

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, *Vaetchanan*, we have the famous, fundamental words of the "Shema" followed by the command to love G-d: "And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might."

When it comes to loving someone, you either do or you don't. You cannot be commanded to love another. How then do we fulfill this commandment?

G-d "wants" to be understood, to be known. The more we understand G-d, the more we love Him. Being that G-d is infinite there is always more to know.

To be loved, is to be understood. Most women know this naturally, as they yearn to be understood. When they are understood they feel loved.

To understand, you must listen. To listen is to remove ones personal perception and feelings on the subject and hear it from the other's perspective totally. To listen is not just about hearing, it's about picking up on nuances such as facial expressions, body language and hints. To experience the other.

Again, most women naturally know how to listen, most men do not, hence the complaint "he doesn't listen." Good listening takes effort.

G-d is saying, try to understand Me, from My perspective. Hints are found all over the Torah. Pick up on the hints, listen.

G-d is asking us to understand: Why did He create this world? How do we fit in the scheme of things? He wants us to understand Him, to know Him.

A hint to this is found in the first verse of the Shema:

"Listen Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one."

In the Torah, this verse has two oversized letters "ayin" (א) and "daleth" (ד). Together they make up the word דע – *dah*, to know or understand.

If you will listen – Shema, You will understand – Dah (know), that *HaShem* is our G-d, *HaShem* is One. In other words, if you will listen you will begin to understand what G-d is all about – and then you will love G-d.

Knowing G-d's purpose for us and His reasoning, will motivate you and animate you, as you will find deep meaning in fulfilling G-d's will. You will fulfill G-d's will not from a feeling of obligation but rather from love.

Listen, understand, love.

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.

Bless You!

Starting from the fifteenth of the Hebrew month of Av (this coming Wednesday), it's a Jewish custom to wish each other in correspondence and in conversations: "*K'iva vachatima tova* - may you be written and sealed for good."

You may well be wondering, "Isn't Monday a little early to start thinking about Rosh Hashana, let alone sending out holiday greetings? After all, it's over six weeks until the High Holidays!"

What's more, gift shops and supermarkets haven't even yet set aside a place in their card racks for "Jewish New Year" cards!

Perhaps if we understand the value of each one of us blessing our friends and family we'll come to realize that it's not early at all!

Wishing friends and relatives a sweet, New Year, along with any other blessings you wish to include, is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.

"I will bless those who bless you," G-d informed our illustrious ancestor Abraham. By blessing someone else, we precipitate receiving our own Divine blessing. The weeks before Rosh Hashana are an especially good time to "reach out and touch someone," whether in person, via phone, social media or mail. When you offer the hope that they be inscribed and sealed for a good and sweet year, you are actualizing a blessing for yourself.

"But wait a minute. Who am I anyway to be blessing someone else?" you wonder. In the *Talmud*, Rabbi Elazar teaches, "Never let the blessing of even a common person be considered insignificant in your

eyes." For, as the Talmud continues, two great men, King David and the prophet Daniel, were blessed by simple people and those blessings were fulfilled.

Just how far does this concept of the value of a simple person's blessing go?

The quote above is preceded in the Talmud by these words: Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, a High Priest



said, "Once, when I entered the Holy of Holies, I beheld the Holy One and He said to me, 'Ishmael, My son, bless Me!' I said, 'Sovereign of the Universe, may it be Your will that Your mercy overcome Your anger, and that Your compassion overrule Your attributes; let Your conduct toward Your children be with loving kindness... and may You overlook strict Judgment.' The Holy One bowed His head to me [in confirmation]." According to the Talmud these words of Ishmael ben Elisha are the same prayers G-d, Himself, offers.

In this coming year, may we bless our friends and relatives – and thereby ourselves – with a year of mercy and compassion, loving kindness and the forgiving of transgressions, by one another and by G-d.

SLICE OF LIFE

An Unusual Visit

by Chaya Chazan



Rabbi Dovid Goldstein, together with his wife Elisa, founded Chabad of West Houston in 1998. He is the head Jewish chaplain for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and works extensively with Jews incarcerated in federal and state prisons in Texas. Rabbi Goldstein shares a unique story:

One day I got a phone call. “Hi, Rabbi Goldstein. I’m working with the Innocence Project to halt capital punishment across all prisons. Did you know there’s a Jew on death row in your prison?”

