

Long ago in the small village of Sassov there lived a Jewish wood-chopper, a man of deep and pure faith. No one knew his name, and so, he was known simply as “the villager.”

All week he made his way into the forest and chopped wood which he sold in the town. During the week, he and his family lived frugally, eating just enough to sustain themselves. But for the Holy Shabbat, he joyfully bought challahs, candles, and other delicacies. Not only did the family enjoy the Shabbat treats, but despite their poverty, they always invited others to join them. At times they even went without food themselves so that their guests had enough to eat.

One Friday morning the villager stood with his bundles in the village square waiting for customers to buy his wood when a woman came and bought the whole lot for six silver coins. He was about to begin his customary Shabbat purchases when the tzadik Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov approached him with a request. There was a woman in the town who had recently been widowed. She was so overcome with grief that she lay in bed all day weeping, and so was completely unable to take care of her two young children. Her health was failing and the poor orphans were going hungry. Could he help? Now the villager was a good-hearted man. He immediately took two silver coins and handed them over to the tzadik. “Thank you so much, but could you perhaps give a bit more?” The wood-cutter reached into his pocket and handed over another two coins. Again, the tzadik thanked him and asked for maybe a bit more for the family. “I’m sorry Rebbe, but I can’t give any more. I have only two coins left. As it is I won’t have enough money to buy wine and challa, but I must leave enough to buy candles to brighten our Shabbat.”

Reb Moshe Leib was moved by the man’s kindness, generosity and his love for the mitzva of Shabbat candles. He turned to the man and asked, “Do you have any valuable object in your house?”

“No, Rebbe, I have nothing except an old cow.”

“When you return home,” said the Rebbe, “sell the cow, and with the money you make, buy the first thing that comes your way. I give you my blessing that G-d will grant you success.”

The wood-cutter ran home happily, brimming with anticipation. But when he told his wife of the plan to sell the cow, she absolutely refused. “How can we sell the cow? Its milk is our main source of food. How do you imagine we’ll live?” And with that the discussion ended.

When Shabbat was over the couple went to the barn to feed their cow. No sooner had they entered the barn when a carriage with two men pulled up. “Do you have a cow for sale?” they asked. The astonished Jew saw the words of the tzadik materializing before his eyes. His wife blurted out: “We’ll sell only for a hundred rubles!” The men agreed to pay the absurd price. Now, it was clear that the blessing was having its effect.

The next morning the wood-cutter went to town with the hundred rubles intending to carry out the Rebbe’s instructions. He noticed a group of landowners gathered for the auction of a choice estate. The Jew’s simple faith was so great that he pushed himself into the crowd intent upon buying the estate regardless of the fact that he couldn’t afford it.

The wealthy landowners looked at the poor Jew. What a nerve he had to try to bid against them! They would punish him for his chutzpa and at the same time help themselves. They agreed not to bid on the property at all. When the Jew’s offer would be accepted, he would lose everything because there was no way that he could afford the complete payment. Their plan succeeded. The wood-cutter bought the estate, giving the one hundred rubles as a deposit, and returned home feeling very satisfied.

That night as the Jewish family slept, there was a loud knock at the door. They were

shocked to see the village priest standing in the doorway. “I understand that you bought an estate today, and I would like to be your partner,” the priest said. Having heard about the low price, he figured he could take advantage of the simple wood-cutter.

“I agree to the partnership if you will pay the total outstanding amount,” answered the Jew. The priest eagerly accepted, handed him the money, and agreed to formalize the deal in a few days. When the day came to complete payment on the estate, the furious landowners couldn’t believe their eyes as the Jew paid up the entire balance.

The earnest Jew set out to visit his newly acquired estate. Travelling down the road he saw a group of people crowded around an accident. “What happened?” he inquired.

“The priest was just killed in an accident when his horses overturned the wagon,” was the reply.

The Jew approached the accident site. It was his “partner” in the estate! Now, the property belonged to him alone. The blessing of Reb Moshe Leib had been fulfilled, and in gratitude the villager distributed large amounts of charity to the poor throughout his long and prosperous life.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And I appeared (va’eira) unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob... I have also heard the groaning of the Children of Israel (Exodus 6:3-5)

The word “va’eira” is in both the past and present tense, indicating that the revelation of G-dliness that existed in the times of our forefathers continues to exist today as well. Every Jew possesses the quality of Abraham (love of G-d), the quality of Isaac (awe of G-d), and the quality of Jacob (mercy); the revelation of these inner traits is akin to G-d’s revelation to the Patriarchs. (Ohr HaTorah)

Moses was concerned that after 210 years of slavery in Egypt the Jewish people would have grown too accustomed to the exile to fully absorb the message that their redemption was imminent. G-d’s answer about our Patriarchs thus reassured him that his worries were unwarranted; the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can never accustom themselves to exile, for to them it is an unnatural state. Every day that passes is as bitter as the very first. The same is true for us today. Despite the fact that this present exile has lasted more than 1900 years, the Jewish people is more than ready to accept the message that the Final Redemption is indeed imminent. (The Rebbe, Shabbat Parshat Shemot, 5751)

You shall speak (tedaber) all that I command you (Exodus 7:2)
The word “tedaber” is related to “tabder” - “and you shall rule over.” The defeat of Pharaoh, the epitome of arrogance and pride, could only be brought about by an individual such as Moses, the epitome of humility and nullification before G-d. (Torat Chaim)



