

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

This Shabbat we read the Torah portion of Bechukotai which is the final portion in the book of Vayikra (Leviticus). Bechukotai begins with the Divine promise: "If you will walk in My statutes, and keep My mitzvot and do them"--then G-d will bestow many blessings, including rain at the right time, ample produce, security and peace.

One might wonder: Should we be fulfilling the mitzvot for the sake of material rewards or for their own sake--because G-d commanded them?

Among the many answers to this question, Maimonides gives the following answer: The mitzvot must, indeed, be fulfilled unconditionally and without regard for reward. However, there are inevitably various distractions and difficulties connected with daily life that makes it harder to fulfill the mitzvot. When these distractions are minimized, it is much easier to carry out the mitzvot fully and completely. But when material circumstances are not quite so satisfactory, though the same performance of the mitzvot is expected, it requires a greater effort. For it is obviously harder to concentrate on Torah and mitzvot when one has to overcome outside pressures.

G-d's promise of material rewards is not meant to provide reason for keeping the Torah and mitzvot. But it is a promise that where there is a firm resolve to walk in G-d's ways and keep His mitzvot, He will make it easier by providing all material needs and reducing outside pressures to a minimum.

The book of Leviticus, which we complete this Shabbat, is also known as Torat Kohanim (the Laws of the Priests) and the Book of Sacrifices.

Jews, as a people, and individually, are expected to behave like kohanim (priests), as G-d has declared: "And you should be unto Me a Kingdom of Kohanim." Just as the kohen has been selected to dedicate himself to the Divine Service--and not only for his own sake, but also for the whole Jewish people--so has every Jew been chosen to serve G-d, with a responsibility also for his entire environment.

To serve G-d does not mean to withdraw from the world; it rather means to serve G-d within this world and together with this world. The beginning of this G-dly service is in one's own home-life, by conducting it in such a way that G-d's Presence should dwell in it, as it is written: "They shall make Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell among them."

This is accomplished by a way of life exemplified by the sacrifices of old. The service of the sacrifices consisted in taking things from one's possession--a lamb, flour, oil, wine, salt, etc.--and consecrating them.

This is the way a Jewish home should be conducted; every detail of one's life should be consecrated to G-d. How is this accomplished? By bringing spirituality into our daily lives and our homes through charity and good deeds, communicating with G-d, and Jewish education. And then the Divine Presence dwells there, and it is a home blessed by G-d, materially and spiritually.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Endless Quest

It was Simchat Torah, the holiday that celebrates the completion of the Torah, and the disciples of the great Chassidic master Rabbi Mendel of Horodok were awaiting him. They approached his student, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, to ask their revered Rebbe to join his followers. Rabbi Shneur Zalman found the Chassidic master deeply engrossed in his thoughts. "The chassidim are waiting for you," he told him.

"I cannot join them!" was the response. Rabbi Mendel explained to his student that he knew of one hundred teachings on the Biblical verse of 'Atah Hor'eisa,' which is recited prior to the joyous hakafot - dancing with the Torah. "I cannot recite the verse without a proper comprehension of its significance," cried Rabbi Mendel.

"Rebbe!" said Rabbi Schneur Zalman. "When you will reach a full comprehension of the hundred meanings, you will discover another hundred..."

"You are right," said Rabbi Mendel, "Come, let us go to hakafot, let us go rejoice with the Torah."

An interesting verse in this week's portion, Bechokosei, reads, "You will eat the very old [grain] and you will remove the old to make way for the new."

A homiletic interpretation understands "the very old" to symbolize G-d, who represents eternity. One ought to satiate one's hunger with G-d.

Yet we should never get stuck in our old understandings of G-d which can hinder our growth and spiritual journey. The only definition of G-d in Judaism is that He has no

definition.

The Chassidic master, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, asks: Why do we begin blessings by addressing G-d in second person, "Blessed are You, Lord our G-d", and then conclude by addressing Him in third person, "Who has sanctified us with His commandments"?

In the beginning of one's spiritual journey, G-d seems very near. You feel that you "have G-d," that you grasp His depth.

But as you continue to climb, you discover the gulf between you and infinity. When you come close to truth, you can begin to sense how far you are from truth.

When Abraham took Isaac to the akeida - the binding of Isaac, the Torah tells us that "On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar. Abraham said to his attendants, 'You stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder....'"

