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VOLUME 40 NUMBER 2

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## The Purim Gift Of A New Friend

by Hanna B. Geshelin

Since the first time I learned about the mitzvah of sending gifts of food at Purim - called *mishloach manot* - it has been one of my favorite mitzvot as I realize how special it can be.

We give two kinds of foods that can be eaten without preparation, such as cooked dishes, baked goods, fruits, candy or beverages.

While in some communities, people give out elaborate packages - these might contain a small kugel, a bottle of wine, a soft drink, a bag of chips, several hamantaschen and a handful of candies - the mitzvah itself involves giving two foods to one person. It's something any of us can do.

One year, I was seriously financially distressed and lived in a community where big, fancy gift packages were expected. I could hardly pay my property taxes, much less think of giving a generous, beautiful package like I would receive. I could only afford to give two very simple gifts.

That Purim, by the time I got home from work, I was totally worn out. I knew it was only a matter of time until I would be laid off, and that didn't help my mood.

At home, I looked at the brown paper lunch bags that held my *mishloach manot*. I was embarrassed at their size and quantity. Still, I had to

hand them out. I set out on foot as the neighbors to whom I was going lived within easy walking distance. I delivered the first one. Then I discovered the second recipient was out of town.

There were other Jews I knew in the neighborhood, though none close by. I walked home, too tired to reach the other neighbors and too exhausted to get into my car and drive.

I knew the packages were supposed to go to Jewish people. Standing on the street in front of my house with the package in my hands, I prayed: "G-d, I simply have to give this away and sit down before I collapse. Help." I looked around. Something told me to give the package to the people across the street.

All I knew about these folks was that the man suffered from a debilitating illness - when I had moved into my house, he had used two canes and now he used a wheelchair - and the woman seemed unfriendly. But I knocked on the door anyway.

When I explained to the woman why I was there, she stared at me in amazement. She was Jewish, and she and her Jewish first husband had raised their children as Jews. She knew it was Purim - her grandchildren had stopped by the night before, on the eve of

Purim, to show off their costumes - but that was the extent of her observance. Her second husband was not Jewish, and she had rarely attended synagogue since marrying him. She insisted that I come in and have a cup of tea.

Between sitting, drinking hot tea and enjoying a new friend, my exhaustion disappeared. We had a lovely visit. I learned that as her husband's illness had progressed, the couple had become socially isolated. He was napping then, but she asked that I come back another day when he was awake. When I did, I discovered that years earlier, I had worked in the same industry that had been her husband's life-long career. This gave us lots to talk about. While we never became good friends, we saw each other several times in the next few months until I moved away. I believe I helped the wife during a trying time. I am sure they enjoyed my visits as much as I did.

The word mitzvah means "connection" and teaches us how to connect to G-d and His children. For me, giving *mishloach manot* is a way of connecting with others and spreading Purim cheer. How much I give isn't really so important. Sharing a simple gift of food, and watching as it reaches someone, may have a ripple effect that I could never imagine.

So, who will I give food gifts to this year? I am now on a gluten-free diet, and my plan is to ask who else in the community is as well. I already know of one 8-year-old boy with Celiac disease, and there may be more. A pile of hamantaschen or other off-limit goodies one cannot eat is frustrating, so receiving delicacies they can enjoy will be a real treat.

Who knows? I may even make another new friend.

## Taxi Driver Wisdom

by Yossy Goldman

A congregant of mine returned from a visit to Israel with a charming story. He was in a taxi and spent time chatting with the Israeli driver. Now, anyone who has ever interacted with taxi drivers in Israel knows that they are a unique species. Somehow, every taxi driver there is a world expert on everything from the Bible to philosophy, politics, the economy, and world peace. When my friend asked his driver if he was not worried about the current danger levels in the Middle East, the driver was completely dismissive of his concerns.

"But you are living in a dangerous part of the world, surrounded by enemies who are trying to drive you into the sea. How can you not be anxious?" my friend persisted.

The driver smiled.

