



IT HAPPENED ONCE

It was a perfectly beautiful Shabbat day. The Jew strolled at leisure through the orchards and fields. The trees were heavy with their fragrant bounty. The bees swarmed about the blossoming flowers; each leaf glowed its own shade of green in the light. "How wonderful was the world which the Creator bestowed upon his creations," thought the man.

Then he reached the boundaries of his own vineyard. "What's that?" he thought, as he noticed a hole in the fence. "Why, how could I have failed to notice it before? I better come around early tomorrow morning and fix it before wild animals or thieves have a chance to go in and eat up the grapes. As it is, I have barely enough to support my family." Then he suddenly stopped in his tracks and caught his breath. "Today is Shabbat," he thought, "and I have just been thinking and planning my mundane affairs on this sanctified day."

The Jew, who was a pious man, was shocked that he had just transgressed the sanctity of the day by actually planning to perform work which was forbidden on the holy Shabbat. He turned his thoughts away from the fence and returned to his home and the joyous Shabbat meal that awaited him.

When Shabbat had come to an end the Jew remembered his vineyard and the broken fence, and he felt a great sorrow at having profaned his holy Shabbat with thoughts of repairing the fence. He decided that to atone for his sinful thought, he would never fix the fence.

The summer passed, and the harvest approached. The vineyard was redolent with the fragrance of ripe grapes.

The man went out to his vineyard to gather in his harvest thinking, "There probably aren't many grapes left. I'm sure the foxes and rabbits must have passed through the hole and eaten them all."

But when he entered the vineyard he couldn't believe his eyes.

The grapes hung in gigantic clusters throughout the vineyard, and the smell of the ripe grapes was overpowering. Every grape was perfect, and there was no sign of any having been touched.

The man began to look for the hole in the fence. The damage had been quite extensive, and so he was sure to find it with little searching. And so he did, but in the place where there had been a gaping hole, there was none.

Instead, completely covering the hole, there was a fully-grown caper bush. The Master of the Universe had caused it to sprout there, to cover up the opening with its bushy branches.

The caper bush had not only saved the grape crop from certain destruction, but it possessed a great value in itself. Every part of the plant could be sold at great profit. The caper buds were preserved in vinegar and savored as a tasty delicacy; the twigs and leaves were enjoyed as well.

The pious Jew benefitted from the wondrous bush for the rest of his life, earning from it a good livelihood to support his wife and children. He enjoyed the bountiful harvest from it every year and it was a reminder of the great holiness of the Shabbat and the miracle of G-d's creation.



In the Holy Land, when the Romans ruled, Rabbi Yonatan was a judge in his city. He was known to everyone as a fair and honest man. The court convened in his home which was situated next door to that of a Roman. And just as the two houses were adjacent, so were their fields.

In Rabbi Yonatan's field there grew a majestic tree whose branches overspread the field of the Roman, but the Roman didn't mind, for he loved to sit under its welcome shade.

This Roman enjoyed disparaging the Jews, and he decided that it might be entertaining to listen to some of the cases brought to Rabbi Yonatan.

One day two Jews came to the court arguing about a tree belonging to one of them. The second Jew complained that the shade it created interfered with his crops. The first man cried, "For twenty years the tree never bothered you!"

The second replied, "That is true, but now it has become so large that it damages my crops."

Rabbi Yonatan listened and then instructed the men to return the following day for the verdict.

The Roman thought to himself, "I bet the rabbi postponed his decision because I was here. He was probably afraid that I would demand that he cut down his tree. I'll show him. I will embarrass him in front of the whole court."

Rabbi Yonatan called a carpenter and instructed him to go at once and cut down all the branches of his tree which hung over his neighbor's field. When the verdict was read next morning, the Roman was there. "You must cut down the branches which hang over your neighbor's field, since they are disturbing him," ordered Rabbi Yonatan.

The Roman leapt up and yelled, "Why, then, don't you cut down your tree which is leaning over my property?"

"Go to the field and look at my tree. You will see exactly what this man must do to his tree."

