



It Happened Once

Rabbi Gershon, the brother-in-law of the Baal Shem Tov (known also as the Besht), had finalized his plans to travel to the Holy Land. A disciple of the Besht, he conferred with him before his departure and was told: "When you arrive in the Holy Land make sure to attend the yeshiva of the holy Ohr Hachaim in Jerusalem. He has two separate yeshivas there - one in which they study the revealed Torah, and another, known to only a very few people, where he teaches the esoteric secrets of the Kabala. Do everything you can to be admitted to the second yeshiva short of divulging your identity, unless you have no choice."

Rabbi Gershon's journey was successful and he arrived in Jerusalem and proceeded directly to the Ohr Hachaim's yeshiva. Anxious to see how they learned there, he attempted to join the students as they reviewed their study. But each time he approached them, he was told that it was permissible to attend the yeshiva only with the explicit permission of the Ohr Hachaim himself. When the tzadik would enter the study hall to deliver his daily lesson, all strangers would be asked to leave.

Rabbi Gershon decided to approach the Ohr Hachaim personally and request his permission to learn. "Who are you?" inquired the Ohr Hachaim.

"I am a Jew who has come from Poland and I desire very much to study in your yeshiva," answered Reb Gershon.

The Ohr Hachaim gave him a penetrating, critical look and asked, "Are you fluent in the study of the Five Books of Moses and the Talmud?"

"Yes, I am," replied Reb Gershon.

"Then I give you my permission to remain here, and I will instruct my staff to accommodate you," the tzadik said.

Rabbi Gershon was pleased with the outcome and settled down for the week to learn in the yeshiva of revealed Torah. All the while he was inquiring as to how to gain admittance to the yeshiva of Kabala. He discreetly asked various students about the secret yeshiva, but none of them had the slightest idea what he was talking about. Those few who were the privileged students, refused to answer his repeated questions. So, Rabbi Gershon was forced to approach the Ohr Hachaim again and ask for permission to attend the yeshiva of esoteric study.

The Ohr Hachaim was surprised by the request. "How do you know about the other yeshiva?" he asked, as he stared into Reb Gershon's eyes, plumbing the depths of his soul.

Reb Gershon, wanting to avoid a detailed response, just looked down and said, "I was told by my brother-in-law." He hoped that his answer would pass without further comment.

"What is his name?"

"Oh, his name is Yisrael," was the matter-of-fact reply.

"I don't know him, but you may come to my lecture tonight," was the reply.

For the next three nights Reb Gershon learned Torah with the select group of students, but on the fourth night when he presented himself to the doorkeeper, he was refused admittance. He was astonished and turned to the doorkeeper crying, "Why have I been refused admittance, when I have the permission of the head of the yeshiva to attend?"

"I'm sorry, but I am following the instructions of the holy rabbi. He said that you are unworthy of learning the secrets of the Torah, since you have not attended to the needs of the Sages."

Reb Gershon turned away, puzzled, but resolved to do whatever was necessary to rescind the decree of the Ohr Hachaim. He noticed that the tzadik donned a special pair of shoes and head covering before entering the bathroom. The next time he saw the tzadik put on the special hat, he ran quickly and brought him the shoes. Rabbi Chaim noted Reb Gershon's actions, but said nothing.

From that time forth, Rabbi Gershon was allowed to resume his midnight studies. He remained happily drinking in the learning at Rabbi Chaim's yeshiva for the next few months. One day, he told the tzadik that his own brother-in-law was a holy man.

"What is his name?" inquired Rabbi Chaim.

"His name is Reb Yisrael, the Baal Shem Tov," Reb Gershon said. "Oh," cried the Ohr Hachaim, "Of course I know him well. I see him very often in the supernal worlds. He is a tzadik of unsurpassed greatness."

