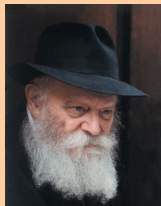


# L'Chaim



## LIVING WITH THE REBBE

*from the teachings of the Rebbe  
on the Torah portion*

With this week's Torah portion, Vayechi, we conclude the Book of Genesis. "So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old... and he was put into a coffin in Egypt" is its final verse.

This conclusion to the entire Book is somewhat surprising, in light of the principle that "one should always end on a positive note." Why couldn't Genesis have concluded a few verses back, when we learn that Joseph lived a long life and merited to see grandchildren and great-grandchildren?

Why couldn't the description of Joseph's death have waited until the Book of Exodus?

We must therefore conclude that Joseph's passing is somehow related to the theme of Genesis itself.

The Book of Genesis begins with an account of the creation of the world.

The Sage, Rabbi Yitzchak, explained that although the Torah should have begun with a practical mitzva, G-d chose to commence with the Creation to refute the arguments of the Gentiles, who would one day claim that the Jews had stolen the land of Israel from the seven nations who lived there prior to its conquest.

To counter their assertion, the Jews will say, "The entire world belongs to G-d; He created it and divided it as He saw fit. It was His will to give it to them [the seven nations], and it was His will to take it from them and give it to us."

Surely G-d did not change the entire order of His Torah just to supply an answer to the arguments of the Gentiles. The comments of Rabbi Yitzchak must therefore contain a more fundamental teaching for the Jewish people as a whole.

The nations of the world are already cognizant of the Jew's uniqueness and his special mission. Their claim, however, is that precisely because Jews are different, they should limit themselves to the spiritual service of G-d and not tie themselves down to a physical land.

Because Jews are a nation like no other, they have no right to claim ownership of a homeland. To the non-Jew, the spiritual and physical realms are incongruous and incompatible.

"The entire world belongs to G-d," the Jew responds -- the worldly as well as the spiritual realm.

Both require sanctification through the light of holiness -- the sacred mission of the Jewish people.

With this concept the Book of Genesis begins, and on this note it concludes. Joseph's coffin remained in Egypt in order to give strength and inspiration to the Children of Israel in their Egyptian exile. The power of Joseph is symbolic of the ability of the Jewish people to overcome even the most difficult of obstacles, imbuing even the coarsest of physical matter with holiness and bringing the full and complete Redemption.

*Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe, Vol. XXX*

## Bagels And Lox

Have you ever wondered why so many Jewish celebrations and holidays are associated with food? And why something as popular as "bagels and lox" (you won't find it listed as a traditional food in any book of Jewish observances) has become customary Jewish fare?

Consider the bagel. The empty space in the center, some would suggest, is there to remind us that being a gastronomic Jew is not enough. If our Jewish experiences are limited to eating bagels and lox, or even potato latkas on Chanuka and matza ball soup on Passover, there is a big hole in our Jewish living and learning.

Or, perhaps the hole is there to nudge us to make "space" for G-d and Judaism in our everyday lives. It can remind us that there is always "room" for improvement in our interpersonal and Divine relationships. And it is symbolic of the fact that mitzvot and rituals are anything but "empty."

What of bagel's sidekick, lox? Salmon, the fish from which lox is derived, are famous for swimming upstream and even leaping up waterfalls. They do this in order to return whence they came. Salmon attempt to do the impossible and are not only successful, but continue to flourish.

The journey of the salmon is related to the experience of the Jewish people as a whole and to every individual Jew. As a nation, we have always gone against the tide. We yearn to return to our roots. We have survived despite the fact that mightier and more powerful nations have attempted to annihilate us. And whereas the Jewish people, Jews, and Torah continue to endure and flourish, those nations that persecuted us no longer exist.

As Mark Twain stated so eloquently near the turn of the century: "... The Egyptian, the Babylonian and the Persian people rose and filled the planet with sound and splendor,

then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made vast noise, and they are gone or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal, but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains."

There is, of course, a Chasidic spin on why we Jews are so "into" food:

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chasidism, interpreted a verse from King David's Psalms, "Hungry and thirsty their soul prayerfully yearns within them" to mean that our hunger and thirst for food and drink is rooted in the fact that "the soul prayerfully yearns." The soul, the Divine force within each of us, wishes to refine and return to its G-dly source the spark of holiness that lies trapped within the desired food and drink. Each soul is designated sparks which only she can set aright. In other words, although we experience physiological hunger, the true "hunger" is the longing of the soul for the sparks of sanctity in the food which are uniquely related to her and are her responsibility to redeem.