Why did Abraham take his attendants along if he was to leave them behind anyway? Because it was only Abraham who "looked up and saw the place from afar." Only Abraham realized how remote he still was from the Divine mountain. His attendants actually thought that the place was near. At that moment, Abraham knew that they were not ready to accompany him on his journey toward G-d.

Thus is the paradox of one's spiritual process. The closer you become, the further you must become. And G-d sends forth His promise: "I will heal he who is far and near."

Excerpts from an article by Rabbi YY Jacobson

SLICE OF LIFE

From Rapper To Rabbi A Journey Back Home



Rabbi Motti Flikshtein

Motti Flikshtein grew up outside Philadelphia. He was raised by Jewish parents, who come from the Ukraine, where it was completely outlawed for them to practice their Judaism. Growing up, Matt had absolutely no Judaism in his life.

The public school district Matt was in had the highest juvenile crime rate in the area, and Matt got swept up in the wrong crowd. He was a rebel – smoking, doing drugs, and acting out from a very young age. By fifth grade, His parents decided it might be time to pull him out of his public school. Only, they had nowhere else to send him.

His parents had friends who had enrolled their children in the Jewish day school. They encouraged Matt's parents to do the same. His father agreed, after much protesting, on the condition that the moment Matt started becoming religious, they were pulling him out.

According to Matt, they had nothing to worry about. He certainly wasn't becoming religious. After all, he was a trouble-maker and a rebel.

He was a regular in the principal's office for smoking, bullying, and acting out. He later became a rapper and continued his behavioral struggles.

At the end of one school year, Matt opened the yearbook and learned that he had won two awards. The first one: Class clown. The second: Matt Flikshtein had unanimously been elected least likely to become a Rabbi.

One Shabbos, the Flikshteins went to the nearby Chabad Rabbi for Shabbat morning services and Matt's parents threatened that if he did not attend, they would take his car keys away. Although he came dressed as gangster as possible, the Rabbi crushed Matt in a bear hug. The family went multiple times, all of which he treated Matt with love. This didn't lead to immediate changes, but the seeds had been planted.

In the fall of 2003, Matt headed out to college. To practice what he was studying, economics, Matt decided to get hands-on experience by becoming one of the campus drug dealers. So he had lots of drugs. He had lots of money. He was high all the time. He was partying every night. He had lots of friends. He had everything that should make him happy. But he still felt empty inside.

One night, an acquaintance of Matt's lost his life to drugs. That was a wakeup call to Matt. Torn with grief, he asked himself the question tearing at his insides: If that were me, would I be happy with the life I'm leading? And the honest answer was no.

Matt wasn't sure what to do with his feelings. He called his best friend Jason Sugarman, who he had met at Jewish day school. Jason was from a traditional Jewish home in Wilmington, Delaware. He was now exploring his roots in Israel, in a Yeshiva. Matt convinced his parents to let him go visit Jason over his break.

Matt spoke to Jason about everything that had happened. After getting it all off his chest, Jason looked him in the eyes and said: 'Dude, you just don't get it. You know about rap, and making friends, and money, and drugs. But you don't know anything about being Jewish.' Those words hit Matt like a ton of bricks. At that moment, Matt knew Jason was completely right.

Jason suggested that Matt attend Yeshiva to learn more about Judaism. Matt began attending Yeshiva the next fall. He also began learning Chassidus, about the deeper level of Judaism. Matt felt a lightbulb go off. He felt full inside. He stopped doing drugs, and returned to Judaism.

Flikshtein returned to the U.S., and finished his degree at Yeshiva University. At the time, he began dating Jason's sister, Rachel Sugarman. It became clear early on that they would get married. One day, they were talking about career paths. Upon saying that he didn't know what he

wanted to do, Rachel asked Matt what he was truly passionate about. "Well, I love studying Torah and sharing it with others," Matt replied. "So become a Rabbi," Rachel suggested. Matt just laughed.

So Matt, now Motti, and Rachel, now Rochel, got married in 2007. They moved to Morristown, New Jersey, where Motti enrolled to get Rabbiniically ordained at the Rabbinical College of America. He was ordained in 2010. The young couple decided that they would go out on Shlichus, as emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

They got an offer to work in northern New Jersey, but before they accepted, they reached out to the Vogels, the Chabad Shluchim with whom Rochel and her family had become close in Wilmington, Delaware. After speaking to the Vogels, both couples thought it was a fantastic idea for the Flikshteins to move to Delaware.