The Roman went, and to his surprise the tree no longer hung over his field. He saw that Rabbi Yonatan made sure that he would not transgress a ruling which he laid on another person. From that time on the Roman had the greatest respect for Rabbi Yonatan and Jewish Law.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And Yitro rejoiced for all the goodness that the L-rd had done to Israel, that He delivered him out the hand of the Egyptians (Ex. 18:9)

What is meant by "that he delivered him from the hand of the Egyptians"? Shouldn't the Torah have used the word "them," meaning the Jewish people, rather than "him"? Yitro had served as one of Pharaoh's chief advisors, and now realized that he should have perished along with the rest of the Egyptians. Thus he was grateful to G-d for not only saving him physically, but for giving him the idea to convert to Judaism. (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*)

Then you shall be My own treasure (segula) from among all the peoples (Ex. 19:5)

The Hebrew word "segula" means a characteristic or trait, i.e., something that does not depend on logic but is simply a "given" of nature. Similarly, G-d's love for the Jewish people has no rational basis, and exists solely because such was His will to choose them. (*Kadmonim*)

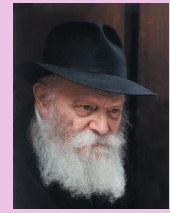
When the ram's horn sounds long, they shall come up to the mountain (Ex. 19:13)

When the Torah was given, all vestiges of idolatry had to be removed from the Jewish people, including the idea that any creation can have its own inherent holiness; only G-d can impart sanctity. Thus in order to make sure that no one thought that the reason the Torah was given on Mount Sinai was that the mountain itself was holy, G-d commanded that immediately afterward it revert to being a "regular" mountain, with animals grazing on it, etc. The "sanctity" of Mount Sinai lasted only as long as the Divine Presence rested upon it. (*Meshech Chochma*)



4:56 Candle Lighting Time
NY Metro Area
23 Shevat / Feb 2
Torah Portion *Yitro*
Blessing of the new month of Adar I
Shabbat ends **5:58 pm**

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE
from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

The climax of the Exodus from Egypt and the purpose for which the world was created was the Revelation on Mount Sinai. It was there that G-d gave the Ten Commandments and the Torah to the Jewish People. In front of the assemblage of every single Jewish man, woman and child, and in the presence of the souls of every Jew that would be born throughout the millennia, G-d descended on Mount Sinai and said, "I am (anochi) the L-rd your G-d." These historic events are described in this week's Torah portion, Yitro.

The Midrash points out a curious fact: The word "anochi" is not Hebrew—it is an Egyptian word!

The Ten Commandments are a condensation of all the guiding principles of the Torah. Of these, the first two commandments, "I am the L-rd your G-d" and "You shall have no other gods," have an even greater measure of holiness, for they were heard by the Jews directly from G-d Himself, and not through Moses. The first of these two commandments, by virtue of the order in which it was given, has even more significance. Why, then, did G-d choose to express the most lofty and exalted concept, the "I," the very essence of G-d Himself, in a foreign tongue?

In order to understand this paradox, we must first examine the purpose of the Revelation on Mount Sinai. The Torah was not given to guard the holiness contained in the Hebrew tongue; for this, no G-dly earth-shaking Revelation would have been necessary. G-d descended on Mount Sinai for one reason only—to enable us to elevate even the lowest and most mundane aspects of our lives and of the physical world, including the Egyptian language, the spoken words of the most abominable nation.

Holiness existed before the Revelation, and Jews had long occupied themselves with the Torah. The innovation of the Revelation was the ability to "fuse" holiness with mundane, to imbue physical matter with spirituality. Even things that were seemingly far removed from the realm of holiness could now be used to bring G-dliness into the world.

The aim of the Revelation is pointedly emphasized by the use of the Egyptian word "anochi." A Jew's daily life involves elevating the physical and transforming it into a vessel for G-dliness. Prayer and Torah study enable us to reach only a limited level of spirituality; elevating that which is seemingly trivial, by adhering to the laws of the Torah, enables us to attain even greater heights of holiness.

When we fulfill G-d's will by elevating even the "anochi," as G-d Himself did, we fulfill the purpose of the Torah and carry out the world's Divine plan.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Light Keeper

By Rabbi Lazer Gurkow

The first lighthouse to be built in what would become the United States was also the last lighthouse to have an official keeper. Sally Snowman stepped down from the role as the world slipped into 2024.

