring to ask for an explanation. “But Rebbe!” he stammered. “I don’t understand. Didn’t you tell me that I was ‘very fortunate’?”

The Rebbe looked directly into Reb Gedalya’s eyes and smiled. “I guess you didn’t understand my intention,” he said. “I meant that you are very fortunate that it is you who has come to me and not your future in-law, Reb Nachum. Can you imagine how you would feel if it were the other way around, if the wheel of fortune had turned for you instead of him?”

Indeed, Reb Gedalya’s son and Reb Nachum’s daughter were wed in a good and auspicious time. And the Sanzer Rebbe himself conducted the ceremony.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

From there you will seek the L-rd your G-d and will find Him (Deut. 4:29)

It is precisely when you seek the L-rd your G-d “from there” – from the depths of your heart and with a sense of complete nullification before the Creator, that “you shall find” – the sudden revelation of the greatest G-dly light. (The Baal Shem Tov)

You have been shown to know that the L-rd is G-d (Deut. 4:35)

When G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai to the soul of every Jew of every generation, He thereby made it possible for any Jew who sincerely desires to serve Him to perceive the true essence of the world, despite the darkness and concealment of what presents itself as reality. (Sefat Emet)

In the heavens above, and on the earth below (Deut. 4:39)

“In the heavens above” – in matters of the spirit – a person should always look to those who are on a higher, more advanced level, and strive to emulate them. As for material concerns (“on the earth below”), one should always look to those who have less, and be grateful and happy with what he already possesses. (The Rebbe)

I stand between G-d and between you (Deut. 5:5)

While this verse in Torah is a direct quote from Moses, the early Chasidim used to interpret it allegorically as follows: It is the “I” – one’s ego and sense of self – that erects the barrier that separates him from G-d...



7:54 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
10 Av/July 31
Torah Portion Va’etchanan
Ethics Ch 3
Shabbat ends 8:56 PM

Dedicated in honor of a dear friend of the L’Chaim Publication

Mr. Victor Braha

בברכה והצלחה מתוך הרחבה גדולה בגשמיות וברוחניות

Wishing you much continued success in all your endeavors