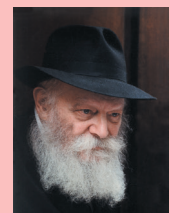
4:31 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
2 Shevat / Jan 12
Torah Portion Va’eira
Shabbat ends 5:35 pm

Dedicated in honor of a dear friend of the
Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Joseph Fraiman

L'Chaim

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פוסד תורה וישיבת חסידי
Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"May there be peace in your wall, tranquility in your palaces" (Psalm 122:6)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In the Torah portion of Va’eira we read about the first seven plagues inflicted on Egypt. The purpose of the plagues was not only to punish the Egyptians, but to deflate their egos and eradicate their false notions about G-dliness. The plagues also served as the blows that freed from the constraints and limitations of Egypt.

Every story in the Torah teaches us how to become better in our G-dly service. Let’s see what we can learn from the first two plagues, blood and frogs.

In Egypt they worshiped the Nile River. So to break their pride in the Nile, the first plague hit the waters of the Nile, turning the water into blood. Water is by nature wet and cold. This was the way of the Egyptians to be cold or apathetic to G-dliness and holiness. The Nile was turned into blood, which is warm and full of life.

The opposite of holiness is coldness, apathy, because holiness is warm and full of life. When we are cold and apathetic to G-dliness and holiness, it opens the door to everything that is unholy, and we are stuck in an Egypt. How do we break out of apathy towards holiness?

Through understanding the second plague.

Egypt had a great fervor and passion for everything unholy. Meaning that there is also an unholy warmth, when someone has a passion for impermissible physical pleasures.

To cool off their passion, G-d sent the second plague, frogs. The frogs went everywhere, even in the ovens, and our Sages learn from them the idea of self-sacrifice.

What is the meaning of the frogs going into the ovens? Ovens, which are hot, symbolize the heat and passion for the physical. Frogs are from the water, cold and wet, but at the same time, they did G-d’s will, to the extent that they went totally against their nature. The cold water creatures went into the fiery ovens and cooled them off. In other words, there is also a holy coldness, when one fosters a coldness towards the physical and the unholy.

The frogs came to deflate Pharaoh’s ego. They went into the ovens cooling off the passion and the false importance of the unholy that existed in Egypt.

Holy fire breaks you free from unholy coldness, and holy coldness breaks you free from passion for the unholy.

To break free from a spiritual Egypt, one must first take a lesson from the blood and bring life and warmth into holy matters, because the beginning of all kinds of evil comes from coldness.

It is a mistake to think that just positive action is enough. If you don’t bring warmth and passion into holiness, ultimately you will end up in the unholy.

Just as we need to bring a warmth and life into holiness - blood, so too we should foster coldness towards the unholy - frogs.

May we all be filled with warmth and holiness, breaking free from our personal Egypts and ultimately breaking free from this final exile with the coming of Moshiach. May he come now!

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.

Why a Mezuzah Is Not a Mezuzah

By Baruch Epstein

There is a mezuzah on the entry to the White House and your avowed atheist neighbor has one that all the neighborhood can see!

I’ll explain. The word “mezuzah” means doorpost. In the Book of Deuteronomy we read: “And you shall write them on the doorposts (mezuzot) of your homes and your gates.” So, if we’re to be linguistic nit-pickers, the scroll is affixed to the mezuzah; it is not the mezuzah itself.

Okay, so beyond my trite witticism (my mother thinks I’m clever), what do we learn from the vernacular use of an architectural term to refer to a ritual object?

Chassidism emphasizes that G-d has a plan—a passionate, inexplicable, irreplaceable desire that this world, warts and all, be transformed into a welcoming home for Him. That’s why He created it. All of creation exists only to exhibit G-d. Humans tend to see it in reverse; we think of ourselves and our world as primary and then look to see where and if G-d fits into the picture. The reverse is true; G-d is, and we are here to prove it.

Like hidden treasure, divinity is just below the surface, waiting for us to expose it through a mitzvah. Every time we use a physical resource for something G-dly, we illustrate its true character: a tool for us to discover the holy spark buried within.

It’s a pretty clever idea (I hope G-d doesn’t mind my compliment). Divinity, while exciting, often seems too spiritual for nine-to-five people like us to grasp. When presented with it, we just gawk in awe. Materiality, on the other hand, we get. So G-d embeds Himself in physical objects, and when we use them according to His instructions, we find Him. Like a metaphor, it makes the abstract tangible.

So maybe we have it right. Maybe the genuine meaning of mezuzah is the mitzvah scroll, and the doorpost is only called a mezuzah to emphasize that its existence is realized, not by holding the door in place, but by enabling a mitzvah. If not for the scrolls, there would be no reason for plain old doorposts.

And so it goes with all things; there are two perspectives: 1) I am, so when I earn money, I buy what I need, and then, if there is any left over, I’ll give to charity. Or, 2) G-d is, and He has embedded Himself in cash as a way for me to discover Him. When I earn money, I first give one-tenth to charity and then use the remaining, now uplifted money for my own needs.

Don’t view the mezuzah as an appendage to your house, see your house as a mezuzah holder. Don’t just read this article, call your local Chabad center and get yourself, or someone you know, a mezuzah for their mezuzah.

