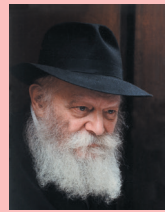


L'Chaim

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"May there be peace in your wall, tranquility in your palaces" (Psalm 122:6)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In the Torah portion of Va'eira we read about the first seven plagues inflicted on Egypt. The purpose of the plagues was not only to punish the Egyptians, but to deflate their egos and eradicate their false notions about G-dliness. The plagues also served as the blows that freed from the constraints and limitations of Egypt.

Every story in the Torah teaches us how to become better in our G-dly service. Let's see what we can learn from the first two plagues, blood and frogs.

In Egypt they worshiped the Nile River. So to break their pride in the Nile, the first plague hit the waters of the Nile, turning the water into blood. Water is by nature wet and cold. This was the way of the Egyptians to be cold or apathetic to G-dliness and holiness. The Nile was turned into blood, which is warm and full of life.

The opposite of holiness is coldness, apathy, because holiness is warm and full of life. When we are cold and apathetic to G-dliness and holiness, it opens the door to everything that is unholy, and we are stuck in an Egypt. How do we break out of apathy towards holiness?

Through understanding the second plague.

Egypt had a great fervor and passion for everything unholy. Meaning that there is also an unholy warmth, when someone has a passion for impermissible physical pleasures.

To cool off their passion, G-d sent the second plague, frogs. The frogs went everywhere, even in the ovens, and our Sages learn from them the idea of self-sacrifice.

What is the meaning of the frogs going into the ovens? Ovens, which are hot, symbolize the heat and passion for the physical. Frogs are from the water, cold and wet, but at the same time, they did G-d's will, to the extent that they went totally against their nature. The cold water creatures went into the fiery ovens and cooled them off. In other words, there is also a holy coldness, when one fosters a coldness towards the physical and the unholy.

The frogs came to deflate Pharaoh's ego. They went into the ovens cooling off the passion and the false importance of the unholy that existed in Egypt.

Holy fire breaks you free from unholy coldness, and holy coldness breaks you free from passion for the unholy.

To break free from a spiritual Egypt, one must first take a lesson from the blood and bring life and warmth into holy matters, because the beginning of all kinds of evil comes from coldness.

It is a mistake to think that just positive action is enough. If you don't bring warmth and passion into holiness, ultimately you will end up in the unholy.

Just as we need to bring a warmth and life into holiness - blood, so too we should foster coldness towards the unholy - frogs.

May we all be filled with warmth and holiness, breaking free from our personal Egypts and ultimately breaking free from this final exile with the coming of Moshiach. May he come now!

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.

Why a Mezuzah Is Not a Mezuzah

By Baruch Epstein

There is a mezuzah on the entry to the White House and your avowed atheist neighbor has one that all the neighborhood can see!

I'll explain. The word "mezuzah" means doorpost. In the Book of Deuteronomy we read: "And you shall write them on the doorposts (mezuzot) of your homes and your gates." So, if we're to be linguistic nit-pickers, the scroll is affixed to the mezuzah; it is not the mezuzah itself.

Okay, so beyond my trite witticism (my mother thinks I'm clever), what do we learn from the vernacular use of an architectural term to refer to a ritual object?

Chassidism emphasizes that G-d has a plan—a passionate, inexplicable, irreplaceable desire that this world, warts and all, be transformed into a welcoming home for Him. That's why He created it. All of creation exists only to exhibit G-d. Humans tend to see it in reverse; we think of ourselves and our world as primary and then look to see where and if G-d fits into the picture. The reverse is true; G-d is, and we are here to prove it.

Like hidden treasure, divinity is just below the surface, waiting for us to expose it through a mitzvah. Every time we use a physical resource for something G-dly, we illustrate its true character: a tool for us to discover the holy spark buried within.

It's a pretty clever idea (I hope G-d doesn't mind my compliment). Divinity, while exciting, often seems too spiritual for nine-to-five people like us to grasp. When presented with it, we just gawk in awe. Materiality, on the other hand, we get. So G-d embeds Himself in physical objects, and when we use them according to His instructions, we find Him. Like a metaphor, it makes the abstract tangible.

So maybe we have it right. Maybe the genuine meaning of mezuzah is the mitzvah scroll, and the doorpost is only called a mezuzah to emphasize that its existence is realized, not by holding the door in place, but by enabling a mitzvah. If not for the scrolls, there would be no reason for plain old doorposts.

And so it goes with all things; there are two perspectives: 1) I am, so when I earn money, I buy what I need, and then, if there is any left over, I'll give to charity. Or, 2) G-d is, and He has embedded Himself in cash as a way for me to discover Him. When I earn money, I first give one-tenth to charity and then use the remaining, now uplifted money for my own needs.

