



This is the story of a remarkable man named Ovadia, who lived during one of the worst periods in Jewish history - the Crusades. As during the terrible Roman persecutions, the time of the Crusades saw a notable number of men and women who risked their lives to become Jews. These gentiles, often from the highest echelons of society, became converts to Judaism out of love of the Torah and a desire to serve G-d according to its holy precepts.

Johannes, who upon conversion took the name Ovadia (which means "servant of G-d"), was one such man. He was a Norman nobleman and the son of a Norman knight who took part in the First Crusade under the command of Godfrey, the Duke of Lorraine.

The First Crusade, initiated by Pope Urban II, drew a motley crew of noblemen, adventurers and rogues who left France in 1096, ostensibly to free the Holy Land from the Moslem "infidels." Along the way, they seized the opportunity to rid France and Germany of the local "infidels," the Jews who lived peacefully in hundreds of communities along the Loire Valley, throughout the Rhineland, in Bohemia and in England. As the Crusaders passed through these lands they engaged in the most fearsome wholesale slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent Jews who happened to live in their path.

Johannes was introspective and scholarly, different from his brother, Roger, who fought alongside his father in the Holy Land. It is unknown whether or not Johannes also accompanied his father, but when Jerusalem was conquered by Godfrey and all the Jews in the Holy City were mercilessly slaughtered, he was living in Southern Italy and studying to become a priest. At some point in his Bible study, Johannes came to the conclusion that Judaism was the true faith, and he resolved to become a Jew. It is possible that he was moved by the staunch adherence to their faith displayed by countless thousands of Jews who chose to die horribly rather than abandon their beliefs. It is also possible that he was inspired by the conversion of another prominent gentile several years earlier.

The conversion, in about the year 1094, of no less a personage than Andreas, the Archbishop of Bari (Italy) created a great stir and caused tremendous consternation within the ranks of the Church.

In his diary, Ovadia (Johannes) wrote of Andreas: "G-d put the love of the Law of Moses into his heart. He left his country, his priesthood and glory, and went to the land of Constantinople, where he underwent circumcision. There he suffered great persecution and he had to run away before the uncircumcised, who had tried to kill him. But others imitated him and entered the Covenant of the Living G-d. And the man went to Egypt and lived there until his death, while the leading churchmen were downcast and bowed their heads in shame."

Upon his decision to convert, Johannes traveled to Aleppo, where he sought the help of Rabbi Baruch ben Yitzchak. Johannes told the rabbi that he came from a wealthy and powerful family, but he had decided to abandon everything to become a Jew. This revelation was not only quite astonishing, but frightening as well, since persecution was guaranteed to follow and death was a very real possibility for any gentile who risked conversion. Johannes replied that he was well aware of all the repercussions of his actions, having made the decision thoughtfully over many years. And so, convinced of Johannes's sincerity, Rabbi Baruch accepted him as a righteous convert.

It was impossible to continue living in France, and so Ovadia moved to the city of Bagdad, where life was far from easy, but there was more religious freedom for Jews. Ovadia had managed to bring a considerable part of his fortune with him, and in Bagdad he devoted himself to helping his less fortunate Jewish brethren. He became distinguished for his distribution of charity and was even appointed by the community to be treasurer of the community chest.

Ovadia wrote a fascinating diary during these years. In approximately 1121, he decided to relocate to Fostat (old Cairo), which had a flourishing Jewish community. He noted that while traveling, he met a certain Karaite named Shlomo Hakohen, who claimed to be Moshiach. The man tried to persuade Ovadia to become one of his adherents. Ovadia just laughed at him, countering that Moshiach would be a descendant of King David, not from the priestly tribe as was this Karaite.

Ovadia eventually settled in Egypt, where he wrote an autobiographical memoir in the year 1241. The only fragments that remain were discovered in the famous Cairo *Geniza* (a collection of ancient manuscripts discovered in the Ezra Synagogue in Cairo). In this remarkable cache of thousand-year-old documents were not only fragments of his memoirs, but an inscription on his prayer book and a letter of recommendation given to Ovadia by Rabbi Baruch ben Yitzchak. The bits and pieces which have come down to us, provide us with a window into that time and a glimpse into a remarkable life of faith, sacrifice and adventure.