The Flikshteins hit the ground running. Their Hebrew school started with eight kids. Now they serve over 40. They run a day camp every summer. They started a teen program, which is part of an incredible, international teen organization called CTeen. And Rochel started a Chabad school for girls called Bais Chana High School for girls from all over the world.

CTeen has become an incredible international network for Jewish teens, where teens can come to meet other Jewish teens that are just like them. But it's also a place to really come and explore. What does it mean to be a Jew?

The Flikshteins try to assist and bring out the significance in what the teens are doing, and how teens can find meaning while connecting to their Judaism. The Flikshteins have helped many teens in the Wilmington area do just that. And, when it comes to spreading positive messages, Rabbi Motti Flikshtein still raps.

Rabbi Motti has been to hundreds of communities around the world to share his amazing story and he's happy to come to yours. To bring him to your community, feel free to reach out to him directly at rabbimotti@chabadde.com. You can follow him on Instagram at "rapping_rabbi".

This article is based in part on the Machne Israel / Lamplighters podcast. Edited by Rivkah Dina Butman.

New Chabad Center to Open in Steamboat Springs, Colorado



Rabbi Isaac and Chaya Devora Abelsky and their son Moshe have been appointed as the new Shluchim - Emissaries to Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

Known for its beautiful mountains and hot springs, "Ski Town USA" attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, both winter and summer, coming from all over the world to ski on its famous slopes, or just to enjoy its namesake springs and gorgeous scenery.

Being home to a sizable Jewish population and considering its often presence of thousands of Jewish tourists, Steamboat Springs has been visited many times by Chabad, but never had a permanent Chabad center of its own.

Given the exponential growth the Jewish community of Steamboat has seen in the aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic, with an unprecedented influx of Jewish families moving into town, the Abelsky's arrival to Steamboat to serve as the Rebbe's Shluchim has generated great excitement.

"The warm response we've received from the local community has been very encouraging, and we're very excited to begin our mission of spreading Judaism here in Steamboat Springs, Colorado," said Rabbi Abelsky.

Teachings

Rabbi Shimon said, "Be meticulous in reciting the Shema and in prayer" (Ethics, 2:13) The Hebrew word for meticulous, "zahir," relates to the word "zohar," "to shine." Rabbi Shimon specified reciting the Shema and praying, not Torah study, because prayer is relevant to every Jew, regardless of his level of learning. Each Jew is enjoined to shine forth and illuminate his surroundings in this manner. Although in general, light is associated with Torah study and not prayer, Rabbi Shimon generated the potential for such light to be produced through reciting the Shema and the daily prayers." (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)





The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

7th of Nissan, 5740 [1980]

Greeting and Blessing:
 This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter in which you write on various aspects of Torah and Yiddishkeit [Judaism] etc., requesting a reply.
 No doubt you understand that these are topics that can hardly be discussed adequately in a letter. Besides, there is no need for it, inasmuch as here is a wealth of articles and books in which all aspects of Yiddishkeit have been discussed, and you can also discuss them personally with knowledgeable people in your community, especially as you mention several by name.
 However, inasmuch as you have written to me, I will discuss very briefly several pertinent points. There are matters over which a human being has control and can change and not merely a human being, but also in the so-called animal kingdom, certain species can adapt themselves to changing conditions in terms of habitat, diet, etc.
 But insofar as one's essence is concerned, this is not something that is left to a person's choice. By way of a well known analogy, our Sages cite the example of a fish which, when taken out of its vital element, the water, will for a time feel very distressed and could not survive.
 Yet there are occasions when some fishes jump out of the water and are trapped on the shore. Unless they can in some way get back to their own element, their fate is inevitable. The Torah and mitzvos [commandments] and Yiddishkeit in general, are for a Jew what water is to a fish.
 There have always been Jews, individuals or groups, who attempted to jump out of their element and seek other pastures. Historically, this resulted in one of two ways: either they returned to the fold or were eventually lost to the Jewish people.
 The only difference is that insofar as a fish is concerned, it can be out of its element for a relatively short period of time, but in the case of Jews who deviate from authentic Judaism,