"Tell me, have you heard of Clint Eastwood?"

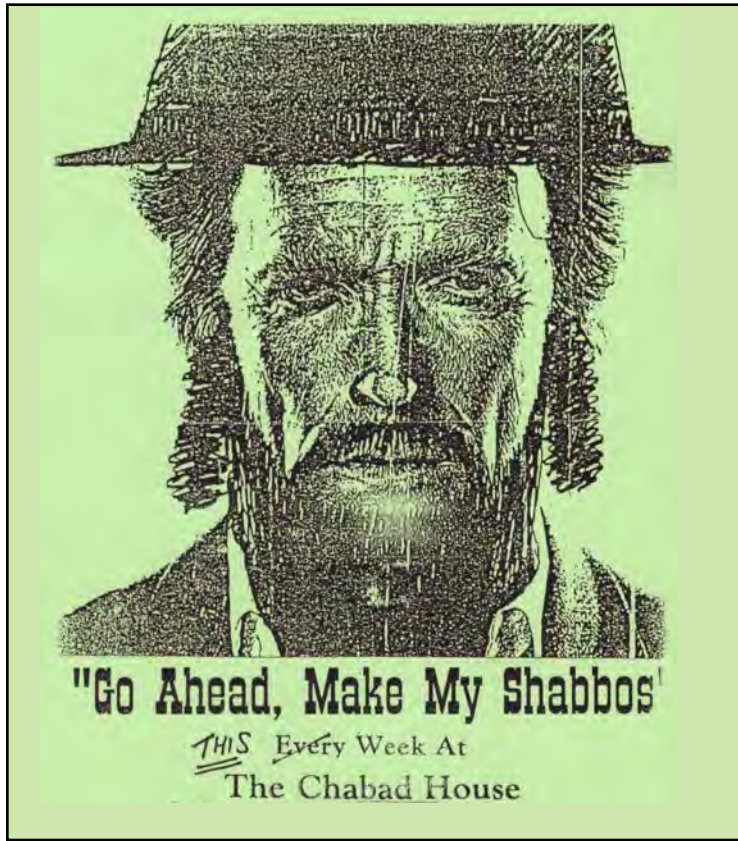
"Of course," replied my friend.

"Well, if you've ever watched a Clint Eastwood movie, you know that he will not be killed, no matter how many people are trying to murder him. In the end, he always survives.

"Why? Because he is the star of the film. He cannot die. They need him for the next movie!

"Well, we are the same. G-d needs us around to fulfill our destiny and His destiny. That's why I'm not worried."

The Jewish People never die. We almost die on a regular basis. In every generation, there is someone trying to wipe us out. But do we die? Will we? Can we? Never! Let us live proud Jewish lives and continue to be living examples of eternal Jewish continuity.



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# MORDECHAI: SCHOLAR, STATESMAN OR BOTH?



Jewish history portrays Mordechai, one of the Purim story's main protagonists, as an extraordinary man. Scholar-par-excellence and Jewish leader, Mordechai emerged from Purim's intricate story of palace intrigue as a political powerhouse; he had actually become viceroy to the king.

Mordechai comes across as a true 'renaissance man', respected and adored by his people. But the Talmud reveals a little-known fact: Mordechai's public acclaim wasn't exactly unanimous.

Our attention is first drawn

Mordechai comes across as a true 'renaissance man', respected and adored by his people. But the Talmud reveals a little-known fact: Mordechai's public acclaim wasn't exactly unanimous.

to the Megillah's (Scroll of Esther's) conclusion: "Mordechai... was a great man among the Jews, and was loved by *most* of his brethren..." It sounds like *some* of 'his brethren' (albeit a minority) had a problem with him.

What was going on? The Talmud teaches that some in the rabbinat disapproved of Mordechai's new public persona. Mordechai was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of seventy-one sages. He was a man totally immersed in Torah. Now he had become a political figure, a position which doesn't allow for the

single-minded Torah-focus he'd enjoyed.