I wasn’t aware of any Jews on death row, but as there are over 150,000 inmates in the Texas prison system, I only meet with those who apply for the Jewish program. Apparently, this particular inmate, Fred Davidson*, hadn’t applied.

I immediately looked into him and discovered some interesting facts. He’d had a difficult childhood, which had affected his mental state. His only Jewish contact was an old penpal from New York, who now sold Kabbalistic amulets. He’d asked to be cremated after his sentence was carried out.

I tried explaining to his mother how terrible it was for the soul to be cremated, but she wasn’t religious at all and couldn’t care less. She was annoyed when I persisted, and asked me not to try

and convince her son out of it.

I wanted to visit Fred to put tefillin on with him, say viduy together, and talk to him about the afterlife. Death row inmates are not granted the privilege of contact visits, but I got religious dispensation for a twenty minute personal visit.

Three days before his execution date, I took Rabbi Mendy Traxler with me, and we were led into a small room. A few minutes later, two prison guards escorted a heavily chained Fred into the room and sat him across from us.

“Rabbis, thank you for coming. I want to make it clear – I am not interested in Judaism. If that’s what you came here to discuss, we can end this meeting now.”

We only had 20 minutes to change his mind. Failure was simply not an option. I knew he’d grown up in Dallas, where I’d also spent part of my childhood, so I brought up sports, hoping to establish a friendly connection. With the ticking clock in mind, I tried sneaking in some Jewish tidbits, but Fred immediately caught on. He slammed his fist on the table, narrowed his eyes, and yelled, “I told you! No Jewish-talk!”

“I’m sorry; I’m sorry,” I apologized. “No more Jewish-talk.”

We began to discuss how he’d ended up in prison. It was a fascinating, if unnerving, experience to hear a murderer’s perspective on what had led to his killing spree.

The 20 minutes were up, but the guard on the other side of the glass was taking a well-deserved nap, so I eagerly pushed my luck again.

“I know you don’t want to talk Judaism, but I heard you have a Jewish friend who’s into Kabbalah.”

Fred’s eyes lit up. “I love Kabbalah!” he exclaimed.

“Really?” I asked, surprised. “What Kabbalah have you learned?”

“I love the Hebrew alphabet, and the significance of the letters,” he enthused.

“Which letter is your favorite?” I asked.

“Shimu!” he answered, confidently. He held up three fingers. “Shimu!”

“Oh, shin! Why is it your favorite letter?”

“I read that King David had a shin on his shield. King David was a mighty warrior, so I love King David!”

“Do you want to be a warrior like King David,

Fred?” I asked him, sensing my opening. His eyes opened wide. I opened my tefillin bag and removed the shel rosh. “See?” I showed him the engraving on the side of the box.

“That’s the shin!” he said, excitedly.

“Exactly! Just like King David! Would you like to put them on?” I offered.

“Okay,” he agreed.

I crossed to his side of the table and began wrapping the tefillin around his manacled arms. He repeated Shema after me, word by word, before breaking down in sobs. It was surreal to see such a large, intimidating man, who’d ruthlessly killed others in cold blood, crying like a child. We continued with the rest of the tefillah, as well as viduy.

I judged the time ripe to open the most important discussion. I broached the topic of cremation and started to explain why a Jewish burial is so important.

“I don’t really care either way, Rabbi,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. “If you think I shouldn’t get one, I’ll tell my mother to call you to discuss it.”

The guard, now awake, began motioning to us to wrap it up.

“Fred, I’m sure we’ll see each other again. Until that time comes, I bless you chazak ve’ematz - may you be strong, and may G-d be with you,” I told him. “Before I leave, I have one small request.”

“What is it?” he asked, suspiciously.

“Can I give you a hug?” I asked.

He thought for a moment. “Only if it will make you feel better.”

“It will,” I assured him.