"Now I understand what happened to me in the Heavenly Court," continued Rabbi Chaim. I had been sentenced to have some terrible calamity occur to me because of using a respected student of the Baal Shem Tov to perform a menial task for me. It was only through the intercession of the Besht that I was saved. If you had told me your true identity at once, I would have been saved the entire incident."

After this conversation, the Ohr Hachaim no longer permitted Reb Gershon to study in his yeshiva for, as he said, "You do not need me to teach you, if you have the Baal Shem Tov as a rebbe."

## THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And they will say on that day, "Is it not because my G-d is not in the midst of me" (Deut. 31:17)

This verse does not refer to one who denies that there is a Creator in the world; rather, it refers to one who believes that G-d exists, but that "G+d is not in the midst of me." He imagines that G-d exists on so high a plane that He does not deign to intervene in our puny concerns. G-d is an active participant in our lives and oversees every detail of our daily lives. Our behavior should reflect our awareness of this. (Otzarenu Hayashan)

"...because my G-d is not in the midst of me, that these evils have overtaken me" (Deut. 31:17)

The Baal Shem Tov used to say that if one sees something bad in someone else, it is a sure sign that an element of the same negative trait exists in the person finding fault. It is as if one is looking into a mirror, and will see only that which is reflected. Rabbi Dov Ber, the second Lubavitcher Rebbe, added his interpretation on this verse: "Because my G-d is not in the midst of me--because my own face is dirty and my own connection to G-d and holiness is flawed, have these evils overtaken me--that is why I find fault in others."

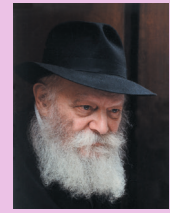
Assemble the people together (Deut. 31:12)

Even a newborn was obligated in the commandment of hakhel, the once-in-seven-year assemblage of all Jews to hear the reading of the Torah. We learn from this that a Jewish child's education begins right after his birth, even before he learns to speak or go to school. (Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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**6:59 Candle Lighting Time**  
NY Metro Area  
**22 Elul/Sept 8**  
Torah Portion Nitzavim-Vayelech  
Ethics Chs 5 & 6  
Shabbat ends **7:56 pm**

# L'Chaim



## LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

This week's parsha is Nitzavim-Vayelech. Nitzavim is always read on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah, and Vayelech is either read together with Nitzavim, or on the Shabbos after Rosh Hashanah, Shabbos Shuva. There are therefore many lessons to be found in the parsha pertaining to Rosh Hashanah and the coming year.

In parshas Vayelech Moshe says, "Take this book of the Torah and place it beside the Ark of the covenant of Hashem your G-d."

The Talmud cites two opinions as to where the Torah was actually placed. One says that it was inside the Ark together with the tablets of the Ten Commandments. And the other says that it was on the side of the Ark. But according to both opinions, both the Torah and the Ten Commandments were in the Holy of Holies, the chamber that housed the Ark.

The Holy of Holies was above nature, the place where the Ark stood was miraculous, though the Ark was there, it didn't take up space. The natural dimensions of time and space were suspended in the Holy of Holies.

The Ten Commandments were also miraculous, the engraving went all the way through and through the stone, yet the letters final mem and samech, one being a square and the other a circle, in other words, the engraving completely encircled the center of the letter, nevertheless the center of the letter remained in place.

So it seems that the objects in the Holy of Holies had a common theme. They were miraculous and above space and time.

The question is, what was the Torah doing there? The purpose of the Ark and the Ten Commandments was not to remain hidden. Rather, their G-dly light spread out to the Temple, to Jerusalem, throughout the land of Israel, affecting all the Jewish people, and ultimately to the whole world.

Being that the Holy of Holies, the Ark and the Ten Commandments were above nature, there had to be a go between, a conduit, to bring their light into the natural world. The Torah served as that conduit that brings the supernatural G-dly light into our lives, and by keeping the Torah, we spread that light throughout the world.

Our service on Rosh Hashanah goes beyond our understanding. It comes from feeling null before Hashem, because we are in awe of Him, there is a special G-dly light that shines and it affects us with a sense of self sacrifice that goes beyond understanding and above nature.