G-d gives them a longer opportunity to return, and this may sometimes take years. If one will take the trouble to reflect on our Jewish history, which is more than three thousand years old, it will be seen that there have been deviating movements ever since the Golden Calf worshippers right after the Torah was given at Sinai but, as mentioned, the results have always been the same, either-or: either they did teshuva [returned to Jewish observance] or were completely lost through assimilation and the like.
 Noting in your letter that you are about to graduate from college and surely have some acquaintance with the scientific method, I trust it is unnecessary to explain to you that in every branch of true science, conclusions are made on the basis of actual experience and facts, even if the facts in themselves are not understood fully. The true scientist will accept the facts and will try or understand them, but it would be both illogical and unscientific to ignore the facts only because they are not fully understood.
 To summarize the above, at any rate briefly: while a Jew has the choice of being one hundred percent observant or less, since the Creator has given every human being free choice of conduct, such a decision is limited only to the actual conduct, but the inevitable results are clear, inasmuch as no Jew can change his essence. As for the problem of one's upbringing or environment, etc., there is surely no need to explain to you that every grown-up and mature person can become master of his conduct and way of life regardless of how these were in the past. Certainly one's upbringing and environment can make it easier or more difficult to carry out the proper decision, but once one has decided to make the necessary change, "there is nothing that stands in the way of the will," as our Torah, Toras Emes, assures us. Moreover, since G-d expects every Jew to live up fully to the Will of G-d, He certainly provides the necessary capacities to do so, so that in the final analysis it is a matter of one's own personal will and determination.
 I trust that the above lines, though scanty in terms of the subject matter, will suffice to provide food for thought, to help you reflect deeply on your personal problems and make the proper decision, even if this may mean giving up certain material conveniences and pleasures. But this is a small price to pay for the great and everlasting reward of fulfillment as a Jew, with the consequent satisfaction and peace of mind. ...
 With blessing,

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Midrash states that Moses asked G-d, "In what merit do the Jews deserve to be redeemed from Egypt? G-d replied, "In the merit of the Torah that they are destined to receive." How could the merit of the future acceptance of the Torah help them in their

present situation? Rather, they longed each day for their redemption so that they could receive the Torah – and the merit of this yearning brought about their Redemption. The same is true now: The merit of our yearning, longing, and praying for the final Redemption and for the revelation of the Torah of Moshiach is in itself sufficient merit to bring about our final Redemption.
(The Rebbe, as quoted in Yalkut Moshiach UGeula by Rabbi Dovid Dubov)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

Many of us are already involved in making plans for the summer. We consider the weather, prices, accommodations, attractions, and other variables and options. But, there should be many other concerns on our list of considerations.

If we're away over Shabbat, is there a place we can hook up with that will allow us to celebrate Shabbat in the proper spirit? Will there be kosher food for body and soul? When we look for a day camp or overnight camp for our children, we must make sure to check into the atmosphere of the camp.

A Jewish camp run on authentic Jewish ideals can not only fill our children's hours with healthy activities for their bodies and minds, but for their souls as well. At a Jewish camp, run according to Torah ideals, a Jewish child can learn to be proud of, and love, his heritage in a positive, hands-on environment.

Unencumbered by books and desks and white-boards, Judaism literally comes to life through stories, songs, activities and practical mitzvos. Vacation time, and especially the beautiful, warm days of summer, is the perfect time to check out the really important "attractions" in life.

Experience a traditional Shabbat, bask in the sunlight of mitzvos (commandments), swim in the deep pool of Torah study. Include Torah and mitzvos at the top of your list of considerations this summer for you and your family

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

Reb Zalman Senders was one of the prominent chasidim of the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi. He was a very successful merchant who was openhanded in his philanthropy with both family and strangers.

Then, suddenly his business dealings began to fail one after the other. Things finally came to such a terrible point that he became completely bankrupt. His debtors swarmed around him demanding repayment, and his problems overwhelmed him. To complicate things further, he had two daughters of marriageable age as well as several poor relatives who also needed suitable matches.

What could he do? He decided to take his problems to his rebbe, and so he set out for Liadi. He arrived late in the evening, and after reciting the prayers with a minyan (prayer quorum), he sat down to wait his turn for a private reception with the Rebbe.

When he was finally ushered into the Rebbe's study, he poured out his heart, relating all that had befallen him, how all of his various business endeavors had failed and left him penniless. "Rebbe," he said, "if it is will of Heaven that I be reduced to poverty, I am ready to accept the decree with love, but if I am unable to pay off my debts and marry off my daughter and the other young girls who are looking to me for their salvation, then I cannot accept it.