Similarly, when a Jew prays for material needs, although his prayers may appear to result from personal desires, the true, impelling force behind the outpouring of the soul is the hunger and thirst of the soul to fulfill G-d's Divine plan-the creation of a "home" for Him in this physical world which will be fully expressed in the Messianic Era.

So, the next time you get a craving for bagels and lox, don't feel bad. You just might be helping your soul fulfill her essential desire to transform the world into a perfect, peaceful, harmonious home for G-d and all of creation.

# SLICE OF LIFE

## Remembering and Learning From a True Chassid

By Rochel Vorst



Rabbi Yitzchak Vorst, OBM

When my father-in-law passed away two days before Rosh Hashana, I asked for the privilege to share some of his story. However, after three attempts rejected by family members, I realized that it wasn't a simple task. You see, my father-in-law, Rabbi Yitzchak Vorst, was more than a Rabbi, a writer, a father, and a husband and as my poor, previous attempts prove, impossible to fully portray.

As a writer, I committed myself to doing more research. I'd read his writings over Yom Tov, I told myself. And try again. That Yomtov was Shmini Atzeres. Before I even had the opportunity to open the book he authored, Why? Reflections on the Loss of a Loved One, our Chabad house security guard had already informed us of the horror that was unfolding in Israel, sending all thoughts of research and writing out of my head.

To complicated matters and emotions, I was busily attempting to plan my oldest daughter's wedding here in Charlotte, NC. Not an easy feat when no infrastructure exists for such things. Who has a hall that'll hold four hundred guests? The wedding is November of 2023, don't you mean next 2024? And catering? Well my husband runs the city's

only kosher caterer out of our Chabad house kitchen, so he has his work cut out for him.

And really, a wedding in war time! Who has the headspace to think of flowers and music when we are in mourning for so many of our Jewish brothers and sisters? When hundreds of them remain imprisoned! And then I remembered my father-in-law's story.

When he was a child, he and his family were rounded up in Rotterdam The Netherlands by the Nazis and brought to the Westerbork transit camp. Despite the inhumane conditions, we Jews survive, and one way we do so is by teaching our children. A makeshift school was established. Its staff and student numbers would shrink dramatically every Tuesday, transport day. And then it would rise again as more prisoners were rounded up.

One day, when only two teachers remained, a little boy wandered in to where the classes were held. Singing a song. Ashrenu – how fortunate we are to be Jewish. The teachers, one of them my father-in-law's own father, Rabbi Levi Vorst, along with the students joined the little boy in singing and dancing.

The little boy was my father-in-law. Singing and dancing. In a labor camp. How fortunate is our lot. How beautiful is our heritage.

It was with that thought in mind that I forced myself to dance that Simchat Torah night. I watched my husband hold the Torah singing the very words his father had sang so many years ago in Westerbork. How precious is our inheritance. And it was with that thought that I threw myself into wedding preparations.

Rabbi Vorst truly lived by these words. How else could he have served as the first Shliach to the Netherlands, impacting thousands of Jewish lives in a country ravaged by the horrors of the Holocaust? What else would have kept him and my mother-in-law going for almost sixty years, reaching Jews of all ages and stages?

Truly, the beauty of our heritage.

Dutch Jewry of every denomination and

age group were represented at his funeral, including alumni and current campers of "Tikvatenu," a Jewish children's camp. Rabbi Vorst had offered his services as camp rabbi to the camp close to sixty years ago. He went to the summer, winter camp and weekends until a few months before his passing. He taught, wrote tens of children's songs in Dutch, and was always happy to join a soccer game. Sure, his goal wasn't the net, but sometimes it takes a well-played game to send the message that we are truly lucky to be Jewish.

Again, my words seem woefully inadequate. I haven't touched on the countless families comforted, the countless souls introduced to Yiddishkeit, the smile, the gentle words, the honesty, and the humor. I didn't tell of his dedication to Eretz Yisrael, the engineering degree and the choice to become a chosid.

I don't know if I can. Maybe I didn't know him long enough. Maybe living in far off North Carolina doesn't qualify me to do so.

So, I'll end off with my favorite story.

