

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

This week we read two Torah portions, *Nitzavim* and *Vayeilech*. *Nitzavim* is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana. *Nitzavim* speaks of our commitment to G-d, His Torah and *mitzvot* (commandments). It teaches about "teshuva" and tells of how G-d will gather us from the farthest places. It is clearly talking about us and our time, as we sit on the threshold of Moshiach's coming.

Teshuva means "return [to G-d]." On a basic level this means, to regret past lapses, ask for forgiveness and get back on G-d's path.

For a person who has broken trust and wants to once again be trusted, being remorseful and saying "I'm sorry" is not enough. He needs to reach higher, find a greater level of character and prove himself worthy.

However teshuva can be so much more. Even the holiest of people can tap into the power of teshuva.

The verse in our Torah portion states, "And you will return until the L-rd your G-d." What does "until" mean? "Return" implies going back to a place or situation you were in before. We are returning to a place where we are in perfect harmony with G-d, the place before our lapse or indiscretion.

Each of us has a soul, described in Chabad Chasidic teachings as an actual "part" of G-d. It is our essence. Over time we could become so involved in the world around us that our soul gets forgotten.

Teshuva is connecting to our G-dly essence, the soul. It is a journey to your core, every step you take inward, brings clarity. You see how you are one with G-d, and that He loves you because you are part of Him. When you connect at this level, the lower levels of teshuva are automatic. How could you remain the same after connecting so deeply? Regret, remorse and contrition over your previous state will overtake you, and you become closer to G-d.

Being that our soul is infinite – part of Infinite G-d – there are always deeper levels to connect to. Through teshuva even a totally righteous person will access new levels of bonding with G-d.

Your core essence is already there; your soul has always been at the highest level. You now have to "return until G-d," return to where your soul is one with G-d.

Suffering also brings one closer to G-d. We have suffered enough. Perhaps G-d wants our closeness to come from our own initiative. Being a father and a husband, I love my family to no end, like any father and husband would. When the love and closeness from my family is from their own initiative, the pleasure is even deeper.

In preparation for Rosh Hashana, let us take the initiative to get closer to G-d. May He, with His Parental love, send Moshiach and gather the exiles and bring us home.

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.

Two Heads Better Than One

As we approach Rosh Hashana, the "head" of the year, we are reminded of the adage "two heads are better than one." We're not referring to the fact that the Jewish New Year is celebrated for two days. Rather, as this is the season when Jews customarily greet each other with good wishes for the coming year, two heads - two people - extending blessings one to the other, are surely better than one.

"Have a good, sweet year," "Shana Tova," "May you be blessed with a healthy, happy year." These sentiments are offered when we bump into an acquaintance, call a relative or send New Year's cards. Judaism encourages us to keep those blessings coming not only before, during and immediately after Rosh Hashana, but throughout the entire year, as well.

How important the concept is of blessing others can be learned from the beginning of the Torah. The first letter of the first word of the Torah is the Hebrew letter "beit." Would it not have been more appropriate, one might ask, for the Torah to begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, "alef"? However, to emphasize the importance of the concept of blessing, the Torah begins with the letter "beit," the first letter of the word "bracha," or blessing.

Just as the Torah begins with the letter *beit*, signifying blessing, so too, should a Jew – a living Torah – "begin with a blessing." Simply stated this means that we should try to begin or at least incorporate into our conversations and

correspondence good wishes and blessings to others.

The Chasidic masters used to say, "When two Jews meet, their meeting should provide a benefit for a third Jew." As stated before, "two heads are better than one!" It can and should be part of our routine, in these days before Rosh Hashana and throughout the year, that when we encounter a friend or acquaintance, we figure out how our meeting can assist a third person. Perhaps you know someone who needs a job and I know of a job opening. Maybe I have a friend who is not feeling well and to my, "May so-and-so have a speedy recovery," you can answer a hearty "amen"? You might know a nice, single Jewish man and you can ask me if I possibly know Ms. Right. Is there a senior in my neighborhood who I don't know (but you do) who would appreciate an offer to pick some things up at the store?