It's a fact that community involvement distracts from one's internal spiritual pursuits. A community leader has to worry about the people's welfare, at every level. It's a burden that simply doesn't allow for total preoccupation with Torah.

So, some of Mordechai's Sanhedrin-colleagues disagreed with his 'new' lifestyle. Although he was as observant as ever, they felt that he had sacrificed his total-immersion Torah study for the sake of political leadership. For some Torah-Jews, this was a mistake. In that

Adapted from the works of  
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson,  
The Lubavitcher Rebbe  
by Mendy Herson



sense, Mordechai took a step down in the religious world when he became a political leader.

But Mordechai, and the majority of the Sanhedrin, took a different position. Why?

The Midrash teaches that the "It would behoove the Sanhedrin's Sages...to lift their robes (prepare for travel)... and circulate amongst the cities teaching the Jews..."

This isn't a simple statement. The Sanhedrin was a very rare group of people. They were spiritual and intellectual giants, and they were supposed to convene on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem - a Holy place that lent the Sanhedrin special clout and spiritual strength.

Yet the Midrash says that it would behoove these religious titans to leave the Temple Mount, lowering themselves as it were, in order to teach the nation.

In other words, the Sanhedrin's sages weren't to obsess on their own spiritual

achievements. They most definitely had the obligation to study, pray and climb to greater heights; but they also had the responsibility to lead, even if that impacted their personal spiritual pursuits.

Mordechai made a choice. He could have chosen to closet himself in a yeshiva and devote his every breath to Torah study. He undoubtedly wanted to do just that. But Mordechai didn't think about what he wanted; he thought about what G-d wanted from him. He saw the need for a leader, and he took the lead.

This is true leadership. Genuine leaders aren't people who yearn to 'be in charge', to be 'the boss'; that smacks of megalomania. Real leaders are people who would prefer to focus on self-mastery than on the mastery of others. They would prefer the peace of mind and privacy that a non-leadership role would afford. Yet, in spite of their personal preference, they see a communal need, and feel a responsibility to step into the breach.

## THE EXTREME JEW

Yesterday, while I was driving her to school in the morning, my seven-year-old daughter asked me: "What's the most important day of the year?"

"Yom Kippur," I replied instinctively. A moment later I said, "Or maybe Purim."

At the next red light I was backtracking again. "Actually, Passover is a very important day in our history. And Shavuot, when we got the Torah. Rosh Hashanah, too...."

I can't really be blamed for my confusion. Open up any Chassidic text on the festivals of the Jewish calendar, and you'll find that the most important day of the year is the one you're reading about. The Passover *maamarim* (discourses) explain how the

Exodus from Egypt is the most significant event of our history, and how it is on Passover, when the Exodus is "remembered and re-enacted," that we establish the very foundation of our spiritual lives and our relationship with G-d. The Shavuot *maamarim* say the same thing - about the Revelation at Sinai. As do the discourses that discuss the inner significance of Chanukah, Purim, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot.... you get the idea.

All of which is, of course, true. At every juncture of the spiritual terrain of Jewish time is embedded a resource - be it freedom, wisdom, joy, unity, commitment - that is the foundation of our spiritual lives and our relationship with G-d. On each of these, the entire edifice stands.

by Yanki Tauber

Yet Yom Kippur and Purim do stand out as "most important days." Both are distinguished by the fact that they are single-day festivals (as opposed to Rosh Hashanah's two days, Sukkot's seven, Chanukah's eight, etc.). Their names even sound alike. Indeed, the great Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria ("The Holy Ari", 1534-1572) says that *Yom Kippurim* (Yom Kippur's full Hebrew name) can also be read to mean *yom k'Purim*, "a day like Purim" (which would mean that my first instinct was off the mark: if Yom Kippur is a day like Purim, than Purim should top the list...).

For both days represent extremes. Yom Kippur in its spirituality - we fast, dress in white to emulate the angels, and spend the entire day repenting and praying. And Purim in its physicality - we party and feast, bestow gifts of food to friends and money to the poor, with lechaims to the max.