*Adapted from Talks and Tales*

## THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

**In this wilderness (midbar) shall they be spent (yitamu) (Num. 14:35)**

"Midbar" is related to the Hebrew word for "speech"; "yitamu" is related to the word "tamim" – "perfect and whole." By speaking holy words, by praying and reciting the letters of the Torah, a Jew attains the level of "You shall be whole with the L-rd your G-d," thereby elevating the "sparks of holiness" that have fallen into the realm of evil. (*Likutei Torah*)

**The land is very, very good (Num. 14:7)**

Throughout their 40 years in the desert, the Jews led an overwhelmingly spiritual existence, their basic needs being provided in a miraculous manner. However, the word "very" appears twice in this verse to emphasize and reassure them that the observance of practical commandments that they would perform after entering the land of Israel would be far superior, meriting an even higher revelation of G-dliness. (*Sichot Kodesh*)

**Of the first of your dough ("arisoteichem") you shall set aside a cake for a gift (Num. 15:20)**

In Hebrew the word "arisa," or kneading trough, also means cradle or crib. As soon as a Jew wakes up and gets out of bed, the "first part" of his day should be dedicated as a "gift" to G-d: reciting Psalms, learning Torah, praying with a minyan, etc. (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*)

By observing the laws of challah, a person demonstrates that the dough he obtains through the seemingly natural order of the world ultimately comes from G-d, and that the forces of nature are only "an ax in the hand of He Who wields it." The belief that nature has independent authority and control is idolatrous; hence, one who refutes this belief is considered to have nullified idol worship. (*Likutei Sichot*)



### 8:05 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area  
**24 Sivan/June 4**  
 Torah Portion *Shelach*  
 Blessing of the new month *Tammuz*  
 Ethics Ch 3  
 Shabbat ends 9:13 PM

# L'Chaim

בס"ד  
**1675**  
 24 Sivan, 5781  
 June 4, 2021  
 The Weekly Publication  
 for Every Jewish Person  
 נוסד תוך ימי השלשים  
 Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson  
 "Unveil my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your Torah." (Psalm 119:18)



## LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, *Shelach*, we read about the *mitzva* (commandment) of "Challah"; when baking bread, separate a part of the dough for G-d. In Temple times, the dough would be given to the *Kohen* (priest). However, today we burn it.

Though men are also obligated to do this mitzva, it is considered as one of the special mitzvot near and dear to Jewish women. This mitzva is so holy that women use the time of separating Challah to pour their hearts out to G-d.

What makes this mitzva so special?

Bread is the most basic food and is symbolic of our most basic physical needs. It is what we toil for and work for, to make "bread" and to put "bread" on the table. It is symbolic of everything physical in the world.

When you separate Challah you are touching on the essence of Judaism. You are taking the physical and lifting it up to a spiritual state.

In the Torah, the paragraph that speaks about the mitzva of Challah says the word "*tarimu*" three times. The literal translation of *tarimu* is "you should lift up."

Why does the Torah emphasize *tarimu* – you should lift up – and repeat it three times? Because when you separate Challah there are three aspects of how you are touching on the essence of Judaism. You are taking the physical and lifting it up to a spiritual state in three ways.

First, "*emuna*," belief in G-d. We recognize that all we have is from G-d. One may think "my smarts and abilities has made me all this wealth," which, in a way is like saying, that it is not from G-d. Separating Challah to G-d is a statement and recognition that everything we have is from Him.

Second, our purpose is to infuse the physical world with G-dliness, even something as basic as food needs to be infused and used for G-d.

Third, the food that we feed our families is a holy endeavor, the future of the Jewish people is nourished by the hands of holy Jewish women.

The Jewish wife and mother feeds us *emuna*, feeds us essence, feeds us with a mitzva. You feed us with love, you feed us with pride and you feed us with tears. You are taking the physical and lifting it up to a spiritual state. The heart of a Jewish woman can do all that and more.

*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.*

## Back Up

Expressions have different meanings, depending on what we're talking about. For instance, take the expression "back up." In baseball or other sports, it means "provide support." You back up the player when the ball is hit; in case he doesn't catch it or it gets by him, you're there to provide support, to get the ball and throw it in.

In a ballgame, the "backup" only provides support. He doesn't do the job of the other player. We assume and expect each player to do his job. It's just that sometimes, by mistake or misjudgment, it doesn't get done.

The same applies in Judaism. No one can do our *mitzvot* (commandments) for us or get a Jewish education for us. We each have to do our "Torah jobs" ourselves. But we can always make sure to provide support, to "back up" each other Jewishly. In a ball game, each player plays with more confidence knowing the other players will back him up. In Judaism, we can learn from each other. We can learn to provide support, to "back up" each other Jewishly. In a ball game, each player plays with more confidence knowing the other players will back him up. In Judaism, we can learn from each other. We can learn to provide support, to "back up" each other Jewishly. In a ball game, each player plays with more confidence knowing the other players will back him up. In Judaism, we can learn from each other. We can learn to provide support, to "back up" each other Jewishly.