Let no one underestimate his or her ability to so profoundly help another person while expending so little effort. For, as we approach the New Year for the world and the anniversary of the creation of humankind on Rosh Hashana, we are reminded that each person is obligated to say, "The world was created for me." Far from being a call to selfishness and egotism, the obligation to view the world as being created "for me," sensitizes us to the far-reaching affects that our conduct can have and that our deeds will affect the entire world.

May we all be blessed materially and spiritually, and may we usher in the ultimate Redemption, NOW!

SLICE OF LIFE

The Road to Finding Meaning by Jake Yaakov Greenstein



Yaakov during his studies at Mayanot

Growing up, I was always the only Jew in class. As a secular Jew going to public school in a Catholic town, I had no connection to any Jewish community and always felt like an outsider. Anti-semitism was a daily reality. The word “Jew” was spoken as a venomous slur. Embarrassed of my Jewish identity – a label that I did not ask for – I retreated. I felt that religion was simply old-fashioned tribalism designed to divide us into groups. I assimilated, called myself an atheist, and explored Eastern-philosophy to satisfy my craving for spirituality.

And as demand grew for a mikvah to serve Center City’s growing community of young Jewish families, the congregation realized what had to be done. With space at a premium in the heart of downtown, it had one option.

“To buy a property would have doubled the price of the project,” said Schmidt. “This made it possible. And with what the sages say about the mikvah being a priority, it was clear what had to be done.” Indeed, the Talmud (Megillah 27a) states that having a mikvah in a Jewish

community takes precedence over having a synagogue. It wasn’t until Birthright Israel, at the age of 21, that my understanding of what it means to be a Jew changed. Experiencing the Jewish nation first-hand made me reflect on my preconceived notions about my Jewish identity. Tzfat is where I learned that Judaism could be spiritual, and where I was introduced to Kabbalistic thought. Our tour guide told me to stop identifying as “Jew-ish” and to simply be a Jew. A proud Jew. I realized that the path I was searching for was the path beneath my feet. Birthright Israel was a pivotal moment that gave me the courage to look inward and confront myself.

After graduating from college and a 6-month internship in Tel Aviv in technology, divine providence, brought me to Mayanot. Mayanot gave me an opportunity to develop an integrated sense of self within my Jewish identity. No fraternity experience in college could ever compare to the inspiration of living with 50 guys in a yeshiva who are all dedicated to becoming better versions of themselves. My goal for studying at Mayanot was to discover a path towards living a spiritual life that reflects my Jewish identity - an identity that I had only just begun to connect with.

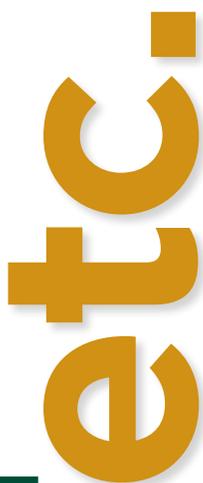
My first few months in Mayanot felt overwhelming at times. I was able to see myself and my life reflected in the clearest mirror I’d ever looked in, complete with all its details and blemishes. Memories and stories that I’d once fondly looked back on as my formative years now seemed like moral transgressions in the absence of character. Being confronted with the truth forced me to reconsider my value hierarchy. What would it mean to take seriously the idea of living a life in service to G-d? Either everything has meaning, and I am ultimately responsible for my thoughts, speech, and actions, or nothing has meaning. The latter is a slippery slope to nihilism and depression, while the former demands tremendous work on my behalf to undergo spiritual development

Rabbi Kaufmann’s philosophy class - Concepts in Jewish Thought - was by far my favorite class, as it provided a philosophical anchor from which I could approach the enormity of the task before me. In it, Rabbi Kaufmann discusses the essential concepts underpinning Jewish thought, primarily through the analysis of Maimonides’ 13 Principles of Faith. The class has equipped me with a foundation for approaching the Jewish canon and changed the way I thought about Judaism in general, particularly through rigorously defining what G-d is and is not. Additionally, the class ends with a Q&A session in which a spirited debate typically unfolds.