When as a young man, he met the Rebbe for the first time, Rabbi Vorst had an important message to pass on from his father, Rabbi Levi Vorst who was serving as the chief Rabbi of Rotterdam. A Chabad shliach was desperately needed in the Netherlands. Please send someone.

The Rebbe replied that he had not yet found the right person who had the skills and knowledge necessary to fill this position. And then the Rebbe smiled broadly.

When some months later the Rebbe instructed him to return to the Netherlands as his first shliach, he understood the meaning of that smile. Soon after their wedding, my in-laws moved to the Netherlands settling in Amstelveen where they became pillars of Jewish life.

So, here is your description. Rabbi Yitzchak Vorst was a shliach of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He dedicated his life to the Rebbe's mission; teaching every Jew, umah yaffah yerushatenu, our precious and beautiful heritage.



### U.S. Troops in Kuwait Celebrate Chanukah

On a warm and dry December day in southern Kuwait, close to 40 soldiers, sailors and marines training at Camp Arifjan gathered to celebrate Chanukah. They lit menorahs, engaged in dreidel-spinning contests, savored home-fried potato latkes and sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts), and discussed how the story of Chanukah relates to their lives and needs in the military.

This year's Chanukah celebration in Kuwait was led by U.S. Army Captain Elisar Admon, a chaplain endorsed by the Chabad-Lubavitch-affiliated Aleph Institute—the leading Jewish organization supporting Jewish soldiers in the United States.

When, more than a year ago, Admon learned from Aleph's military personnel liaison Rabbi Elie Estrin of the possibility of a deployment to Kuwait for Chanukah, he immediately signed up to help raise the troops' morale and bring the "Festival of Lights" and cheer to the men and women on the distant American military base.

## A Call To Action

Think about and do something on behalf of Jewish education:

"It is the absolute duty of every person to spend half an hour every day thinking about the Torah-education of children, and to do everything in his power -- and beyond his power -- to inspire children to follow the path along which they are being guided."

(As quoted by the Rebbe in *Hayom Yom*)





# The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

**BITACHON [TRUST] IN G-D THAT ALL THAT HE DOES IS FOR THE GOOD**

Excerpts of a Letter

5th of Nissan, 5735 [1975]

I am in receipt of your correspondence, and trust that you received my regards through your brother R. Zalman who was here for the Yud Shevat observance.

I must reiterate again what was said when you were here in regard to bitachon [trust] in G-d that all that He does is for the good. It is not easy to accept the passing of a near and dear one, but since our Torah, which is called Toras Chesed and Toras Chaim [the Torah of Kindness and Life], our guide in life, sets limits to mourning periods, it is clear that when the period ends it is no good to extend it-not good, not only because it disturbs the life that must go on here on earth, but also because it does not please the soul that is in the World of Truth.

A further point which, I believe, I mentioned during our conversation, but apparently from your letter not emphatically enough, is this: It would be contrary to plain common sense to assume that a sickness or accident and the like could affect the soul, for such physical things can affect only the physical body and its union with the soul, but certainly not the soul itself. It is also self-evident that the relationship between people, especially between parents and children, is in essence and content a spiritual one, transcending time and space-of qualities that are not subject to the influence of bodily accident, disease, etc.

It follows that when a close person passes on, by the will of G-d, those left here can no longer see him with their eyes or hear him with their ears; but the soul, in the World of Truth, can see and hear. And when he sees that his relatives are overly disturbed by his physical absence, it is saddened, and conversely, when it sees that after the

mourning period prescribed by the Torah a normal and fully productive life is resumed, it can happily rest in peace.

Needless to say, in order that the above be accepted not only intellectually, but actually implemented in the everyday life, it is necessary to be occupied, preferably involved in matters of "personal" interest and gratification. As I also mentioned in our conversation, every Jew has a most gratifying and edifying task of spreading light in the world through promoting Yiddishkeit. Particularly, as in your case, where one can be of so much help and inspiration to children and grandchildren, who look up to you and your husband for encouragement, wisdom, etc.

Here is also the answer to your question, what you can do for the soul of the dear one. Spreading Yiddishkeit around you effectively, displaying simple Yiddish faith in G-d and in His benevolent Providence, doing all the good work that has to be done, with confidence and peace of mind-this is what truly gratifies the soul in Olam Ha'emes [the World of Truth], in addition to fulfilling your personal and most lofty mission in life as a daughter of our Mothers Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah, and thereby also serving as an inspiring example for others to emulate.