Little Brewster, a tiny island near Boston, has been home to Boston Light since 1716. The lighthouse will continue to serve, but it will join its sister lighthouses in complete automation. Lighthouses continue to dot our waterways. Their beacons guide lonely captains on dark, stormy nights. Their light offers comfort, warmth, and cheer to a tempest of fearful hearts, but no one kindles or preserves them. They operate without human intervention.

There is another kind of lighthouse that continues to shine, but this one requires human effort. "For the Commandment is a candle, and the Torah is a light" (Proverbs 6:23). These Divine lights burn for eternity, but they only enter our hearts if we open the door. For this light to make a real-world difference, we need to open our hearts and souls.

Wax and wick do not a candle make until we strike a match. The Torah and its commandments can't guide us unless we study and observe them. G-d gave us the candle and the wax, but He

placed the match in our hands. If we study the Torah with passion and embrace our Judaism with enthusiasm, its light will shine in our hearts and souls.

As the last lighthouse keeper steps down, we must ask ourselves, who will keep G-d's lighthouse? Will we strike that match? Will we open our hearts and minds to its flame?

CATEGORICAL LIGHT

We might serve as kindlers, but the light is Divine. As G-d is eternal and categorical, so is His Torah and its moral code. Human codes are malleable. Mores and opinions, like fashions and styles, shift with the wind. But G-d's morals are absolute.

They tell the story of a powerful battleship sailing through the night. The captain spies a light directly in its path and instructs the oncoming ship to change course. The responding message insists that the battleship change course. Enraged, the captain radios, "I am a battleship with the power to obliterate you; you change course." The return message was not long in coming. "I am a lighthouse, your call."

The Torah is a lighthouse that never changes course. Other ships are larger, faster, fancier, and nimbler, but the Torah is enduring—written by an unchanging G-d.

SLICE OF LIFE

Before Amazon Was Born, This Jewish Website Got Its Start in Long Island City

By Mordechai Lightstone



Eli Winsbacher, left, with Rabbi Kazen, and site webmaster Michael Kazen, in February 1996.

The social responsibility of massively successful high-tech companies was again thrown into high relief last week when Amazon announced that Long Island City—a working-class neighborhood in Queens, N.Y., that has been home to the largest public-housing development in the Western Hemisphere—would now be home to one of the tech giant’s major new headquarters.

What is not known to many is that this is not the first time that Long Island City has played a critical role in the history of the Internet. In fact, the two came together 25 years ago during the Internet’s infancy. A year before Amazon.com went online for the first time in September 1994, Long Island City served as the first home base for a small Jewish website, as well as a proving ground for the potential of the Internet to serve as a unifying force for social responsibility worldwide.

That site was Chabad.org.

Chabad.org not only predates Amazon.com (and its briefly floated original name, Cadabra), but also such other early tech titans as Yahoo, eBay and The New York Times’ web presence.

Launched in the fall of 1993, Chabad.org was one of the first 500 websites created after the birth of web in 1991.

Amazon’s recent announcement just so happens to be timed to the confluence of two anniversaries: the 25th anniversary of Chabad.org’s launch in 1993 and the 20th *yahrzeit* (anniversary of passing) of Chabad.org’s co-founder and visionary leader, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Kazen.

In the ensuing quarter-century, Chabad.org has grown to be the most popular and largest content-rich Jewish website in the world, reaching 50 million unique visitors last year.

Two Anniversaries Highlight Judaism Online

In the summer of 1993, Rabbi Kazen—known affectionately as Y.Y.—was at the PC Expo at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Midtown Manhattan. There, he met an individual from the Long Island City-based Dorsai Embassy—one of New York’s original Internet service providers, and a nonprofit dedicated to helping other organizations and individuals get online.

Kazen, who worked at United Lubavitcher Yeshivah, was already familiar with the BBS system, the confederated network of “bulletin boards.” For the past five years, he’d been a regular contributor to Keshemet, the Jewish BBS, and had visions of further creating a dedicated Chabad presence online.

