

L'Chaim



Reb Leib Sarah's, one of the greatest of the Baal Shem Tov's disciples, had long desired to live in the Holy Land. After years of struggle, of wandering, of perfecting himself to the utmost of his ability, his deepest desire was to settle in the Holy Land, there to be able to attain spiritual achievements unreachable elsewhere.

Although he was himself a person of renown, he was also a chasid, and so, he went to his rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov, to ask his permission and blessing for the trip. "Rebbe," he asked, "I request your permission to settle in the Holy Land, which is my heart's desire." But, to his surprise, the Besht's reply was negative. The next year Leib Sarah's again went to his rebbe with the same petition. But, again, the Besht denied his request, without even an explanation. This scenario repeated itself year after year for several years, and Leib Sarah's was deeply disappointed.

One year he decided that he wouldn't go to his rebbe at all; he just wouldn't ask. The desire to travel and settle in the Holy Land had become so strong within him, that he could no longer deny it. So, Leib Sarah's sat down with his wife and then with his children and discussed the question of moving to the Holy Land, there to perfect his soul in the service of his Maker. His wife and children were all agreeable, and so it was decided to go. Wasting no time, he sold all of his worldly goods save the barest necessities, and gathering all of his money, he bought tickets for himself, his wife and children for the long journey to the Land of Israel.

When everything was in order, Reb Leib Sarah's packed up his belongings and set off with his family through Russia toward Turkey, whence he would travel to Israel. It was a slow and arduous journey overland with many stops in the small towns and villages through which they had to travel. One day they came to a small town and noticed some sort of excitement in the town. Leib Sarah's inquired of the villagers, and was shocked when he heard their reply. For none other than the famous Baal Shem Tov was unexpectedly visiting the town, and the people were overwhelmed by the great honor of receiving such a personage.

Leib Sarah's was even more overwhelmed by his own dilemma. He thought of the possibility of not going to greet his rebbe, thereby avoiding any embarrassment because of his disobedience, but how could he not acknowledge the presence of his great rebbe and teacher? He sat in his wagon deliberating, when suddenly he had no choice, for the Baal Shem Tov's carriage pulled up next to his own. Reb Leib Sarah's dismounted and approached the rebbe. The Besht appeared to be surprised and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Rebbe, please forgive me for not heeding your words, but I am now on my way to settle in the Holy Land."

The Besht replied, "Well, if your wish to go is so strong, then go. But now, where are you going to spend the Shabbat?"

"I am just now searching for a place, but it's difficult since I spent all of my money on the tickets for the journey," replied Reb Leib. The Baal Shem Tov offered to host Reb Leib and his family for the whole Shabbat. When they were in their rooms preparing for the arrival of the holy day, the Besht knocked on Reb Leib's door, asking if he had immersed in the mikva yet. "No," he replied, "I have no money remaining, so I will forego the mikva this week." To this, the Baal Shem Tov replied that he would pay the entrance fee for him, and they should go together to the mikva. Reb Leib Sarah's joy was unbounded, for he understood the profound meaning of the immersion and was relieved not to miss his usual ritual.

Upon arriving at the mikva the Besht said, "Reb Leib, you go first." But, he refused, saying, "Please, Rebbe, you go; you are my teacher, after all." The Besht was adamant, and Reb Leib immersed first. After the proscribed immersions were completed, he rose from the water, turned to his rebbe and said, "I have changed my mind. I will not go to the Holy Land. I will return to Medzibozh, to you. Let

me tell you what I saw in the mikva during my immersions. As I entered the water I saw a continent. As I looked closely I saw Eretz Israel, and as I looked even more closely I saw Jerusalem. As I narrowed my focus still more, I could see all the parts of the Temple Mount, even the Holy Temple itself. Then I looked inside and saw the Holy of Holies, but though I strained my eyes as hard as I could, I couldn't see the Holy Ark, the Tablets of the Law, or the Divine Presence. In my anguish I cried out, "Where are the Tablets? Where is the Divine Presence? But a Heavenly Voice answered me, saying, 'They are found in Medzibozh.' Therefore, I am following you back to Medzibozh to fulfill my Divine Service. I now see that during the exile, the Divine Presence dwells with the leader of the generation."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years (Gen. 47:28)