"Back up" also means to move something backward. In a heated debate, for instance, we might say, "back up," meaning let's retrace our steps, re-discover the true issue, and start again. In this sense, "backing up" Jewishly means going back to the original situation, the original status. We call that *teshuva*.

We also use the term when the normal flow is obstructed. The sink is "backed up"; the water behind a dam is "backed up." And in a similar sense, sometimes our Judaism gets "backed up." Things get in the way – work, worries – and we get behind. Our mitzvot get clogged, log-jammed. Which to do first?

Of course, we unstop our Judaism the same way we unstop the sink – we pull out the obstruction – and often we only need to pull out a little bit, just enough to get the water – or mitzvot – flowing again – and whoosh! – the blockage is swept away, resulting in a strong, steady flow.

"Back up" has another meaning, namely, to provide proof. When we make a claim, we have to back it up with evidence, to prove that it's true. The same thing in Judaism: it's beautiful and important to "feel Jewish" or have a "Jewish heart." But we have to "back it up" with proof, with evidence, with action - the action of mitzvot.

Of course, nowadays, when we say "back up" we're often referring to our computers and phones and the procedure of making a copy of our data in case something goes wrong. If any number of disasters strike, we always have the "back up" – the extra copy.

What does this teach us? The value of duplicating and double-checking. Almost all computer users have experienced the crisis and panic that follows the loss of important data not backed-up.

So, too, in Judaism: it's important to pay attention to the details, to double-check that the product is still under kosher supervision, that there are enough candles for Shabbat before it's time to light them. When taking an account of where we are and where we are headed Jewishly, we have to double-check our self-assessment, make sure we haven't overlooked anything.

And doing a mitzva once is a good start. But it doesn't end there. We need to duplicate it - in ourselves, and encourage others to do so, as well.

So however we look at it, it's time to "back up" our Judaism.

Dedicated in memory of  
 a dear friend of the Lubavitch Youth Organization  
**Mr. Martin Zimet OBM**

# SLICE OF LIFE

The Place for Me  
by Miriam Cherniak



I was born in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. When my parents married they became involved with Chabad in our city. While I was growing up, step by step, my family was becoming more and more religious.

What made an impact on me was of course my family, our vibrant Jewish community, the Jewish school I attended, and also a Chabad program for teens STL (Shiurei Torah Lubavitch) which is something like CTeen. I actively participated in the events and had lots of friends there. But some of the most important things that STL gave me was the meaning behind why we do the *mitzvot* (commandments), how performing mitzvot have impacts the world, inspiration to work on myself, do more and a pride in being Jewish.

When I was 15 years old, I attended my first International CTeen Shabbaton in Crown Heights. It was an incredible experience! I had spent time in Crown Heights before with my family, but this time it was something really special! Do you know the feeling when you go to another place and feel excited about everything that's around you? I had this feeling every single moment for the whole week that I was there.

After coming back to Ukraine, in my thoughts I was still in Crown Heights. There and then I decided that after High School I was going to come back to Crown Heights for longer than a visit. I didn't yet know how, but that was what I wanted. I later went to two more CTeen Shabbatons and each one was inspiration for the whole year.

The following year, I was thinking about what to do after I would finish high school. I thought perhaps to study in a seminary in Israel. Or maybe I would go to college. Maybe this, maybe that. I was also thinking about how I could come back to Crown Heights.

A few of my friends had studied at Machon L'Yahadus women's yeshiva and the thought popped into my head to study there. I had heard glowing reports about the dean Rabbi Shloma Majeski and all of the other teachers' amazing classes. My friends told me about the dorm mother Mrs. Shterna Rodal and the dorm. I didn't even check out the website or ask my friends for more details. I just immediately knew, "Yes, that is what I want to do! That's where I'm going. How didn't I think about it earlier?"

When I was finishing high school I remember seeing my classmates and friends worrying about what they would do after they finished. Should they study marketing or psychology? Go to Israel, Germany or stay in Ukraine? Maybe not continue to study and instead start working? Some of my friends were considering applying to Machon L'Yahadus, but actually only my best friend ended up coming with me. I was so thankful to G-d that I had such clarity about what I wanted to do! (When sitting on the plane to New York I was so calm and happy, I didn't have any second thoughts.)