At the PC Expo, he learned for the first time about the nascent World Wide Web—a project born at CERN, the European Nuclear Research facility in Switzerland in 1991.

When Kazen returned to the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y., he went directly to 770 Eastern Parkway (Chabad Lubavitch Headquarters) to visit his friend Rabbi Eli Winsbacher, who then worked at WLCC, Chabad’s telephone communications hub.

“Eli, you’re my computer maven,” Kazen told him. “We’ve got to open up an electronic Chabad house. No one has done this, it’s nowhere to be found. We’ve got to do this.”

“Yossel, you’re crazy,” said Winsbacher.

“That I know,” Kazen responded. “But now that I’ve got a dream, I’d like to fulfill it.”

The pair quickly realized that despite Winsbacher’s technical prowess and Kazen’s vision, they would need a guide to navigating the

Wild West of the early world wide web.

Recalling that the Dorsai Embassy offered free classes on Tuesday evenings, Kazen and Winsbacher struck out for Queens.

“We took our car and schlepped out to Long Island City for classes,” Kazen later recalled in a talk he gave to Chabad emissaries the next year. Before leaving, he told his wife, Rochel, that he’d be back in an hour.

Tall, with a trim beard and a penchant for wearing snap-brim fedoras, Charles Rawls is one of the co-founders of the Dorsai Embassy. With the slightest trace of a Texan accent from growing up in a little town in the central part of the state, where “the ‘Welcome to’ and ‘You are now leaving’ signs are on the same post,” he still recalls that fateful encounter with a wry smile.

“Someone tells me, ‘We’re going to have some interesting visitors—a couple of rabbis are coming over.’”

“We’re about community service and giving back,” said Rawls. “So if these rabbis are about giving back, why not?”

Entering the Dorsai Embassy—a former washmat now filled with personal computers and servers, affectionately known as “the bunker”—the two Chassidim stood in sharp contrast to the computer hackers inside.

“There they were,” recalls Rawls. “The geeks on one side, the Chassidim on the other.”

Glancing at his pager hours later, Kazen realized that his one-hour trip had kept him out until 4 a.m.

Kazen would return many times, so much so that he was eventually given his own keys to the bunker.

The two—soon joined by Dovid Zirkind and YY’s son, Michael, together with the group at Dorsai—would go on to launch Chabad.org by year’s end.

Rawls recalls that initial interaction as “pretty much an example of what the Internet should be about,” a tool to build bridges and connect people.

“Yes, the tech was exciting,” he recalls. “But Rabbi Kazen wasn’t a technologist. He had a vision that was bigger than the technological capabilities of the time. He was going to push boundaries, if he could, to do great and wondrous things.”

Excerpts from an article on Chabad.org



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Excerpts From a Letter of the Rebbe, Concerning the Need of Our Young to Be Guided in the Path of Torah, Which Has No Substitute and No Rival

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to receive your regards through Dr. Nissan Mindel, and also your latest writings. Many thanks.

Dr. Mindel tells me that you invite my comments in reference to your endeavors to promote international prosperity. I must admit that I do not find it easy. However, knowing you I know that nothing other than complete candor would be acceptable to you. I am confident, therefore, that you will accept my remarks in the spirit that they are made.

It is, of course, very praiseworthy for a person to take a keen and active interest in world affairs, especially in an age of materialism and egotism. All the more so, when the person has been highly successful in his own business affairs yet dedicates himself to problems of global proportions, underdeveloped nations, and the like. For in doing so, he sets an example of humanitarian concern that many would do well to emulate.

On the other hand, I trust you will agree that the question of priorities is a legitimate one; it is certain a compelling factor from the viewpoint of the Torah, which sees the scale of priorities as beginning with one’s immediate family and relatives, and going on to the community and to the national interest of one’s own people.

This may sound like a “chauvinistic” idea, but the objection must be brushed aside, for the simple reason that one must view obligations on their own terms. Clearly,

the discharge of a “debt” was first priority.

A person comes into this world with a certain spiritual heritage that he receives from his people. Hence, the perpetuation of this heritage is not a matter of pure benevolence or philanthropy, but the discharge of a debt and an obligation.