When the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, was a child, he learned a commentary on this verse that these 17 years were the best years of Jacob's life. This surprised the boy, and he went to his grandfather, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, to find out how it was possible that the years spent in such a spiritually corrupt and abominable land could have been Jacob's best.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman replied: Before Jacob descended into Egypt, he sent an emissary to establish yeshivot and places of learning. Whenever and wherever a Jew learns Torah, he cleaves to G-d and achieves a true and meaningful life. Furthermore, precisely because Egypt was such an abominable place, the holiness and spirituality Jacob attained there shone that much brighter against the dark and evil background of his surroundings. (Lubavitcher Rebbe)

With you shall Israel bless...May G-d make you as Ephraim and Menashe (48:20)

In the previous verses Jacob had said, "Ephraim and Menashe shall be to me as Reuven and Shimon." Despite the fact that Ephraim and Menashe were born in exile and were educated in Egypt, a land not conducive to Torah learning and Judaism, they were still as righteous and pure as Reuven and Shimon, who grew up in more enclosed and insular surroundings in Jacob's household. (Lubavitcher Rebbe)

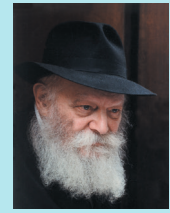
And let my name be called on them, and the name of my fathers (48:16)

Jacob blessed his grandsons, Menashe and Ephraim, by expressing his wish that they grow up to be a source of pride to the family.

When, G-d forbid, children do not follow in their parents' footsteps and stray from the proper path, the grandparents and parents are ashamed that the children bear their name. Jacob blessed his grandsons that they should be worthy of being called the descendents of Abraham and Isaac.



4:30 Candle Lighting Time
NY Metro Area
10 Tevet / January 10
Torah Portion Vayechi
Shabbat ends 5:34 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

Before Jacob passed away he called all his children together and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which will befall you in the last days." But we find that Jacob did not reveal the future. Our Sages explain that the Divine Presence left Jacob, and with it, the knowledge of the end of days. In other words, G-d prevented Jacob from revealing the date of the Final Redemption.

We can be sure that Jacob did not intend merely to satisfy their curiosity; rather, Jacob thought that he would be doing the Jewish people a favor by revealing when the end of days would come. However, this revelation would not have brought any tangible benefit, but would have actually caused Jacob's descendents harm: Had the fledgling Jewish nation learned that the Final Redemption was not to come for thousands of years, they would have despaired. Why would Jacob want to reveal something to his children that would have caused them to despair?

In order to explain what really took place, we must understand the two different ways in which the Redemption can come about. The Talmud teaches that although G-d has fixed a definite date in history for Moshiach to come, if the Jewish people is worthy, Moshiach will arrive before the appointed time. If the Jews, through their actions, merit the Redemption sooner, they will not have to wait until the specified date.

Jacob did not plan on revealing the final date by which time the Redemption would have to occur; he wanted to give his children a far closer one by which time Moshiach would come if they so merited. It is quite possible that Jacob was referring to a time only a few years after that very day. Why was this not allowed to happen?

The answer lies in the fact that had Jacob been successful in revealing the date, the Redemption would have had to occur then. Once the Divine Presence was withdrawn from him, the opportunity to speed the process was taken away, and we still await the Redemption today.

Had the Jewish people known that the Redemption was so near, they would surely have perfected their actions and been worthy. The knowledge would have encouraged and inspired them to remove all obstacles to Moshiach's arrival, and we would not still be waiting.

Obviously, this was not meant to be. G-d prevented Jacob from revealing the secret, for the Final Redemption must come about purely on the merit of our efforts, working within the limitations placed on us by the physical world. Jacob's revelation would have affected the quality of man's worship and changed the Divine plan. G-d therefore caused His Presence to depart from Jacob.

Jacob, for his part, knew all this, but tried to hasten the Redemption even at the expense of man's mission in perfecting the world. Although G-d has ordained otherwise, the request of a tzadik is never in vain and the ramifications of Jacob's actions are felt today: Every Jew must demand and insist that G-d bring the Final Redemption in our own time, and this very insistence will infuse us with strength and determination in our worship. When we say, "We want Moshiach now" and "Moshiach is on the way," we automatically improve our behavior in our desire for the Redemption to finally come.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Get Us Out Of Here

By Rabbi Eli Friedman

Accept no substitutes.

Don't settle - demand the best! Expect the best!

Yaakov's final years in Egypt were his best years. He had brought great prosperity to Pharaoh, and he knew that he would be accorded the greatest honor at his funeral in Egypt, but he demanded something else: "Unsatani Mimitzrayim!" Take me out of Egypt! Bring me home. He wanted to be buried in Israel.

