

L'Chaim

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The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person
נוסד תר"ץ ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"To You I lifted up my eyes, You Who dwell in heaven" (Psalm 123:1)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

At the end of this week's Torah portion, Shemos, Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh to demand that he free the Children of Israel from bondage. Pharaoh answered them, "Why do you, Moses and Aaron, hinder the people from their work? Go about your own tasks."

Our Sages explain that Moses and Aaron, being members of the tribe of Levi, were not required to work like the rest of the Jewish People, and were exempted from the bitter decree of slavery. Pharaoh, in effect, asked the two of them: "Why do you involve yourselves in affairs that don't concern you? Let the rest of the Jews continue in their tasks, and don't disturb them."

Why did the Egyptians permit an entire tribe of the Jewish People to be exempt from the terrible bondage forced upon the rest? The Egyptians recognized that each nation must have its own leaders and teachers to whom the people could turn for spiritual guidance. Pharaoh therefore allowed the tribe of Levi to continue learning Torah and to disseminate its teachings among the rest of the Jews. It was accepted as a natural state of affairs that the spiritual authorities should enjoy a higher status and occupy an elevated position in society.

When Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh to demand that the entire Jewish nation be allowed to journey into the desert to worship G-d, they were disputing this commonly held notion. Pharaoh, for his part, claimed that it was sufficient that the upper class, the clergy, be allowed to learn Torah and carry out Jewish ritual. Pharaoh was the original proponent of the separation of "church" and state. The Egyptian king did not object to the Leviim learning Torah; he did not seek to totally negate the spiritual and intellectual yearnings of the Jews. He merely sought to perpetuate the Egyptian world-view which saw the two realms of the religious and the civil as two opposing concepts.

As religious leaders, Moses and Aaron were allowed a certain amount of authority by the Egyptian regime, on the condition that they limit themselves to the synagogue and to the yeshiva.

When Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh with their request, it was seen as a total contradiction of the existing world order. They claimed that the Torah's very purpose was to show man how to conduct his daily, private life, and that its laws were applicable to each and every facet of a person's existence. Moses and Aaron radically challenged the man-made division between that which belonged in the spiritual realm and that which was outside of religious law. The Torah is neither limited in scope nor reserved for a select few.

From this we also learn the duty incumbent upon every Jew to help other Jews, even if he is not personally threatened. Aaron and Moses were not content to remain within the secluded tents of learning if the rest of the Jews were not allowed to participate. Because of their self-sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish nation, they were ultimately successful in ending the Egyptian exile and leading the Jews to Mount Sinai.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Burning Bush and the Tanya

By Rabbi Yosef Y. Jacobson

THE INAUGURAL VISION

Moses, shepherding his father-in-law's sheep sees a blazing thornbush. We read in Shemos. "The bush was burning in the fire but was not consumed. Moses said to himself, 'I must gaze at this great sight—why isn't the bush burning up from the flames'". G-d reveals Himself to him, saying: "Don't approach here. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy soil." He then speaks to Moses, identifying Himself as the G-d of your fathers," and charging him with the mission of leading the Jewish people to redemption.

THE THORNS IN THE FIRE

Since this revelation was the genesis of Moses's appointment as the leader of Israel, this vision captures one of the common dilemmas in the life of the Jew and indeed of every searching human being.

The story of the burning bush which would not consume the thorns embodies the duality in every heart. On one hand, we experience a desire to be good and moral. But then, at other times, we are mundane and careless, overtaken by ugly emotions.

DOUBT

Moses, the first and greatest Jewish teacher, approaches the thorn bush. He has one question: "Why does it not get consumed?" How is it possible, Moses wonders, that if a person's spirituality is authentic, it has no bearings on his or her thorns?

G-d responds: "...the place upon which you stand is sacred soil." You must encounter the holiness in your present situation.

Then G-d continues to tell him: "I am the G-d of your father." I am present in the midst of this thorny bush.

THE TANYA

This notion is one of the central themes of the Tanya—the magnum opus of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad, known as the Alter Rebbe (1745-1812), whose passing will be marked on the 24th of Teves.

The Alter Rebbe termed his work: Sefer shel Banunim, which means The Guidebook for the Ordinary Person.

Who is the banuni? The banuni is a person who possesses in a conscious way a duality—not like the tzadik, who has achieved moral perfection. The banuni operates on two levels of consciousness. His life constitutes a struggle between good and evil.

Here is the Tanya's profound idea—all based on that vision of the burning bush. Never doubt the potency and authenticity of your inner holiness and Divinity, just because there are ugly thoughts still lingering in your brain.

G-d does not want you necessarily to attain the spiritual perfection of the tzadik, the toxic-free person. The hero of the Tanya is the banuni: he opens up a door for every human being in every situation and on every level to connect and become true servants of G-d.