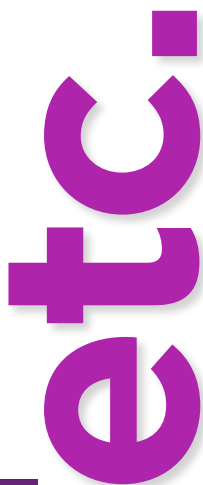
He agreed, and let me give him a hug. With that, we said farewell, and left.

Three days later, on the day of Fred’s execution, his mother called me. I thought she’d be upset that I’d spoken to Fred about cremation after she specifically asked me not to, but she’d called for a different reason.

“Rabbi,” she began. “My son has been on death row for eight years. He’s been constantly mistreated by everyone. In all those years, the only person to lay a loving hand on him was you. Fred called me and told me about your visit, including the hug you gave him before you left. I can see you truly care about him. I’ll sign over the rights to his body, and you can bury him as you see fit.”

Fred Davidson, after a life of wandering, was buried with full Jewish dignity.

From dollardaily.org



New Chabad Centers and Emissaries

Rabbi Mendel and Nechama Gurary recently arrived in **Wood Ranch, California** to open a new Chabad Center in the city. Wood Ranch is located in the hills of Simi Valley and has an estimated 400 Jewish families. The new Chabad House will host holiday programs, services, a women’s club, Torah classes, and an early childhood day care.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel and Shoshi Zilbershtrom have arrived in **Jurmala, Latvia** to open a new Chabad Center in that city. The new emissaries will focus on serving the ever-growing local Jewish community, businessmen, and thousands of tourists who come every summer to the popular tourist location on the shores of the Gulf of Riga and just west of the capital. The Zilbershtroms will also lead the youth and teen activities in Riga. The newly established Chabad House will help ensure that every Jew in the city will be able to connect to their Jewish roots and heritage.

Hakel–Unite

Experience has borne out that people are enthusiastic and excited when they are told the history of Hakel, that in the time of the temple this year would be a Hakel year when the people and the king would gather in the temple. Furthermore, in the spiritual sense the mitzva (commandment) may be fulfilled now, too, by attending a Hakel gathering which will effect more fear of G-d and greater Jewish unity. *(From a letter of the Rebbe to Lubavitch Yeshiva of Manchester, 5748)*



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

19th of Tammuz, 5720 [1960]

Greeting and Blessing:

I received your letter of the 8th of Tammuz, with the enclosures for which you will find receipt herewith.

As requested, I will remember you and your wife in prayer when visiting the holy resting place of my father-in-law of saintly memory, in accordance with the contents of your letter.

Needless to say, one must have absolute faith in G-d, while at the same time providing the channels and vessels in the natural way to receive G-d's blessings, and the greater the faith in G-d, the sooner and in a larger measure one sees the fulfillment of G-d's blessings.

With regard to the matter of the observance of the laws of *Taharas Hamishpocho* [family purity], and that there are some doctors who suggest that the period of abstention required by these laws might interfere with the period of ovulation, I need hardly say that the ruling of the *Rov* [Rabbinic authority] is, nevertheless, quite binding. Moreover, inasmuch as these laws are part of our Torah, which is called *Toras Chaim*, being the guide in life, it is impossible that the observance of the Torah, especially such a basic law as *Taharas Hamishpocho*, should interfere with another law, especially such a basic *mitzvah* [commandment] as procreation, which is the first *mitzvah* in the Torah.

As a matter of fact, I would like to call your attention to the fact, which I am sure also your doctor will substantiate, that there are many medical authorities who do not accept the whole theory regarding the period of ovulation with absolute certainty.

Furthermore, the number of medical authorities subscribing to this latter view is increasing. But even those who do attach importance to this theory, do not claim that the period of ovulation could be so carefully narrowed down as to make a day or two significant. Finally, there are various methods and treatments which help to postpone the period of ovulation and which have been applied to good advantage.

May G-d, whose benevolent Providence extends to everyone individually, fulfill your heart's desire to be blessed with healthy offspring.

Hoping to hear good news from you,
With Blessing,

It would be advisable to ascertain if, at the time of your marriage, either you or your wife might have been involved in hurting the feelings of a man or woman through a previous broken engagement or promise, and the like, in which case a *Mechila* [asking forgiveness] might be necessary.