Take me out of here.

As Yaakov is our forefather and we are his heirs, each of us possesses the strength to do the same. Don't settle for "pretty good" or even "really good." Ask to be taken home.

In modern terms, this means simply that we are not hoping and praying for a return to normalcy; we are asking for Moshiach.

The world seems so dark now, we wonder if a world so bruised and evil can truly emerge fully good.

Yaakov's message calls out: Of course Moshiach is a reality, of course we are headed there, of course it is going to happen. That is the most basic and most lofty of all Jewish beliefs.

On December 20th, an MK in the Israeli Kneset spoke about Moshiach from the podium. She pointed out how absurd it is that this foundational, ancient, righteous dream of a world

perfected, the cornerstone of Jewish faith and the secret to Jewish survival, is considered extremist, "Messianism."

She reflected on some of the hastily assembled replacement Messiahs - the Green Line; the Oslo Accords; and others. She lamented her former faith in them and how false and dangerous they turned out to be.

She proclaimed proudly her faith - the Jewish faith - in the imminent coming of Moshiach, a faith unwavering and undying, a belief that is not subject to change and eternal in its essence.

My friends, there are no good replacements for Moshiach. We don't dream of a Jewish president. We don't pray for a Jew to win Best Actor. We don't hope for Jews to win Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes. We don't long for the day that the United Nations sides with us. These are all half-measures, moral band-aids. We're not interested. We want Moshiach.

Maybe there was a time when we could persuade ourselves to make the best of the exile. But that time has come and gone. Now, even the best of the exile will not do. It wasn't good enough for Yaakov and it's not good enough for us.

Take us out of here. Bring Moshiach. We want Moshiach, we need Moshiach. We've experimented with the alternatives and there are none.

Accept no substitutes.

We want Moshiach now!

SLICE OF LIFE

When The IDF Almost Occupied Damascus



Dr. Aryeh Morgenstern

On the eve of Simchat Torah of 1973 — which fell two weeks after the start of the Yom Kippur War — I came with my friend Dr. Shlomo Levin, then consul in charge of religious affairs at the Israeli Consulate General in New York.

When the war broke out, I got busy organizing public events for Israel, but the news coming out of Israel was quite depressing. Still, I knew that if there was any place where I could hear an uplifting message and gain some encouragement it would be at the Rebbe's farbrengen.

When Shlomo and I entered the synagogue, it was already packed with thousands of chasidim. Despite the crush, as soon as the Rebbe noticed us, he signaled that we should approach him. Although the hakafot — the dances with the Torah — were about to start, the Rebbe began speaking with us about the situation in Israel.

The huge hall fell silent as everyone tried to hear what the Rebbe was saying to us. And he said a great deal — in fact, the conversation lasted a full hour as the Rebbe laid out in detail his view of the situation and his recommendations, based on Torah sources, as to how Israel should act. He wanted Shlomo and me to pass on this message to the heads of the Israeli government.

He began on an optimistic note, noting that this war did not present an existential threat to Israel. But, interestingly and contrary to the

widespread thinking of the time, he felt that most of the war effort should be concentrated to the north in the battle with Syria, and not in the south in the battle with Egypt. This was surprising, as the conventional thinking perceived Egypt to be the main threat.

At that juncture in the war, Israel already pushed back the Egyptian forces and even succeeded in crossing the Suez Canal and advancing further south. But the Rebbe argued that further invasion of Egyptian territory would not produce any real gains, since there was no possibility of changing Israel's strategic position there. The ultimate and more difficult enemy of Israel, the Rebbe stressed, was Syria, whose ancient capital, Damascus, was regarded as a symbol of strength by the whole Arab world. "I don't understand why Israel isn't moving forward to conquer Damascus," he said.

It is worthwhile to note that, at that point, Israel had already recovered from the initial shock of the combined attack by the Arab armies, which surprised even the military intelligence agencies, and had moved from defense to offense. The Rebbe thought that the IDF had to take advantage of this momentum and not be satisfied with returning to the pre-war borders.

The Rebbe argued that conquering Damascus, if only for a short time, would not only enable the rescue of Israeli captives, but cause the collapse of the Syrian regime, which was leading the opposition to the very existence of the State of Israel. As long as the government in Damascus stood strong, the Rebbe argued, there would be no peace with the Arab world.