Being in Machon L'Yahadus was and is an amazing experience. I came to a place where everyone actually cares about each other, everyone is so welcoming, kind and friendly. And of course the knowledge that I gained here was much bigger than I even expected. One of the things at Machon L'Yahadus that inspires me the most is watching the girls around me grow in their Jewish identities and observance right before my eyes. Even after few weeks you see how people change. After few months or a year

— everyone has much more knowledge, different perspectives on life. And that's amazing!

I'd like to share with it was like to be at Machon L'Yahadus last year, in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic. Fifteen of us girls didn't or couldn't go home. We were all living in one house. Sounds like an intro to a reality show! Despite the fact that it was a difficult time in all of our lives, our experience in the dorm was amazing. We became even closer than we had been, truly like a family. We made our own Passover Seders, cooked all of our own Shabbat meals, shared and inspired at *farbrengens*, no rabbis or teachers, just us. I personally didn't feel locked down at all because of being surrounded by so many people. And even the dorm itself is big. (Sometimes I would do 6000 steps in one day without even leaving the building!)

My "favorite" Covid memory is last year on Passover. We were all sitting together on one of the last days of the holiday learning about the splitting of the Red Sea that we were commemorating that night. Someone started telling the story... and I remembered a *Medrash* about it... then someone else brought another commentary... and we all started sharing different insights and commentaries that we had learned in school or on our own. And of course the discussion went beyond just the Splitting of the Sea. We were jumping from one topic and story to another, we brought books to find sources, and everyone was shouting, but in a good way, from excitement and wishing to share what they knew. Such "farbrengens" didn't just happen once, but many times during our lock down! These were really good times.

This year is my second year at Machon L'Yahadus and it is even better than the first. I think because now I have even more appreciation for Machon and the people in it, and also more seriousness in studying of course.

I'm really happy that my transition from teenager into a grown up, which is a very important period in life, took place in Crown Heights at Machon L'Yahadus.

For more info on Machon L'Yahadus visit [womensyeshiva.org](http://womensyeshiva.org) or call (718) 552-2422. For more info on CTeen visit [CTeen.com](http://CTeen.com) or call your local Chabad-Lubavitch Center.



## The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence  
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Freely translated

18th of Teveth, 5720 [1960]  
Greetings and Blessings:

I received your letter of January 10th, in which you ask my explanation of the reference of the four basic elements (*Yesodoth*) mentioned in Chapter 1 of the *Tanya*, and you ask me how it is possible to reconcile this with modern chemistry which recognizes over one hundred elements.

Profactorily, I must make at least two corrections in your letter.

One, the origin of that statement in the *Tanya*, is not as you write, but it is to be found in the *Medrash Rabba Bamidbar 14:12*, and at greater length and in greater detail in many parts of the *Zohar*, and further explained in other books of the Kabbalah.

Two, modern chemistry does not recognize over one hundred basic elements but a considerably fewer number if matter is to be reduced to its basic components or particles, (for the so called elements are themselves made up of atoms, which are the smallest particles into which an element can be divided and yet retain its properties and characteristics, but the atoms themselves are further made up of further smaller particles), such as electrons, protons, and neutrons.

Thus the answer to your question lies in the proper definition of the terms under discussion. For as indicated above, the so called element is not the basic particle matter. Even the term atom, which originally meant something in [di] visible, is an archaism now employed only for convenience, as it no longer corresponds to its original meaning.

Similarly when we speak of an individual as being an element of society this does not mean that the individual himself is not composite.

This should be borne in mind when we consider the term *Yesodoth* in the *Zohar*, *Medrash Rabba*, *Kabbalah*, etc. and of course, in the *Tanya* and other Chabad sources. This does not mean something that under normal circumstances is indivisible or unchangeable.

I might also mention that there is another school of learning which conceives these four *Yesodoth*, not in their physical aspects, but rather qualitatively, this is to say, fire in the sense of the properties of heat and dryness; water, in the sense of coolness and humidity etc.

I hope that this will answer your question, if you have any further questions do not hesitate to write again.

With all good wishes, and with blessing,

1 Sivan, 5716 [1956]

Peace and blessing!

In response to your letter from the 25th of Iyar: I was happy to read in it that many of your doubts have vanished. Our holy books explain that *Safek* – doubt – has the same numerical equivalent as *Amalek*. The intent is to the *Kelipa* of *Amalek* – the spiritual force of impurity that the nation of *Amalek* represented. Just like the people themselves, this force embodies the trait of jumping into even a boiling bath, just so long as it manages to cool the ardor the Jewish people. The same is true of all of your doubts – their source is clearly in the influence of *Amalek*.