For in that case, it would be a desecration of the Divine Name (Chilul Hashem). It is one thing if G-d has decided to punish me in this manner, but why should He do it in a way that brings shame to His honor? The one thing that I ask is that I be allowed to pay all of my creditors and find suitable matches for my daughters and young relatives. After that, I am willing to live in poverty forever, if that is the will of G-d."

Rabbi Shneur Zalman was listening intently to Reb Zalman Senders' recitation of his terrible problems. When it had finished, he looked deep into the eyes of his brokenhearted chasid and said: "You certainly know how to talk about all the things that you need, but you have no interest whatsoever in what you might be needed for!" Poor Reb Zalman Senders felt as if he had been pierced through the heart by his Rebbe's words. He gasped inaudibly and fell down in a faint.

Chasidim, hearing the thud on the floor, rushed over to him to try to revive him. One offered water, another, vodka, but when Reb Zalman regained consciousness, he had no need for anything. When he rose to his feet he was radiant with joy and infused with a new approach to life.

His put all of his problems behind him and instead focused his energy into learning Torah, both the revealed and the mystical aspects. He attended every lecture that was given, prayed with great fervor. All of his actions were infused with the deep-felt happiness and contentment of a man who is at peace with his lot.

The following Shabbat, Rabbi Shneur Zalman delivered his lecture on Kabbalistic concepts. He also used the occasion to pray on behalf of his chasid, Zalman Senders who sat listening to the Rebbe's every word. It was as if the Rebbe's prayers entered Reb Zalman's heart even as they ascended to the higher realms, for during his stay in Liadi, Reb Zalman attained the strength to overcome all of his difficulties.

It was one week later that the Rebbe blessed him and instructed Reb Zalman to return to his home. Upon his arrival he resumed his normal routine and sure enough, his business began to pick up.

Within a relatively short length of time, he had rebuilt his life and was thriving even more so than before. When word reached Rabbi Shneur Zalman about the

good fortune his chasid was once again enjoying he quoted a passage from his masterwork, The Tanya, in reference to the subject of trials and tribulations:

"When one is at any time bothered by mundane worries,... it is the appropriate time to transform the sadness by becoming a 'master of accounts' (spiritual 'accounts'),... and to act on the counsel of the Sages' to constantly excite the Good Inclination against the Evil Inclination. In that way he will eliminate the melancholy engendered by the mundane problems, and then, he will attain true joy."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah Portion

If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments...I will give you rains in their due season, and the earth shall yield its produce, and the tree its fruit (Lev. 26:3-4)

How do we walk in G-d's statutes? asks Rashi. By studying His Torah, he concludes. Rabbi David of Kotsk once commented on the verse, "You should believe when one tells you, 'I have toiled and I have succeeded.'" He explained: Something a person achieves by dint of his own labor will endure, but something acquired too easily will not last. Just as effortlessly as it was won will it disappear. That is why our Sages urge us to toil night and day in our Torah study – so our learning and knowledge will be retained. (*Mishnat Yisrael*)

"The word 'im' ('if') is used to imply pleading and entreaty," the Talmud states, teaching us that G-d pleads, as it were, with every Jew: "Please walk in My statutes! Please keep My mitzvot!" G-d's request also endows us with the strength to overcome all difficulties that might stand in the way of observing Torah and mitzvot. (Hayom Yom) As Rashi, the foremost Torah commentator explains, this refers to the mitzva of learning Torah. For the more Torah knowledge one acquires, the easier it is to observe the commandments, as Torah study itself saves a person from the Evil Inclination. (*Melo HaOmer*)

Why does the Torah devote so much detail to the physical reward for observing mitzvot? Isn't the spiritual benefit far more important? And aren't we really supposed to observe the Torah's laws without regard for reward, but simply because G-d wants us to? Most of us have not yet reached a state in which the promise of spiritual reward is greater motivation than physical reward. The Torah therefore goes to great lengths to describe the physical blessings to which all can relate. For the same reason, our Sages devoted much detail to the physical wonders and miracles that will take place in the Days of Moshiach. Although the ultimate good will be the open revelation of G-dliness, our appreciation of this will not be immediate. Rather, the world will have to first "mature" over a period of time in order to recognize this fact. (*Sichot Kodesh, 5751*)

Dedicated in memory of a dear friend of the
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Mr. David Yagoda OBM

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