I would say that the entire Tanya is based on that single passage G-d told Moses: "for the place upon which you stand is holy." Wherever you are, you can find holiness and develop a real relationship with the Almighty.

Moses wants to approach the fire. We all want to transcend our conditions and become Divine. So G-d says, no! You must realize that holiness is where you stand today! To be a Jew means that wherever you are in life, you can become a conduit for the Infinite and bring heaven down to earth.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

By the Grace of G-d
10th of Adar I, 5733 [February 12, 1973]
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. Mordechai Shoel Landow

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your celebrated book. I appreciate your thoughtfulness in sending me an autographed copy. I understand you are soon to publish a second book, and take this opportunity of thanking you in anticipation of a copy of it, too.

The world of business and finance is, of course, not the primary sphere of my interest. Nevertheless, many principles and even methods are common, or at any rate relevant, to various disciplines of human endeavor.

I trust, therefore, that I may glean from your books some useful points that may successfully be applied in the area nearer to my sphere of interest, namely "how to make a million souls" — to paraphrase the title of your book — for Torah Judaism, which admittedly may be a little harder.

And to make it by "retailing", for the approach and method to attain this goal, however, is not radically different. We cannot expect of every "poor" Jew to be instantly transformed into a "millionaire" Jew in terms of total commitment to Torah Yiddishkeit.

It is a step by step process - "retailing", but with the clear understanding that, while, concessions may be made to human nature on the road to a radical change, there can be no diluting or compromise insofar as the inchangeability of Torah and Mitzvot.

If at any point in this gradual advancement commitment falls short of the goal, the goal is unmistakably clear. For the Torah,

Toras-Emes, is not subject to change. And our great teacher Maimonides declared it a basic principle of our Faith. This great "Guide for the Perplexed" (the title of one of his major works), and universally recognized doctor — of both the body and soul, was concerned not merely with the perplexed of his generation, but with the perplexed of all times, including, especially, those of our own day and age, when perplexities have perhaps never been greater.

It has been very encouraging to learn that you are utilizing your substantial influence and other resources in taking an active part to further the activities of Lubavitch to spread and strengthen Yiddishkeit in your community. Our representatives there have informed me of your personal interest, which has found such eloquent expression in the text of your address to the Banquet, as I see from the copy received by me. I am told that it made a strong impact on the audience.

This is certainly proof that it was a case of "words coming from the heart, which penetrate the heart," to quote our Sages. And, if I may be permitted another quotation, our Sages succinctly expressed human ambition, which grows with accomplishment, in the adage "He who has 100 desires 200, and having attained 200 - desires 400" (not merely a further increment of 100). If this is so in mundane matters, how much more so should it be in regard to eternal spiritual values.

May G-d grant that this should be so in your case, in your communal endeavors in behalf of the advancement of all matters of Torah. The utmost Hatzlocho is assured where the endeavor is a total one, in terms of "body, soul, and financial resources," to quote our Sages again.

In other words, not only through generous financial contributions, but also through personal involvement, including the recruiting of friends to the cause, by word and example, and in a way that all these efforts are permeated with inspiration and joy, reflecting all the spiritual capacities of ones' soul.

With prayerful wishes for Hatzlocho in all above, and with blessing,

Aggada, Jacob said, "Though it is not known when the Day of Judgment will be, I do tell you that the hour you gather and assemble together you shall be redeemed." The unity of Israel, all being as one, is the preparation and condition for the ultimate redemption.

(Rabbi J.I. Schochet in Mashiach.)

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

The 20th of Teves (January 20 this year), is the yartzeit of Rabbi Moses Maimonides, otherwise known as the Rambam.

In his major work, the Mishne Torah, the Rambam enumerates and details all the 613 laws of the Torah. He places the laws relating to the Jewish king, and Moshiach, at the very end of his work. In the introduction to these laws he states that the Jews were commanded to fulfill three mitzvot upon conquering and entering the Land of Israel: To appoint a king; to kill the descendants of Amalek; to build [G-d's] Chosen House.

It would seem that these mitzvot should have been mentioned much earlier in his work if they were, in fact, so important! However, the Rambam chose to organize the Mishne Torah in this fashion to emphasize that the true and complete performance of all the mitzvot of the Torah will be attained when a king rules over Israel. The Rambam then defines Moshiach as a king, who will not only redeem the Jews from exile, but also restore the observance of the Torah and the mitzvot to its complete state.

For many, this would seem a rather novel approach. Yet, the Talmud states that "the world was created solely for Moshiach." This being the case, we certainly must do everything in our power to hasten his arrival.

What is within the power and reach of each individual, great and small? Good deeds, charity, studying concepts and laws associated with Moshiach and the Final Redemption, fostering peace between family, friends, co-workers, and actively waiting for and anticipating his arrival each and every day.

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

Before Jacob passed away, he said to his sons: "Gather together and I shall tell you that which shall occur to you in the end of days." According to the