Push yourself to your limits and beyond - both these days say to the Jew - and if you do it with all the integrity and devotion and goodness of your Jewish soul and body, there you will find G-d.



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*The Chabad Times (ISSN 159)  
is published 4 times a year by:  
Chabad Lubavitch of Rochester, Inc.  
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"Try to pose for yourself this task: not to think of a polar bear, and you will see that the cursed thing will come to mind every minute."

Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote that in 1863. Daniel Wegner, a psychology professor at Harvard, tested it out over a century later with a simple experiment: He asked participants to verbalize their stream of consciousness for five minutes, while trying not to think of a white bear. If a white bear came to mind, he told them, they should ring a bell. Despite the explicit instructions to avoid it, the participants, on average, thought of a white bear more than once per minute.

Over the next decade, Wegner developed his theory of "ironic processes" to explain why it's so hard to tamp down unwanted thoughts. He found evidence that when we try not to think

of something, one part of our mind does avoid the forbidden thought, but another part "checks in" every so often to make sure the thought is not coming up-ironically, bringing it to mind.

**"Fear Not!"**

In the event the Jews had to go to war the Torah gives instructions for the preparations. One detail is about the "Kohen Appointed for War," whose role was to give a rousing, motivational speech, rallying the troops psychologically and spiritually preparing them for battle.

The Torah instructs him to proclaim the following:

*"Hear, O Israel, today you are approaching the battle against your enemies. Let your hearts not be faint; you shall not be afraid, and you shall not be alarmed, and you shall not be terrified because of them."*

Try to picture an ancient battlefield: clashing swords, clanging shields, flying spears, thunderous hoof beats. Imagine the blood and the gore, the battle cries, and the screams of the van-

This pre-battle pep talk doesn't make much sense. "Don't be afraid!" Really? If the Torah told us that soldiers should fight despite feeling afraid, that would be understandable. But to expect someone not to feel fear at all - how is that even possible?

quished and dying. War was (and still is!) a terrible, terrifying thing.

Thinking about it that way, this pre-battle pep talk doesn't make much sense. "Don't be afraid!" Is that really all he had to say? How could he brazenly get up there and wave his magic wand over the people and say, "Fear not!" Fear, especially in the face of a terrifying war, is a natural emotion; you can't just magically turn it on or

off. So what is the Torah expecting from a hapless soldier quaking in his boots?

If the Torah told us that soldiers should fight despite feeling afraid, that would be understandable. But to expect someone not to feel fear at all - how is that even possible?

**Stop Fueling Your Feelings**

Rabbi Shlomo Freides was a renowned Chabad Chassid during the first half of the 19th century. In the late 1820s, he sent a letter to the third Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, known as the Tzemach Tzedek, expressing worry about his declining health. He related that he felt powerless, and that his prayer was that G-d remove his mental anguish. The Tzemach Tzedek wrote a fascinating response in which he offered practical techniques that would help Rabbi Freides overcome his mental struggles.

Here's what the Rebbe laid out:

The Kabbalistic masters explain that every human soul comprises ten unique attributes, or functions, which we use to explore and interact with the world around us.

The functions are broadly divided into two categories - cognitive facilities and emotional capacities. The soul expresses her cognitive and mental capacity in the human mind, whereas her breadth and depth of emotion is realized in the heart.

By default, the soul operates in a linear way - consciousness flows from the intellect into the emotions. In simple words, how we understand something shapes the way we feel about it.

The mind develops an idea, understands it, and then gauges how it feels about it. The heart comes marching in closely thereafter, developing a corresponding emotional response. You first hear about the wonders of a certain person, you get to know him/her, you start realizing how terrific he is, and before you know it, you develop feelings for him. You now like him.

Or, you hear about a social ill, you start reading about how rampant it has become, you begin to understand how devastating it is, and before long, you're repulsed and angry about the situation. You just went through the process of mind to heart, cognition to emotion.