I might add, however, that one must beware of the yetzer hara [evil inclination] who is very crafty. So he tries to trick them saying: You know, G-d has prescribed a period of mourning, so why not do more than that and extend the period? In this way he may have a chance to succeed in distracting the person from the fact that at the end of the said period, the Torah requires the Jew to serve G-d with joy. The yetzer hara will even encourage a person to give tzedakah [charity] in memory of the soul, learn Torah and do mitzvos in memory of the soul, except that in each case it be associated with sadness and pain. But, as indicated, this is exactly contrary to the objective, which is to cause pleasure and gratification to the soul.

May G-d grant that, inasmuch as we are approaching the Festival of Our Freedom, including also freedom from everything that distracts a Jew from serving G-d wholeheartedly and with joy, that this should be so also with you, in the midst of all our people, and that you should be a source of inspiration and strength to your husband, children and grandchildren, and all around you...

# MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Rebbe Rashab, Rabbi Shalom Dovber, said:

"Even the greatest minds must lay aside their intellect and not be ruled by reason

and knowledge, for they are susceptible to being misguided by their intellect to the point that their end may be a bitter one.

"The essential thing in these times of the "footsteps of Moshiach" is not to follow intellect and reason, but to fulfill Torah and mitzvot wholeheartedly, with simple faith in the G-d of Israel."

# A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism, whose yahrtzeit we will be commemorating on Friday, 24 Teves, taught that "a Jew has to live with the times" -- the "Jewish times" being the eternal Torah in its weekly Torah portion readings.*

*This week's Torah portion begins with the words: "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years." According to our Sages, these were Jacob's best years.*

*It is related that when the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Chabad Rebbe, learned this Torah portion as a boy, he asked his grandfather, Rabbi Schneur Zalman: "How could our father Jacob have lived his best years in a place like Egypt?" (Egypt was known for its crass materialism and depravity -- utterly foreign to the spirit of our Patriarch.)*

*Rabbi Schneur Zalman replied: "In the preceding portion we are told that Jacob had sent his son Judah ahead of him to Goshen (in Egypt) to establish a Torah center for the twelve tribes and their children and grandchildren. Thus, wherever the Torah and mitzvot are studied and observed, a Jew can live his best years, even in Egypt."*

*Today we stand at a point in history where, because of the Rebbe's declaration that "The time of the Redemption has come" and "Moshiach is on his way," we prepare each day for the Messianic Era. And yet, we must live with the times. We must continue to learn from our Patriarch Jacob, and continue to establish centers of Torah study for young and old. In addition, the Rebbe has enjoined us to learn about the Redemption and Moshiach, so that even those places of study established long ago should "live with the times" and enhance their learning with the study of these subjects.*

*As the Rebbe expressed, "This is the way to hasten the Geula." May it happen immediately.*

*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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# IT HAPPENED ONCE

There was once a Chasid who travelled to his Rebbe every month to take in the atmosphere of holiness which filled the very air of Kozhnitz. He was happy with his lot in life; if only he had a child, he would be completely content.

Several times his wife had insisted that he ask the Rebbe for a blessing to cure their childlessness, but to no avail. His wife wouldn't desist from her pleas. "This time," she insisted, "you must not leave the holy Rebbe until he answers our request, for my life is worthless to me without children."

The man was forced to agree, and when he came to Kozhnitz and was admitted into the Rebbe's chambers, he told the Rebbe of their longing for a child. The Rebbe listened and offered him the solution his spiritual vision afforded him: "If you are willing to become a pauper you will be granted the blessing you seek." The man agreed to discuss the condition with his wife and return with her answer.

The woman didn't think for a moment. "Of course it's worth everything to me. What good is wealth without children?" The man returned to Kozhnitz and accepted the harsh prescription. But poverty was not the end of the Rebbe's advice; the man was sent on a long arduous journey to visit the famous tzadik, the Chozeh (Seer) of Lublin.

The Chozeh was known for his power to discern the state and provenance of a person's soul, and when he met the Chasid he studied his visitor long and hard before he spoke.

"I will tell you the source of your childlessness and then what you must do to correct the problem. Once, when you were very young, you promised to wed a certain maiden.