Indeed throughout the year, in our mundane, physical state, we need to try to humble ourselves to the point where we are null, just like on Rosh Hashanah. In this way we draw the light of Rosh Hashanah into our everyday lives.

How do we accomplish this? the answer can be found in Parshas Nitzavim which begins with, "You are standing here today, all of you (kulchem), before Hashem your G-d, your heads, your tribes... from your woodcutters to your water drawers."

When we are united, Hashem's light shines on us and through unto the whole world. Through humility and respect, we begin to see how we are not whole without others, and when we are united, we find joy in our mission. This joy breaks all boundaries, especially the confines of the dark exile, and when it does, Moshiach will be here. May it happen soon.

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.

## How to Trust

Trusting is difficult. Whether the one to be trusted is another person or the Divine.

Each of us has at some time misplaced our trust. You know that sinking feeling you get when, for example, you walk out of the store, get to your car and realize your keys are missing. Isn't that the same feeling, magnified, when we realize we've misplaced our trust?

Of course, there's a difference between trusting a person and trusting G-d. After all, "do not place your trust in nobles, nor in mortal man..." (Psalms 146: 3). Still, we may, and, in some sense, even should, trust each other. When it says, "It is better to rely on G-d than to trust in man" (Psalms 118:8), that implies that, according to the natural order of things, trusting someone else is fine and in fact makes perfect sense. But still, it's better to rely on G-d.

That leads us to a definition of trust - bitachon, in Hebrew - and an apparent contradiction. Following the definition of Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda in his Duties of the Heart, we may say trust is a sense of security that comes from a complete reliance, from being sure that the other person will, as best he can, act for our benefit.

In other words, trust seems to mean total reliance, having confidence in someone else to act for us.

But since people aren't perfect, we can't ever completely, totally, unconditionally rely on another person. Fatigue, illness, some natural event or human error beyond one's control can prevent the fulfillment of a pledge. In a sense, to completely

trust someone isn't fair to the person trusted, simply because he can't control all the contingencies of his own life.

So we can only have complete trust in G-d. And we should have such a complete trust - an absolute reliance that He will do what's best for us.

But here's the apparent contradiction: The Torah says, "The L-rd your G-d will bless you in all that you do." If we're relying on G-d - trusting Him to do for us - why are we bothering to do anything at all? Doesn't that show a lack of trust?

Human action seems contradictory to trust (in G-d).

But it's not.

When we act, we act in and through nature, the physical world. Yet nature itself is but a tool, "an ax in the hand of the woodsman." Nature has no significance in and of itself; it's only an instrument. So when the seasons come and go, they do so as an expression of G-d's Will. And when we sow and plant and reap, or build, invent and manufacture, we also do so - or should do so - as an expression of G-d's Will.

So this, in short, is how to trust: recognizing, knowing, feeling that all existence is an instrument, an "ax," created to express G-d's Will.

The practical implication? Such an attitude, such an approach must affect how one acts. If nature and the "way of the world" are but tools for expressing G-d's Will, and G-d's Will manifests itself in Torah and mitzvot (commandments), then the world - business, politics, whatever - cannot truly be an obstacle to a Jew or hinder observance of a mitzva.

# SLICE OF LIFE

## Young Long Island Rabbi Donates Kidney to a Senior Congregant

By Bruria Efuno



Rabbi Aizik Baumgarten, left, just before donating a kidney to Terri Davgin, center, with their spouses, Musia Baumgarten and Richard Davgin.

Eleven years ago, when Richard and Terri Davgin were looking for something more in their Judaism, they connected with Rabbi Leibel and Goldie Baumgarten, co-directors of Chabad of the Hamptons on the east end of Long Island. The couple never imagined just how far their relationship would go.