Being aware of the process that produces your negative feelings provides a method of taming them, and that is to simply pull the rug out from under those feelings. If thought is the fuel that both generates and maintains your feelings, the best thing to do is to stop the flow - stop thinking about it!

To those soldiers frightened at the clashing cymbals and clanging swords of war, the first and most basic instruction was: Don't think about it.

**Pull Out The Rug And Find A Replacement**

But as Dostoevsky so keenly observed, it's virtually impossible to stop thinking about something. So what was a terrified soldier supposed to do? What are we supposed to do when besieged with thoughts of anxiety and fear?

Here's where we introduce something called the "Blue Dolphin." If it's impossible to not think about a white polar bear, why not try thinking about a blue dolphin instead? In other words, forget about not thinking about something; that will never work. But you can try to think about something else, and set the entire emotional process in a different direction.

This is what the Rebbe explained in that letter to his anxious chassid, and it's something that you, I and everyone else can trot out in our lives right now.

Who doesn't experience fear, anxiety, anger, hurt, pain, jealousy, frustration, or some other negative feeling I missed out? We all do. It's part of the human experience.

Now, you can spend your entire life trying to root out the cause of all those negative feelings, and there's definitely merit to that. Some matters do require excavation, whether it's on your own or with professional help. There's a time and place for that.

But it's not the prescribed method for every negative feeling you may have. Sometimes, you can whip out your blue dolphin, pink cow, or even your toddler-on-a-scooter-juggling-three-balls-and-eating-avocado-toast (if that's your thing). Whatever works for you. If you have a Torah thought, something you know by heart that you can easily pull up - even better. As you can probably guess, that's what the Rebbe prescribed to his follower - and it's not a bad idea for you either.

Remember: You're in the driver's seat of your feelings. Grab onto the steering wheel and choose which direction you want to go.



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# AGING AND RETIREMENT REGENERATION AND DIGNITY

by Simon Jacobson

*Many years add in wisdom - Job 32:7*  
*The soul never ages; it only becomes more vibrant - The Rebbe*

In the spring of 1972, when the Rebbe was about to turn seventy years old, he received many letters from well-wishers. Some of them suggested that to the Rebbe that he consider slowing his very active pace after his many fruitful decades as a leader and activist, that it might be time for him to rest, as do most people his age.

The Rebbe, of course, had no such intention. On his seventieth birthday, after a busy day receiving many guests including Yitzhak Rabin and Herman Wouk (who delivered a personal letter from President Nixon), the Rebbe convened a special gathering. His talk was long, emotional, and intense. True to his style, the Rebbe used a personal issue to deliver a universal message. He emphasized that the elderly must not succumb to conventional wisdom and cease to pursue a productive life. On the contrary, they must use their added years of wisdom and experience to grow "from strength to strength." To shunt the elderly aside is not only insensitive, he added, but foolish, the faster our world changes, the more we need the experience and wisdom of our elderly friends and relatives.

Ten years later in 1982, the Rebbe presided over another huge gathering in honor of his birthday, this time his eightieth. He spoke passionately until 3:00 a.m., and still he wasn't through. In a striking testament to the strength of the elderly - and to the idea of exemplifying what one teaches - the Rebbe began distributing study books that had been printed especially for this occasion. There were several thousand men, women, and children present, and the Rebbe

patiently handed a book to each one. By the time he finished, the light of dawn was trickling through the windows.

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**There are two vastly divergent views on aging - that is, "You are old and worn out, thus not very useful" versus "You are wise and experienced, thus indispensable." The Torah assures us that old age is a virtue and a blessing. We are told to respect all the elderly, regardless of their scholarship and piety, because each year of life yields wisdom and experience that the most accomplished young person cannot possibly yet possess.**

You have worked very hard for many years. As your physical faculties weaken, shouldn't you be slowing down? Hasn't the time come to reap the rewards of life? Society's solution, of course, is total retirement. But have we considered its effects on our spirits? Why are many of our elderly unhappily experiencing a void in their lives?