Though I originally imagined attending Mayanot only for a month or two, I am now a mere month away from completing my first year. Having recently been accepted to law school to study technology law, I’ve decided to defer my admission to continue refining myself to become a better Jew and, G-d willing, husband and father. Judaism, and particularly Chabad Chassidus, have completely reoriented my approach to career and ambition. To live a life of Torah and mitzvot need not be mutually exclusive with a lucrative career. Rather, to understand that career is merely a vehicle for more meaningful pursuits, such as supporting a family, building a community, and giving Tzedakah, has put everything in perspective.

It never occurred to me that a life centered around ethics was essential for finding meaning. I was taught to only prioritize my career, and perhaps in my 30’s consider having a family. Mayanot has provided me with an opportunity to establish a foundation in Torah, explore my heritage, and develop a philosophical perspective through Chassidus that affects everything I do. It has changed the type of family that I, G-d willing, hope to raise. This journey that I’ve been on as a Ba’al Teshuva has completely expanded the scope of what I thought was possible in life.

Yaakov is currently studying law at Cardozo School of Law.



Sanctuary to Mikva

Rabbi Menachem and Chava Schmidt, co-directors of Lubavitch House of Philadelphia, have made the difficult decision – together with their congregants – to turn the sanctuary of the Vilna Synagogue in Center City, Philadelphia, into a mikva. The need for a mikva to serve Center City’s growing community of young Jewish families has been steadily increasing. To buy a property would have doubled the price of building a mikva. And since the Talmud states that having a mikva in a Jewish community takes precedence over having a synagogue, it was clear what needed to be done. Work has already begun on Mikva Mei Shalvah

Think Good

Chabad of Hackensack has brought a positive message to the masses in a “back to the basics” form, a massive billboard. The public service announcement board overlooks the large I-80 highway as it passes through New Jersey, proclaiming the ever relevant Chasidic adage, “Think good, it will be good.”



WHO’S WHO?

Shmuel (Samuel) the Prophet was the first of a group of leaders who comprised the Era of the Prophets. Samuel was the child of Elkanah and Chana. Chana, a prophetess, was childless for many years and prayed for a child on Rosh Hashana in the Sanctuary. Her prayers were answered and Shmuel was born in 931 b.c.e. At a very young age he was apprenticed to the High Priest Eli. Shmuel wrote the biblical books Judges, Ruth and Samuel. He anointed King Saul and then afterward King David. In Psalms, King David equates Shmuel with Moses and Aaron (99:6)



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In the Month of Elul, *Chodesh Horachamim* [the month of mercy], 5733

To the Boys and to the Girls

Participants in the Tzedoko [charity] Campaign

G-d bless you

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to be informed that you fulfilled my request to act as my agents in the *Mitzvah* [commandment] of Tzedoko connecting it with a word of Torah, and adding to it your own Tzedoko.

Needless to say, in every case of doing a *Mitzvah* there is no place for a "Thank you" from a human being, since doing the *Mitzvah* in fulfillment of G-d's will is itself the greatest reward and truest happiness, and as our Sages of blessed memory declared: "The Reward of a *Mitzvah* is the *Mitzvah* itself."

However, it is in order to express thanks for acting as my agents in this joint effort and for this I say: Thank you very much to each and every one of you.

I also take this opportunity, as we have entered the month of Elul, to remind you of the special significance of the month, the Month of Divine Grace in preparation for Rosh Hashonoh and for the entire coming year, may it be a good one for all of us.

The Alter Rebbe [Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism] explains the special significance of this month by means of the well-known parable of a "King in the field;"

"When a King approaches the city of his royal residence the people of the city go out to welcome the king in the field. Then everyone who wishes is permitted to come and greet the king and he receives everybody graciously and with a smiling face. But after he

enters his Royal Palace special permission is required to see the king and this also is the privilege of a chosen few."

This, then, is the significance of the whole month of Elul, when the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He, makes known that He is "in the field" and everyone – man, woman, boy and girl – can come to Him without difficulties, or special introductions.

But – one may ask – what is the meaning of approaching the King in the field, since G-d has no likeness of a body, nor a body and as the Torah warns, "You have not seen any image (of G-d)?"

...Elul, when [G-d] makes known that He is "in the field" and everyone can come to Him without difficulties, or special introductions.