They soon became close friends with the Baumgarten family and were among the happy guests at the wedding of Aizik and Musia Baumgarten, today program directors at Chabad of East Hampton and co-directors of Chabad of Montauk, which operates during the summer.

Looking back, Richard comments that “when you select a rabbi, you look for spiritual healing. You don’t realize how much more you will get.”

That realization came at a powerful moment, when Terri was in urgent need of a kidney, and



The rabbi helps Richard Davin don tefillin before the surgeries.

Rabbi Aizik Baumgarten stepped in to donate his own.

“It’s been a life-changing experience,” Terri Davgin said after the successful surgery. “Not just to live, but also to go through something like this that is just so amazing and wonderful. I don’t hope anybody else needs to go through it, but if they do, I hope it’s as wonderful an experience for them as for me, especially with such good friends like I have—from Chabad, my family, and my husband.”

Less than a year earlier, the Davgins had confided in Rabbi Aizik Baumgarten that Terri was in urgent need of a new kidney. The rabbi connected Terri with Renewal, a Jewish-run kidney donor organization. All four Baumgartens, as well as several community members, then got tested, in hopes that one of them would match.

It turned out that one of them was a match—the young rabbi. Rabbi Aizik rushed through the secondary testing process knowing that Terri couldn’t wait very long.

“One day, on a Monday, I got the phone call,” recalls Terri. “On Tuesday, I had the first meeting at the dialysis center, and I was floating because I just couldn’t believe that the timing was so amazing. I said to the lady, “You’re not going to believe this, I just got a phone call that told me I have a kidney!” It really made things so wonderful for me.”

The operation was scheduled for seven weeks later, on May 23—just three days before

Shavuot, and right in time to save Terri’s life.

The holiday of Shavuot, and the summer vacation which follows shortly after, is the busiest time of year for Hampton rabbis, but Baumgarten didn’t think much of it. “This is about saving a life, it takes precedence over being physically ready for any busy season. There’s no question about what we needed to do, and when. It’s when Hashem wanted, it’s what is meant to be!”

He told the Davgins that he felt it was an opportunity given to him from G-d. “That I’m able to help in this way, and the fact that it’s such close friends makes it so much better and enjoyable.” He added, “The fact that I can help with spiritual needs is so much deeper now that I can do it also with my kidney.”

Terri Davgin woke up from the operation elated, immediately feeling better. “I absolutely feel great. I can’t believe how good I’m doing. I took a long walk today, and I really feel a difference in my body to have a working kidney to live. I had trouble walking two steps before, and now I’m doing great!”

Her rabbi was also in cheerful spirits, claiming he simply did what was the right thing—an incredible duty that he was given. “I feel very satisfied and happy that she now has a much better quality of life, hopefully for many years to come—and that I was the one who was able to facilitate that, it humbles me and I feel great.”

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The Baumgarten family welcomes their father home after the surgery.

## Hakhel – Unite!

Even though the Mitzvah of Hakhel, in its concrete form, is connected with the Beis Hamikdosh, nevertheless its spiritual content is relevant in all places and at all times. It is particularly emphasized, however, each year at this time, when on the Shabbos before Rosh-Hashanah the Torah reading is always from the Sedra “You are standing this day, all of you . . . your heads, . . . to the drawer of your water.”

## The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In the days of Selichoth, 5716 (1956)

To My Brethren, Everywhere

G-d bless you all,

Greeting and Blessing:

As the old year draws to a close and the new year draws near, every person draws up a “balance-sheet” for the year gone by, which guides him in his resolution for the forthcoming year.

In order that such a “balance-sheet,” and the resolutions based on it, be as close to the truth as possible, one must be wary of overestimating one’s virtues and accomplishments. But neither should one exaggerate one’s deficiencies and failings, for a depressing mood, not to say despondency, G-d forbid, is one of the serious obstacles on the road to self-improvement.