All of us, if we are fortunate, will grow old. Should we look toward that time with enthusiasm or with dread?

Before contemplating the later years of one's life, we

must ask ourselves a basic question about life itself. Why am I here? Our attitude toward aging and retirement will depend on how we answer that question.

One may believe that the primary objective of life is to take advantage of its material possibilities and live as comfortably as one can. If so, one might think that one will be content to live out the later years in as much comfort as affordable. One might see the last years of life as a time to enjoy the just desserts of a long life of labor.

But why, then, do we often have a nagging feeling of dissatisfaction about spending our entire day in leisure? Because we were not put on earth to live a purely material existence; we were created to refine this material world with truth and virtue, introducing G-dliness into our every moment. This is our life's mission, and it lasts our entire life.

If we were to measure life solely in terms of material gain and productivity, then we would inevitably see the physical weakening of old age as a liability. But because man is primarily a spiritual being, whose true wealth is measured in intellectual, emotional, and spiritual gains, we recognize that the soul is the primary force in life. And the soul, unlike the body, never ages; it only grows. As one ages, therefore, he should not decrease his level of activity, for spiritually, he is growing ever stronger.

Because man was created to spiritualize the material world, the only way to reach true happiness is through spiritual growth and achievement. And that means giving to others, loving and sharing, finding a deeper meaning in everything we do, and recognizing G-d in all our ways.

Recognizing the prominence of our timeless soul: This is the key to understanding the aging process, the key with which we open the door of opportunity in our twilight years. Human productivity is a direct result of human creativity, and human creativity is a direct result of the spiritual energies of the soul. "Every person was created to toil," as the sages say. However, this toil takes on different forms in our life cycles. As one ages and physical strength is not what it used to be, one's toil and productivity need to be expressed through spiritual achievements. So if a human being reaches a certain age, whether it is fifty-five or seventy-five, and suddenly announces, "I'm going to

retire," the question must be asked: Retire from what? Ambition? Creativity? From the mission of the soul? One does not retire from life.

The argument assumes that our goal in life is to amass the right amount of wealth so that we can shut down our productivity at a certain age and revel in our material success and free time. This is not to say that we should not enjoy the fruits of our labor - only that we should never forget the reason that the labor has been done in the first place. Nor must we devote our entire lives to earn a living. But we should never completely abandon the world of work and productivity for a world of inactivity.

Each phase of life, of course, has a unique set of characteristics and needs. That is why we must take great care in educating a

child, for his mind is so impressionable; that is why we must properly channel the fiery spirit of young people, for it is so strong; that is why we develop careers and raise families during adulthood, because we have by then achieved the necessary blend of maturity and ability. So, too, does the twilight of our lives have its inherent strength. Sometimes, of course, modern society makes us forget this. Think about how we constantly celebrate the image of youth, how it has come to stand for everything that is energetic and desirable. This can have an obvious demoralizing effect on the elderly and, by extension, on society in general. If we value the physical vitality of youth more than the intelligence, wisdom, and the spiritual vitality of an experienced soul, what does

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## THE REBBE'S ADVICE

by Chana Sharfstein

Our entire family was in an audience with the Rebbe of righteous memory, in honor of our son Yacov Yisroel's bar mitzvah. We had discussed everything we planned to, when the Rebbe surprised me by asking about my uncle, Rabbi Note Zuber of Roselle, NJ.

I responded by saying that he was doing well, thank G d, and had just retired. The Rebbe shook his head and said, "Retired, what does that mean?"

Foolishly, I thought the Rebbe needed an explanation, and I began to relate that my uncle's congregation had dwindled in size as its members aged, and there were very few congregants left.

The Rebbe responded that there is no such thing as retiring. Situations may arise in life that necessitate changes, and one must then make the appropriate adjustments. But retirement, never!

The Rebbe suggested various options for my uncle. His ideas included moving to New York City, where there were many opportunities for involvement in scholarly pursuits. He emphasized the importance of finding avenues where my uncle could use his talents and capabilities to contribute to the Jewish world.