In this context, the Rebbe quoted Tractate Megillah of the Talmud: "If someone tells you, 'Both Caesarea and Jerusalem were destroyed,' don't believe it. 'They both stand' — don't believe it. But if someone tells you 'Caesarea was destroyed and Jerusalem stands,' or 'Jerusalem was destroyed and Caesarea stands' — that you can believe."

Just like the city of Caesarea at its prime symbolized the strength of the Roman Empire in the Middle East, so Damascus presently symbolized the strength of the Arab League. The Rebbe was convinced that utilizing this opportunity to vanquish Damascus would bring peace once and for all in the north and free up

Israel's vital resources.

In response, we tried to explain that the decision makers in Israel were concerned about the reaction of the Soviets who had taken the Syrians under their wing, and had threatened to get involved in the war if Israel invaded Syria. The leaders in Israel feared that moving against Damascus would cause us to pay a very heavy and very bloody price. Furthermore, the US opposed our advancement into Syrian territory, and we didn't want to anger our top ally.

The Rebbe rejected these arguments one by one. Regarding the Soviets, he said that theirs were empty threats, and that there was nothing to be worried about. Regarding the Americans, he said that contrary to their declarations, they were actually quietly interested in Israel overpowering the Syrians. As for the potential loss of human life, the Rebbe suggested that more blood might be spilled in the future if the Arab threat was not reduced now. This was the message that he wanted us to bring to the government in Israel — and he wanted us to transmit the message right away.

When the hakafot finally started, we stayed only for the first one, and then hurried out to fulfill our promise to the Rebbe to communicate his perspective to the powers that be. I phoned my friend Zevulun Hammer, one of the heads of the National Religious Party, and gave over to him the Rebbe's main points. He listened intently but said he feared that the Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, would be too concerned about Soviet intervention to take this risk. Meanwhile, Shlomo called the office of the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, and communicated the same message, getting a similar response.

In retrospect, there is no doubt that the Rebbe was right in his strategic analysis. Syria is still a threat to Israel, serves as an extension of Iran, and is a base for the terror organization Hezbollah. As a result, the northern border is still not secure.

May we soon see Israel fulfilling the Rebbe's directives and peace in our Holy Land.

Dr. Aryeh Morgenstern, a Senior Fellow at Machon Shalem in Jerusalem, is a historian who specializes in the history of the Jewish settlement of Israel.

He was interviewed BY JEM in April of 2010.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Since your letter of May 25, 1983, I have not heard from you. I trust it is a case of "no news is good news," and that the problem you wrote about, namely, facing a crisis of faith on account of certain doubts and uncertainties, has been over come, or at least substantially eased, as indeed most often happens in such cases.

This is one of the reasons -- the main one being pressure of duties -- why my reply to your letter has been so inordinately delayed. Also because it is difficult to discuss such a topic in a letter.

Actually, there is no need for it, inasmuch as it is not an unusual problem, and there is a whole body of literature (also in English) that deals with the questions raised in your letter. It is surely possible to discuss them personally with a knowledgeable person, such as a learned practicing Rav [rabbi].

Since you have already written to me, I will endeavor to clarify (within the limits of a letter) some of the uncertainties mentioned in your letter, such as how to understand the diversity of religions in the world, why are Jews committed to keeping all 613 mitzvot of the Torah, while the rest of mankind only seven of them, the so-called Seven Noahide Laws (with all their ramifications, of course -- which also constitute quite a substantial Divinely ordained moral code); how can a Jew be certain that the Jewish religion and way of life is the true one and superior to any other, etc.

Let me begin with an illustration:

A person looking at his hand will, first of all, think of it as part of his anatomy, which is capable of performing a variety of manual jobs. Thinking further, one will see that the hand is comprised of many parts, such as fingers and muscles that have their particular functions as well as cooperative functions in conjunction with other parts, enabling the hand to carry out more delicate tasks, like writing, for example.

On a still deeper level, there are nerves and vessels that connect the hand and fingers to the brain and heart, which influences the quality of the handwriting, to the extent of expressing the writer's thoughts and feelings, and even revealing hidden aspects of his character, as is known to handwriting experts.

One could carry the analysis still further, to the level of atoms, electrons, etc. Thus, one can speak of the human hand and its functions on different levels, from the simplest to the most complex, which are not mutually incompatible, as long as each part carries out its functions in the proper and wholesome manner.

If there are such complexities, gradations, and levels in the physical world, yet with an underlying unifying factor, they are certainly present in the world of the metaphysical and spiritual.