Ed.'s note: Eleven months after the Rebbe wrote this letter of advice and blessing to the childless couple he wrote another letter wishing them mazel tov on the birth of their first child

16th of Adar I, 5725 [1965]

I was pleased to receive your letter of the 15th of Shevat, in which you write about the successful initial meeting on *Taharas Hamishpocho* [family purity], and the fruitful beginnings.

It is, of course, unnecessary to emphasize to you the paramount importance of this cause. Nor do I think that it would require a great deal of persuasion to convince the other participants in the meeting of the vital importance of *Taharas Hamishpocho*.

Suffice it to say that even where a person may not be so meticulous insofar as he or she is concerned, yet there is no limit to the love and devotion of parents to their children, their readiness to spare no sacrifice for their benefit.

Even if the observance of the laws and regulations of *Taharas Hamishpocho* entailed a certain effort or even sacrifice on the part of the parents, surely it would be done eagerly, knowing that in addition to the essential thing of the need of observing G-d's commands for their own sake, these observances have a direct influence on children, and through them on grandchildren and so on. Of what account, therefore, is a temporary inconvenience or effort by comparison to the everlasting benefit in terms of good health, physical and spiritual, and true *Nachas* [pride], etc. All the more so since the inconvenience or effort are smaller than imagined.

May G-d grant that this vital activity of *Taharas Hamishpocho* in your community should grow and expand, bringing even more and more members and participants, and may the observance of this essential law and regulation stimulate also the general observance of the Torah and *Mitzvos*, where there is always room for improvement.

With blessing,

Sages, Moses prayed no less than 515 times to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel. The connection between the two is that when the Jewish people keep the Ten Commandments, it hastens the time when Moses' request will be granted in full, and all Jews will enter the Land of Israel with Moshiah. *(The Rebbe)*

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This Shabbat is known as "Shabbat Nachamu." It is the first Sabbath after Tisha B'Av, when we commemorated the destruction of the Holy Temple. It is named "Shabbat Nachamu" for the first words of the Haftarah which begins, "Nachamu, Nachamu – Console, console yourselves, My people."

Our Sages explain the double use of the word "console": "The Jewish people committed a twofold sin... received a twofold punishment... and are likewise comforted twofold." Elsewhere our Sages comment, "Because its Torah's commandments are doubled, so too are its consolations doubled."

Why this emphasis on the two? The terms "twofold" and "double" refer to two different dimensions. Everything in a Jew's life - the Torah and its commandments, the destruction of the Holy Temple and our consolation - reflects this duality; for everything in the world is composed of both a physical and a spiritual component.

A Jew is a mixture of body and spirit which together form a complete being. A Jew is considered whole when both his body and soul are working together to serve G-d.

Mitzvot (commandments) are likewise composed of these two dimensions. Every mitzva contains a spiritual component - the intentions behind it, and a physical component - the way the mitzva is performed.

This is what our Sages referred to when stating that the Torah's mitzvot are "doubled."

The Holy Temple itself also reflected this duality. The Temple was a physical structure. Yet, the G-dly light with which it was illuminated was infinite in nature. Its destruction was therefore a double blow as it affected both of these aspects.

When the Holy Temple is rebuilt in the Messianic era our consolation will be doubled because it will encompass both dimensions: not only will the physical structure of the Temple be restored, but its G-dly revelation will also return.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקא

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



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MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Torah portion of *Va'etchanan* contains the Ten Commandments. According to our



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Reb Yehoshua Milner owned a mill in Jerusalem over a hundred years ago. A devout and scholarly man, he made a good living from the mill, although he almost never went there. The old-fashioned mill was situated near a river and the huge millstone was turned by the steady and patient treading of a horse which spent its days pacing round and round in an endless circle. The working of the mill was supervised by the manager, Reb Shmuel. And so, Reb Yehoshua was free to devote all his time to Torah study.

When Reb Shmuel passed away another man was hired to be the manager of the mill. This new manager decided to improve the mill by replacing the slow, old horse with a new massive one, stronger by far than the other horses that had worked there before. The new horse accomplished work so much more quickly than the previous ones, that it became known as “the wonder horse.”