You wrote that you read in astronomy books that there are stars whose light rays must travel far more than six thousand years until reaching Earth. How, you asked, could that fit with our holy Torah's position that we are in the year 5716 since Creation?

Even if you were to assume that the above-mentioned calculation about the star's distance is correct (since that, too, is a subject of dissent among scientists), it does not pose a difficulty regarding the age of the universe. Just as stars were created, light rays were also created. And just as G-d could create a star that begins to shine only after its creation, so could He create a star that already has rays of light shining forth from it. Especially since Torah tells us, "there was morning, the first day," even though "Let there be luminaries" was only uttered on the fourth day; i.e. there was light even before the luminaries were set in the heavens.

You write that you saw in some book that possibly the six days of creation did not consist of twenty-four hour days, etc. etc. To our sorrow, similar interpretations are offered in several books. However, they distort the verses, because – with forgiveness asked from the honor of their Torah – they did not properly understand the "foundations" upon which the various scientific theories about the world's age are built. Any knowledge or research into these foundations proves to any healthy mind that they are only conjectures, very far from certainties. This is the scientists' opinion, as is clearly stated in their books. It is just that in the books generally studied in schools by beginners, they conceal their many doubts and uncertainties in the underlying assumptions.

And while there is no need to delve into this at length, the simplest proof that the six days of creation are twenty-four hour days is the fact that the concept of keeping Shabbat after six week days is connected to G-d's resting after the six days of creation

will merit to live in the times about which the Prophet Zechariah said, "In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men from the nations of every language shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that G-d is with you." (*Yalkut Shimoni*)

## A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

The 28th of the Hebrew month of Sivan (coinciding with June 8 this year) is the 80 year anniversary of the arrival in the United States of the Rebbe and the Rebbeztin.

Twenty-eight in Hebrew letters spells *Ko-ach*, meaning "strength." The Rebbe explained this means that strength and permanence are contributed to the entire day, and this in turn gives strength to every Jew to carry out his preparation for the ultimate redemption.

The Rebbe went on to explain that it was in "770" (Eastern Parkway) that the spreading of the wellsprings of Chasidut, the prerequisite to *Moshiach's* revelation, reached its most complete expression.

He referred to 770 using the Talmudic term "Beit Rabbeinu Shebebavel" meaning literally "the house of our Master in Babylonia" that our Sages refer to as the location of the Temple in exile, so to speak.

"Not coincidentally," explained the Rebbe, "770 has the numerical value of the Hebrew word 'poratzta' meaning 'and you shall spread forth.' And it is from 770, explained the Rebbe, that the first revelation of the Third Holy Temple will take place, encompassing the entire building from its lowest levels until its rooftop.

"The rooftop is the place where *Moshiach* stands and announces, 'Humble ones, the time for your redemption has come.' The rooftop of the Holy Temple," continued the Rebbe, "refers to the miniature sanctuary of the Diaspora which represents the Holy Temple of Jerusalem."

It is also not coincidental, the Rebbe pointed out, that "770" is the numerical value of "Beis *Moshiach*" - the House of *Moshiach*.

May we all go together with the Rebbe and 770 and all the miniature sanctuaries - every shul and every Jewish home, for that matter - to the actual site of the Third Holy Temple in Jerusalem, now.

Shmuel Beilman

## 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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### Is It Shabbos Yet?

One of the most beloved books of *HaChai Publishers* is "Is it Shabbos Yet?" by Ellen Emerman, where a young girl, Malky, continually asks her mother the title question as the two prepare for the Friday-night meal. In a spin-off of the book, Emma, a young college student, goes about her day, pressing snooze on her alarm, grabbing a drink at Starbucks, writing papers and inviting friends to Chabad for Shabbat. The book's story line reflects Vikki Kalbacher's experience on campus with Chabad becoming her second home. A journey that began six years ago, culminated in Kalbacher teaming up with Nechama Haskelovich, co-director of Chabad at the University of Pennsylvania, and her daughter Devora who illustrated *Is It Shabbos Yet? The College Student Edition*. Available in Jewish book stores or at [LubavitchHouse.com/book](http://LubavitchHouse.com/book)



### Today Is...

24 Sivan

"You ask how can you be bound to me when I do not know you personally...The true bond is created by studying Torah. When you study my Chassidic discourses, read my transcribed talks and associate with those dear to me – the chassidic community and the students – in their studies and *farbrengens*, and you fulfill my request regarding saying Psalms and observing Torah-study times – in this is the bond."