When it comes to contemplating the existence of G-d, one must, first of all realize that finite human beings (even the wisest of men) cannot grasp the "mind" and "thoughts" of the Creator, whose attributes are essentially as incomprehensible as Himself -- except to the extent that He willed to reveal in the Torah. But what is revealed in the Torah is as clear as light, which is why the Torah is called Torah Or [Torah of light]; indeed much of it has become common sense.

Now, insofar as the human is concerned, the Torah tells us that it has evolved by the design of the Creator, into a variety of components, rather than one massive uniform block -- just as the physical human body consists of a variety of organs and parts, each with its own purpose and function, nothing in it is useless or superfluous. For, as our Sages tell us, "The Creator has not created anything useless in this world."

Of course, one may wonder why did G-d choose one nation out of all mankind to give it His Torah and mitzvot and designate it as "A kingdom of kohanim (G-d's servants) and a holy nation"? Or, why does He permit such a variety of religious beliefs and practices, some of which are in direct conflict with His ordained order? But this would be like asking, why must the human body consist of such a variety of different parts, from the brain and heart to the foot and sole? Or, why does G-d permit malfunctions in an organism that is otherwise perfect?

As for the question, in view of the various religions and creeds of the world, each claiming to be the truth and superior to all others, how is a Jew to be certain that his religion is the true one?

This and related questions have already been dealt with at length in the famous 12th century classic, the Book of Kuzari by the great Jewish philosopher Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, which is available also in English translation. It is well documented and based on proofs that would stand up to the scrutiny of scientific method and common sense.

wait for Moshiach's ultimate arrival, but that every day we should wait expectantly for Moshiach to come on that very day. The Talmud teaches that "Thinking is potent." Accordingly, the very fact that Jews around the world are intensely and persistently focusing their hearts and minds on the world's urgent need for Moshiach, will in itself surely hasten his arrival.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'Chaim Publication.
From the Archives

Ahead of you, behind, up or down? There is a beautiful teaching from the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, about how to honestly view your "surroundings." He said that in material matters one should always look "down," while in spiritual matters one should always look "up."

What does this mean?

When it comes to the material aspects of our lives, we should look around at those who are not as fortunate as us, who have less than us--whether that be in health, possessions, livelihood, etc. By doing this we will realize how truly lucky we are. For, by only looking at those who have more, we remain unsatisfied and ultimately become envious.

However, this attitude of looking at those with less does not apply in the least to the spiritual realm of our lives. In spiritual matters, in refinement of our emotions and in eradicating unsatisfactory character traits, as well as in our relationship with G-d and His creatures, we must always look at those who are "higher"--those individuals who, through working on themselves--have become more refined and more in touch with G-d and His Torah.

In fact, the Previous Rebbe states unequivocally that that which is considered a good trait in material matters--being satisfied with one's lot--is actually a tremendous flaw if it is applied to the duties of the heart and soul. Therefore, when our Sages taught, "Who is rich? One who is happy with his portion," this was stated only in connection with one's portion in the physical world. In the spiritual world we should continuously be striving to improve our lot.

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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Customs

What is the reason for dancing at a wedding?

Part of the mitzva of "making the groom and bride happy" is to entertain them with dancing. By dancing around the bride and groom, the community expresses its support for the couple. The Talmud relates many instances when the greatest of our Sages set aside their uninterrupted study of Torah for the sake of entertaining the couple. In accordance with Jewish law, men and women dance separately with a mechitza (divider) separating them.

Amsterdam Jews Spread Light After Recent 'Pogrom'



This year in Amsterdam, home to a modest, close-knit Jewish community, the annual Menorah parade took on a new look. A full police escort, complete with glaring emergency lights, joined the procession, their beams competing with the white glow of the car-mounted Menorahs.

This change, from a simple parade to one heavily guarded, came just a month and a half after Israeli soccer fans were brutally attacked by Muslim taxi drivers while returning from a match. Whether heading back to their hotels or catching flights home, the visitors were ambushed in a coordinated assault.

In response to these events, this year's Menorah parade, organized by Rabbis Eli Spiero and Akiva Camissar, featured the protective presence of Dutch police. Despite the shadow of recent violence, the parade saw increased participation, with many attendees rallying in defiance of fear and intimidation. The Menorahs illuminated Amsterdam, a light of Jewish resilience and pride, offering hope to those who might have felt threatened, and a message of encouragement to stand strong.