Therefore the Alter Rebbe goes on to explain that this approach has to do with prayer, for prayer in general and in the days of Elul in particular is an occasion concerning which is written, "May G-d cause His face to shine upon thee" – face to face – the person praying standing directly in the presence of the King, as in the parable above.

And the Alter Rebbe adds, that in order that such closeness be truly meaningful in a lasting and tangible way, it must be followed by actual study of Torah, by Tzedoko and Good Deeds.

May G-d grant that each and every one of you should go from strength to strength in all matters of Goodness and Holiness, Torah and *Mitzvos*, and be a source of pride and true *Nachas* [pride] to your parents and teachers, and may you make fullest use of the auspicious days of this month and be inscribed for a good and sweet year materially and spiritually.

With the blessing of *kesivo vechasima tovah* [may you be written and sealed for good],

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

We are in the midst of the month of Elul, a time of introspection and soul-searching. As the old year draws to a close, we take stock of our behavior and make amends for any wrongs we may have committed. In preparation for the New Year, we conduct an honest assessment of our conduct, that we may be aroused to repentance and improvement of our Divine service.

During Elul, a Jew can almost sense the difference in the air. Everyone feels an inexplicable urge to draw closer to G-d, to increase in Torah and mitzvot.

The G-dly soul that every Jew possesses automatically pulls him in the direction of holiness. However, there are two basic ways to motivate a person: the "carrot" and the "stick." Fear of punishment may yield the desired results, but it usually causes more damage than benefit.

Historically, it was against this backdrop that the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples first arose. In those days, itinerant preachers would "put the fear of G-d" into simple Jews by vividly describing the punishments that would befall them if they did not walk the straight and narrow.

The Chasidic approach, however, is the exact opposite. The Baal Shem Tov emphasized the innate worth of every Jew, the value of serving G-d with purity of heart, the immense power of prayer and the beauty of the Jewish soul.

In Elul, G-d's Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are manifested with particular intensity. It should thus be a time of only emphasizing the positive and increasing our love for our fellow Jew. In the merit of our good deeds (especially the mitzva of charity), each and every one of us will be found deserving, and G-d will inscribe us together with all the righteous.

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



In this week's portion *Ki Teitzei* we read, "If any of you are dispersed at the outermost parts of heaven from there will the L-rd

your G-d gather you" (*Deut. 30:4*) No matter how far a Jew may be from Judaism, G-d promises to gather him back into the fold of the Jewish people when Moshiach comes. When a Jew is spiritually brought back from "the outermost parts of heaven," it hastens Moshiach's coming and brings the Redemption closer. (*The Rebbe*)



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Many years ago in Poland there lived a wealthy Jewish merchant who bought flax from the nobility and then resold it abroad. At the same time, he pursued the holy mitzva of “*pidyun shevuim*,” ransoming prisoners. (In those days it was not unusual for Jews to languish in debtors’ prisons when they failed to pay on time for leasing inns or other properties.)

One day the merchant was on his way to the estate of one of the Polish landowners, when he fell asleep at the reins of his carriage. As he dozed, the horses wandered off the path. When the merchant awakened he found himself on an unknown road. In front of him was a carriage driver fixing a broken wheel. Inside the carriage, a Polish gentleman sat looking angry and impatient. The merchant asked the nobleman if he could be of any assistance.

“Yes, you certainly can,” he replied. “I would be most grateful if you would drive me to the inn just fifteen minutes ride from here. I could use a bit of whiskey, and I will be happy to treat you to some also in return for the favor.”

“I will be happy to take you to the inn,” the merchant replied. On the way they spoke amiably, and the nobleman discovered that the merchant dealt in flax, which was one of his primary crops. “What a happy coincidence,” he thought, and they agreed to meet again to conduct some business.

When they arrived at the inn the Jewish innkeeper rushed to offer the Pole, who was his landlord, hospitality. The merchant went into the other room to say his afternoon prayers. He couldn’t help but overhear snippets of conversation. “Moshke, you had better pay up the rent, now!” the landlord barked. The Jew responded meekly about the terrible snows which had kept customers away.