Don't view the mezuzah as an appendage to your house, see your house as a mezuzah holder. Don't just read this article, call your local Chabad center and get yourself, or someone you know, a mezuzah for their mezuzah.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Continuation of a Letter Written in 1973

I am impelled to add yet another essential point. The survival of our Jewish people, and the impact that this matter has upon every Jewish individual, is not something that has as yet to be investigated and experimented with. The Jewish people is one of the oldest in the world, and in its long history as a nation it has gone through various conditions and circumstances, mostly very unfavorable, as mentioned above. If one wishes to know the secret of Jewish survival under circumstances that have obliterated larger and stronger nations, one has but to apply the same scientific method as in other cases.

In other words, it is necessary to find the common factor, or factors, in all the various periods of Jewish history, which would then have to be taken as the basis of Jewish survival. Should two or three different factors be found, there would be a question of whether all of them were indispensable to survival, or perhaps only one or two would also have been sufficient. But if only one common factor is found, then there can be no doubt that this is the only basis of the survival. This, as mentioned above, is the scientific approach, and is not a matter of belief or faith. Moreover, as in all fields of science, it does not matter whether one does or does not understand the scientific findings. Indeed, in most exact sciences the facts and actual phenomenon are first ascertained, and then a scientific explanation is sought.

Now, going back to the long history of our Jewish people over a period of some 3500 years, it will be seen that there has been only one factor that has preserved Jewish identity and survival throughout the various periods of our history. This factor was not language, nor country, nor anything else which is often associated with nationhood and nationalism, for in all these things there have been radical changes from one period to another, as anybody familiar with Jewish history knows.

QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

The single factor and, I emphasize, the one and only factor, which has preserved our Jewish people throughout the ages, under all kinds of circumstances, has been the fulfillment of the mitzvot in day-to-day life, such as the observance of Shabbat, the putting on of tefillin, and the Torah education of our children. These and all other mitzvot are already embedded in the Torah and have been observed by Jews since the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, and they have been observed in the same way throughout the ages without change.

A further proof that this is the "secret" of Jewish survival, if further proof is necessary, is the fact that there have always been deviationists; the Torah relates that immediately after the Torah was given at Sinai there were the worshippers of the golden calf. Similarly, throughout the period of the judges, prophets, and kings, as well as the post-biblical period of the second Beit Hamikdash [Temple], and later. These deviationists attempted to steer another course, away from traditional Judaism, but they could never take root within the Jewish people. Either these deviationists eventually realized their mistake and returned to the fold of observance of Torah and mitzvot, or they were completely assimilated among the nations of the world, without having anything further to do with the Jewish people, least of all with Jewish survival.

On the basis of the principle that the essential thing is the deed, as quoted earlier, I want to bring out the practical conclusion of the thoughts expressed in this letter, namely, that regardless of how your daily life expressed itself in the past, it is my duty, inasmuch as we have established contact between us, to point out to you your duty to yourself, to your surroundings, and to our Jewish people as a whole, to order your life in fullest accord with the Torah and mitzvot in the daily life and conduct.

Needless to say, I realize that such a change entails difficulties and the giving up of various things, but surely it is a small sacrifices in relation to the enormous privilege of fulfilling a sacred obligation to our people. In addition to your sacred obligation to the Jewish community in which you live, and to your family.

May G-d grant that you will have good news to report in all of the above.

With blessing,

why he should not be the Redeemer. At one point, he tells G-d, "Please send the one You will send." Moses was asking G-d to send someone else, namely, Moshiach. Since G-d was going to send Moshiach in the future anyway, Moses asked G-d to send Moshiach immediately. Moses wanted the first redemption to also be the last (*From Reflections of Redemption, by Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann o.b.m.*)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This past Tuesday, the 28th of Tevet, was the birthday of Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson, mother of the Rebbe.

There is a famous story told about Rebbetzin Chana's selfless dedication for the dissemination of Torah. Rebbetzin Chana followed her husband, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, when sent into internal exile by the Stalinist government. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was deterred from recording the unique expositions on the mystical, kabalistic parts of the Torah because of the lack of such simple provisions as paper and ink. Instead of paper, he wrote in the margins of books. But ink? He could hardly reuse old ink.

Rebbetzin Chana used to go out into the woods and gather wild plants. From these she managed to make her own ink so that her illustrious husband could continue writing.

After Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's passing, Rebbetzin Chana was finally allowed to leave Russia. With total devotion and complete disregard for her own personal safety, Rebbetzin Chana smuggled out her husband's manuscripts. These manuscripts were later edited and published by her son, the Rebbe.

As the Rebbe himself explained at a gathering commemorating his mother's yartzeit, a great lesson can be learned from her courage and self-sacrifice. And surely this is an important lesson that we can meditate upon as the awesome day of Yom Kippur approaches.

When faced with an obstacle, one must not be concerned or overwhelmed by the fact that it seems insurmountable. One cannot become weighted down by the difficulties. Rather, we must work to overcome the obstacle without pre-conceived notions or calculations of the impossibility of the situation. We must do our part-what must be done. Ultimately, because we are doing what G-d expects of us, we will be successful.

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

When Moses encounters G-d at the burning bush, an extended conversation ensues. G-d wants Moses to redeem the Jewish people, to take them out of Egypt. Moses demurs, finding several excuses