Soon word of this magnificent horse spread through the countryside, and bidders came from near and far to try to buy the fabulous animal. Much more money was waiting to be made through the horse if it would be used for other more demanding tasks, such as pulling huge loads, or transporting the wealthy from place to place.

Reb Yehoshua was unwilling to sell the horse, and he refused all bids that were presented to him. However, no matter how many times he said “no,” and how many people he rebuffed, offers continued to come his way from people who wished to purchase the horse. Finally, when Reb Yehoshua tired of the continual interruptions to his Torah study, he set a price for “the wonder horse” of 25 Napoleons, a sum that would support a family for two years. Surely, no one would be so foolhardy as to make an offer like that! Reb Yehoshua, however, underestimated the tenacity of his would-be buyers. One merchant actually came up with the sum and a deal was struck.

The night before the sale was to be finalized, Reb Yehoshua couldn’t sleep. He tossed and turned in his bed until, finally, in the middle of the night, he gave up. He dressed and left the house, telling his family he would soon return.

His employees were shocked to see the owner, Reb Yehoshua, arrive at the mill. As he never visited the mill during the day, what was he doing there in the middle of the night? Reb Yehoshua walked straight up to the horse as all of the employees looked on. He stopped at the horse’s side and whispered in the mighty animal’s ear, “Shmuel, I forgive you completely.” When the horse heard those words, it literally dropped dead. Reb Yehoshua said nothing and returned to his home.

The next day news quickly spread that “the wonder horse” had died the previous night, for no apparent reason. “A healthy horse!” everyone exclaimed, and a horse worth 25 Napoleons! Who had ever heard of such a thing!

Reb Yehoshua called his family and friends and related the amazing story of the previous evening. “Last night I couldn’t sleep. I tossed and turned and when I fell asleep at last, I had a very strange dream. In the dream my former employee, Shmuel, appeared to me and said, ‘I must confess to you. I wasn’t the wonderful manager you thought me to be. I stole from you throughout all the years I worked at the mill. When I died and appeared before the Heavenly Court, I was informed that the only way I could expiate my terrible sin against man and G-d was to return to earth in the form of your mill horse so that I could repay my debt to you. I was given an especially strong body so that I could work extra hard. For months I toiled tirelessly, making up for what I stole from you throughout the years. But it seems I did my job too well, for I became renowned for my strength and stamina.

“In the dream, Shmuel continued, ‘When I heard that you were planning to sell me, I was horrified. I would not be able to expiate my sins unless I was working for you in your mill. If you would sell me, I would have to return to earth once more, perhaps in

an even lesser form, to atone for my misdeeds. I cannot bear the idea of returning again, so I beg you, please forgive me for what I did to you.’

“When I heard his plea, I jumped up out of bed and ran immediately to the mill. I went up to the horse and told him that I forgave him with all my heart. And when he heard my words, he expired, for he had fulfilled his purpose here on earth. Now, poor Shmuel will find his peace in the next world.”

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

You have been shown to know that G-d 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” – man’s ego and sense of self - that erects the barrier that separates him from G-d...

You shall teach them diligently to your children, you shall speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deut. 6:7)
 Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch explained: As Rashi notes, “veshinantam” – “and you shall teach them diligently,” is an expression of sharpness (“chidud”), indicating that a person’s Torah study should be intense, strong and penetrating. “Levanecha,” “to your children,” is related to the word “libun,” “elucidation,” meaning that one’s words and explanations should be unambiguous. “And you shall speak of them”: In the same way that speech reveals that which is hidden inside, so too should the revelations of Torah be applied to the daily life. “Sitting in your house” refers to the time when the soul is contained in the physical body; “when you lie down, and when you rise up” refers to the period after the resurrection of the dead. *(Sefer HaToldot)*

Dedicated in Honor of My Children, Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren
 Lynn Green Bennett & Jeff Bennett
 Ronna & Marc Zaken and Family
 Yehudis & Rabbi Eli Cohen and Family
 by **Leona Green**

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