The merchant finished praying, and was about to leave, but the innkeeper begged him to partake of some refreshments. “No, I’d better be on my way,” the merchant replied. “But tell me, are you having problems with the landlord?”

“He’s drunk now. I hope when he sobers up he’ll extend me credit a bit longer.” The two Jews bade each other farewell, and the merchant departed.

When the flax harvest arrived, the Jewish merchant remembered the Polish landlord. He went to the estate, and the Pole was glad to make a deal with him. They settled on a price and drew up a contract. The conversation was friendly, and the merchant mentioned Moshke. “How is our friend, the innkeeper?”

“Oh, I had to put him in prison. Imagine, after all the chances I gave him, he still didn’t pay me! Now, it’s his wife’s problem to come up with the money!”

“What! I can’t believe you actually imprisoned the poor fellow! How much does he owe you?” asked the merchant.

The landlord mentioned a figure, exactly the sum agreed upon for the deposit. The merchant placed the money in the Pole’s hand, and said, “There is the money he owes you. Now, set him free!”

“Fine. Now give me the money for the deposit and we’ll conclude our deal.”

“I’m sorry, Sir. I have no more money with me.”

“I have never seen such a thing,” exclaimed the Pole. “You have just given all your money to an utter stranger, and in the bargain, you have lost out on a wonderful deal which could have made you a tidy profit!”

“What you say is true, Sir, except for one thing – that Jew is not a stranger to me, he is my brother, and it is my duty to redeem him.”

The Pole was stunned. “You are a fine fellow. I will sign the contract without a deposit. I will also write a letter of recommendation to my brother-in-law, who is also a flax merchant. He will be anxious to do business with you.”

The Jewish innkeeper was returned to his joyful family, and the gratitude they felt toward the merchant was inexpressible. But how on earth would they ever be able to repay him for his kindness? “I wouldn’t sell my mitzva for any amount of money!” the merchant declared, and they parted in happiness and with a deep feeling of brotherhood.

The merchant proceeded to the other landlord with the letter of recommendation. Just

as the first Pole promised, his relative was happy to sell his flax to the Jew. They were about to conclude the deal when the merchant heard a child crying in Yiddish, “Daddy, Mommy, I want to go home!”

“Why is a Jewish child here, away from his parents?”

“I had to take him so his parents would pay what they owe me!”

The merchant suddenly rose from his seat. “I can’t do business with a man who would take a child as hostage!”

The Pole was anxious not to lose the sale. “Fine. I’ll have the child returned, just let’s finish our business.” Just as his brother-in-law had done, this man also concluded the deal without a deposit, and the merchant made a very nice profit on the sale of the flax. In addition, he accrued yet another precious mitzva to his account when the child was returned to his grieving parents.

The Jewish merchant was rewarded in this world as well as the next. And he was blessed with yet another great reward, the birth of two sons who lit up the world with their holiness, the illustrious tzadikim, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk and Reb Zusia of Anipoli.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

The anger of G-d burned against this land... and G-d rooted them out of the land in anger... and cast them into another land (Deut. 29:26-27)

The curses and punishments enumerated in this section of the Torah are merely warnings, not promises that G-d must fulfill. Their purpose is to arouse the heart of man to choose good over evil so that they will never come to pass. *(Peninei HaGeula)*

G-d will circumcise your heart... in order that you may live (Deut. 30:6)

When G-d will circumcise your heart, the pleasure and delight that you will take in Torah and mitzvot [commandments] will be as keenly felt as the pleasures of the physical body; you will love the Torah as much as you value your very life. *(Ohel Yaakov)*

To love the L-rd your G-d...and to cleave unto Him (Deut. 30:20)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, author of the Tanya, used to say in the midst of his devotion: “Master of the Universe! I do not want your Garden of Eden, nor am I interested in the World to Come. I desire only You alone!”

See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil (Deut. 30:15)

One should not perform good deeds in order to live; one should live in order to perform good deeds. *(Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk)*

Dedicated in honor of our dear parents
Misha and Olga Rovner
 And our dear children
Jacob and Jordanna Rovner
 Wishing you a happy and healthy sweet new year
Anna and Serge Rovner



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