Moreover, if a Jew directs his primary efforts towards the interests of the world at large, or those of certain nations of the world, he is working for a cause which has many advocates. On the other hand, the interests of his own people must depend almost exclusively on the efforts of the members of this people, since our Jewish people stand alone in an indifferent, unfriendly, and often downright hostile world.

Add to this the consideration that our people were also decimated in the Holocaust, with the result that those who have been fortunate enough to survive must step into the breach and strive to make up for the martyrs who gave their lives al Kiddush Hashem, and in whose merits we now exist.

Once the principle of priorities, as mentioned above, has been accepted, it has also to be applied in regard to the needs of our people. The first priority would have to be given to those needs that have the fewest advocates. You will no doubt gather that I have in mind the preservation and dissemination of our Torah heritage and way of life, especially among the younger generation.

Here the challenge and the opportunity have never been greater. On the one hand, our younger generation is a victim of the general confusion and spiritual turmoil prevailing in the world. On the other hand, there are many seekers, who crave guidance and identity. These young people, standing at the threshold of life – if they could only be given the proper Torah guidance and education, would not only bring about a turning point in their own lives but, with the energy and enthusiasm which characterize the young and adolescent, would inject this spirit into every phase and facet of Jewish life.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

As this year is a leap year on the Jewish calendar, there are two months of Adar, known as Adar Rishon and Adar Sheini, or Adar I and Adar II. This Shabbat we bless the new month of Adar I.

Our Sages have taught that, just as when the month of Av begins (the month in which we commemorate the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem) we lessen our joy, so, too, when the month of Adar begins, we increase our simcha – joy and happiness.

In talks delivered immediately preceding and during the two months of Adar, 5752 (1992), the Rebbe emphasized the importance of simcha in turning the darkness of exile into the light of Redemption.

The Rebbe also stressed that, being as there are two months of Adar this year, there are 60 days during which we are to increase our simcha. More importantly, in Jewish law, the quantity of 60 has the ability to nullify an undesirable presence.

Specifically, this concerns food, as we see that if a quantity of milk, for instance, has accidentally become mixed with meat, if the meat outnumbers the milk by a ratio of 1:60, the milk is nullified and we may eat the meat.

Similarly, explains the Rebbe, 60 days of simcha have the ability to nullify the darkness of the present exile, allowing us to actually turn the darkness into light.

Concerning the kind of things that should be done to arouse simcha, the Rebbe suggested that each person should proceed according to his level: a child, for instance, should be made happy by his parents; a wife by her husband, and visa versa. The bottom line, my friends, is that the Rebbe did not let up on encouraging an increase of simcha in all permissible manners during the entire month.

We must hearken to the Rebbe’s words and utilize simcha, especially during this month, to turn darkness into light, sadness into joy, and pain and tears into rejoicing with Moshiach in the Final Redemption, may it take place, as the Rebbe so fervently prayed, teichef umiyad mamash -- immediately, literally.

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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Who's Who

Onkelos was a famous Roman proselyte, the nephew of the Roman emperor Hadrian, who became acquainted with Judaism through Jewish scholars who travelled to and from Rome.

He settled in the Holy Land, where he became a disciple of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya.

Onkelos is most famous for his Targum, the Aramaic translation of the Torah.

He feared that during the Babylonian exile many Jews had forgotten Hebrew, since they had become accustomed to using Aramaic and other dialects.

In addition to being a translation, the Targum is also a simple commentary.



An elderly Jewish woman in Cherkassy loads a wood-burning kitchen stove.

In Ukraine, Chabad Network Redoubles Efforts to Provide Shelter and Warmth

Amid blackouts and single-digit temperatures, living conditions are becoming unbearable in many parts of Ukraine.

Chabad centers around the war-weary nation are going all-out to keep their communities warm and safe after aerial bombings and missile attacks damaged electric grid infrastructure and power lines around the country.

Chabad centers have been distributing heaters, blankets, home insulation and food in cities and towns around the nation since the beginning of the war. With the sun going down in some places as early as 3:30 p.m., many residents are spending most of their days and nights in the dark and cold, while many others are spending more time at Chabad centers and public shelters.