It is possible, however, that even without exaggeration the “balance-sheet” may reveal that the liabilities’ side is quite substantial, perhaps even outweighing the assets’ side. But even in such a case there should be no room for despondency. For together with the feeling of sincere repentance and a firm resolution to change for the better—which must be the necessary outcome of such self-searching, there is an encouraging feature in the general conduct of man, which should be borne in mind at this time. It is, that every positive and good action- positive and good in accordance with the definitions of our Torah, the Law of Life-is indestructible and eternal, being connected with, and stemming from, the Divine “spark” that is in man, the Neshama (soul), which is eternal; while any negative and destructive action, being connected with, and stemming from, the Nefesh Habahamis (animal

soul) and evil inclination in man, which are essentially limited and transient, is likewise of a temporary and transient nature, and can and must be corrected and completely wiped out through sincere and adequate repentance.

Bearing this in mind, every one, regardless what his personal “balance-sheet” reveals, will find encouragement and renewed hope in the future, knowing that his good deeds in the past year are eternal, as is the light and benefit which they have brought into his own life, into his family and all our people, since all Jews are closely related and form one whole.

In light of the above, moreover, this helpful feeling is further enhanced in that it is of a universal nature. All good actions unite to make this world as a whole progressively better. Even when a religious and moral relapse seems very much in evidence, with many yet to become wiser and more religious, the world as a whole is essentially becoming more purified with every passing year, every day and every minute, for no instant passes without many good deeds.

No matter what the state of affairs seems to be at any given moment, eventually the good must triumph and the evil be eradicated, as this is the avowed will of the Creator and Master of the Universe. Eventually everyone must repent, and G-d “who forgives abundantly” will accept repentance, “for none shall be rejected by Him.”

Through sincere repentance for the past and good deeds in the present and future, everyone has the ability to make the coming year, a year of very great accomplishments indeed, and G-d, “who desires repentance,” helps to carry out such determined resolutions.

And on the scale of Divine justice on the forthcoming Rosh Hashanah, such determination will ensure still further the repentor’s acquittal and his being inscribed for a happy and pleasant new year.

With the blessing of Kesivo VaChasimo Toivo [may you be inscribed and sealed for good].

and slaughter it” This shechita - slaughtering for kosher consumption - implies the removal of the evil within the Evil Inclination, so that what is left is a holy angel. In this way, the “scoundrel” is transposed and transformed into “a white one”.

## A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

Throughout the ages it has been customary to give more tzedaka (charity) during Elul than at any other season of the year. And there’s a very good reason why:

The month of Elul is a time when we return to G-d in teshuva. When we genuinely repent of our misdeeds, G-d forgives us our transgressions.

The mitzva of tzedaka has the power to hasten the atonement of sins. After we have already done teshuva, we increase the amount of tzedaka we give to “speed up” the process. This principle applies throughout the year, but it is especially pertinent during Elul, the period of introspection and preparation for Rosh Hashana.

Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgment for all humankind. As every person truly wishes to be found worthy, we increase our performance of good deeds during Elul, the final month of the year.

However, good deeds alone are not enough to ensure that we will be exonerated. Human beings are tiny and insignificant in comparison to G-d. Realistically speaking, how valuable can the sum total of all our good deeds be, no matter how numerous, when it is G-d Who sustains us and gives us the opportunity to do them?

In truth, in order to be acquitted on the Day of Judgment, we need to be the recipient of G-d’s “tzedaka”! For it isn’t by virtue of our actions that we are found worthy on Rosh Hashana; it is only because of G-d’s kindness and mercy that He judges us for good.

A basic principle in Judaism is that G-d behaves towards us according to our actions, measure for measure. When we share our wealth with our fellow person, both material and spiritual, G-d responds in kind by granting us an abundance of blessings.

When we give more tzedaka during Elul, G-d responds with “tzedaka” on Rosh Hashana. The scale of judgment is tipped in our favor, and He inscribes us in the Book of Life for a good and sweet year.

In the merit of our good deeds - and especially the mitzva of tzedaka - 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 חייה 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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