When you matured, she didn't interest you any longer and you broke your promise and left the place. Since she was your true intended, you have not been able to have children since. You must find her and beg her forgiveness. Go to the city of Balta which is very distant from here -- there you'll find the woman."

The Chasid wasted no time in embarking on the journey. But when he arrived there no one knew anything about the woman. He rented a room and waited to see the words of the tzadik materialize.

One day, he was walking down the street when he was caught in a sudden downpour. He ran to a nearby shop to escape from the rain and found himself standing near two women who were also seeking shelter. Suddenly, he was shocked to hear one say to the other, "Do you see that man? He was once betrothed to me in my youth and deserted me!" He turned to see a woman dressed in the richest fabrics and wearing beautiful and valuable jewels.

He approached her and she said, "Don't you remember me? I am the one you were engaged to so many years ago. Have you any children?"

He immediately poured out the entire story, telling her that he had come only to find her and beseech her to forgive him. He begged her to ask of him anything to atone for the terrible pain he had caused her.

"I lack nothing, for G-d has provided me with all I need, but I have a brother who is in desperate need. Go to him and give him 200 gold coins with which he can marry off his daughter, and I will forgive you. In the merit of marrying off a poor bride you will be blessed with children, as the tzadik told you."

"Please, you give your brother this money. I have travelled many months and I'm very anxious to return home."

"No," the woman adamantly refused. "I am not able to travel now, and it is not feasible to send such a sum of money. No, you must go yourself." With that, she turned and proceeded down the street, but as he was following her with his eyes, she seemed to disappear.

The Chasid ventured on yet another journey to a distant city where he was able to locate the woman's brother.

The man was in a terrible state of agitation which he readily explained: "My daughter is betrothed to a wealthy young man, but I have suddenly become penniless and unless I can find the dowry money, the marriage is off."

The Chasid listened to the heartrending tale and then said: "I will give you two hundred gold coins which will be more than enough for all your expenses." The man couldn't believe his ears. "What, you don't even know me -- why would you do such a thing for a total stranger?"

"I have been sent by your sister whom I met a few weeks ago in Balta. Many years ago I was once betrothed to her and I abandoned her, and the help I'm offering to you is my promise to her."

"What are you saying?" the man turned pale. "What kind of crazy tale are you spinning and why? My sister has been dead for fifteen years. I should know -- I buried her myself!"

Now it was time for the Chasid to be shocked. It was beginning to dawn on him that the Maggid of Kozhnitz and the Chozeh of Lublin had orchestrated this entire wondrous episode for his good and the good of this man. He handed him the golden coins and the man blessed him to be granted the blessing of many sons and daughters and a long and happy life of joy from them.

## THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah Portion

**Jacob lived (Vayechi) in the land of Egypt seventeen years (Gen. 47:28)**  
 "The best years of Jacob's life were equal to the numerical equivalent of the word "vayechi," which is thirty-four. These were the seventeen years from Joseph's birth until he was sold, and the seventeen years Jacob spent in Egypt. (Baal HaTurim)

**I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel (Gen. 48:14)**  
 "There are no poor, scribes or teachers of young children except from the tribe of Shimon," comments Rashi, the great Torah commentator. Jacob did not intend this only as a punishment, but as an antidote to Shimon's undesirable character trait of insolence. Jacob worried that if Shimon and Levi were wealthy, no one would be able to oppose them. He therefore decreed that they be poor, forcing them to come to their brethren for assistance and thereby curbing their arrogance. (Kli Chemda)

**And Joseph went up to bury his father (Gen. 50:7)**  
 A person is judged with the same yardstick he uses to judge others. Joseph, the most respected of the brothers, involved himself personally in the burial of his father. He thereby merited that none other than Moses himself would later carry his bones back to the land of Israel. (Sotah, 9:4)

**Gather together and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days (Gen. 49:1)**  
 The Talmud relates that Jacob wished to reveal the end (of the exile) but it was concealed from him. The literal meaning, however, is that Jacob wished to "reveal, i.e., manifest and bring about, the end."  
 In this context there is an important moral for every Jew. We are to follow in the footsteps of Jacob, and wish and pray for the manifestation of the ultimate end -- the final Geula. Seeking and contemplating this will of itself assist our service of G-d, inspiring us to attain our ultimate goal of Moshiach. (Likutei Sichot, Vol. XX)



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