A few years ago, I was offered an incentive to retire from teaching public school. Without much thought, I made a hasty decision. During my professional career, I had often thought that retirement would be wonderful. One could sleep late, especially on gray, chilly days. One could stay home and just relax, free to do nothing at all.

A few months later I awakened at the regular time, followed my regular morning routine - and then I felt confused. Time seemed quite endless. How would I fill my day? I began with the closets and drawers, kitchen cabinets and bookcases. But soon I realized that these were temporary projects, not a new lifestyle. With great enthusiasm, I planned days at museums and exhibits. Did you ever realize how tiring it can be to stand endlessly, viewing countless exhibits? After a while I realized that this too could not be an activity I could do daily, not even weekly - perhaps monthly.

Suddenly, I remembered the Rebbe's words about retirement. I realized that I should be looking for a less structured day - but one still filled with meaning, a fruitful day.

I was very fortunate. My former employer contacted me

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# My Child, Remember To Take Off Your Costume

by Chana Cotlar

My Dearest Child,

As I prepare your Purim costume today, fingering the pink tulle princess gown and rhinestone-laden tiara you will soon don, my mind starts to wander.

I think of the many costumes you will wear as you grow and develop. Such is the nature of life. We all have them, those facades we hide behind.

As you grow, you may find yourself - as so many of us do - working hard to portray a certain image of yourself to the world. One that is whole. One that feels in control. One that "has her life together."

And that is OK. We all need to wear that costume at times.

We need it in order to walk into the work office after a hard morning with the kids. We need it to playfully engage with our children after a difficult conversation with our spouse. We need it in order to get out of bed on those mornings we feel unable to face the day ahead.

But, my dear, precious child...

As I hang the costume in your closet today, neatly pressed and glittering, where it will wait for you to wear, I pray for you.

I pray that you have the wisdom to create spaces in time where you can shed the facades you have so carefully erected. Moments in which

you give yourself permission to allow the costume to fall away so that you can face yourself in your most authentic and vulnerable form.

And it is there, in this most vulnerable space, that you will find both the tension and beauty of embodiment, of existence itself.

On the one hand, you will uncover a soul that pulsates with genuine light and clarity. With unwavering faith. With abundant joy. With the warmth and security of always feeling in G-d's embrace. With a burning desire to live in sync with its true purpose; a life of connection to G-d, Torah and mitzvah observance.

At the same time, you will feel the pull of your physicality. An ego that struggles to let the soul's faith, light and clarity shine through it. An ego that feels G-d hiding from it. An ego that can feel consumed by darkness. An ego that can react with anger, betrayal or frustration.

Allow yourself to sit with the tension. It is the tension of Creation and its ultimate purpose. And therein lies the greatest beauty and light of all; it is the beauty of growth. The beauty of the mission with which your soul was entrusted - to feel the pull in both directions. To feel torn and confused at times. And to slowly create openings within your very physical and mundane existence for the soul's

rays to peek through.

But it takes work. And the courage to face yourself for real. The seeds of growth are planted with honesty, watered and nurtured with authenticity.

Talk to G-d from that hal-  
lowed space. Pour out your deepest thoughts and feelings. Allow Him to carry that tension together with you, to help you create those openings for spiritual growth to take root. In those deepest recesses of your heart and mind, you will find G-d. Right there, listening, carrying, one with you.

Surround yourself with a few trusted friends and with mentors who are on this spiritual journey together with you. With whom you can shed the facades of life and talk openly and honestly about how to live more in sync with your true purpose. With G-d. With faith. With Torah and mitzvot. With true light. With inner peace. With joy.

I know you will be a lovely princess this Purim, my dear. The pink tulle, delicate lace and glittering gemstones will make for a most beautiful costume. But always remember that it is but a glittering veneer. It is in the struggle and effort to live from a more G-d-conscious place within you that your true beauty will emerge.

## Why Are Tefillin From Animal Hide?

by Yehuda Shurpin

Many of the laws and details regarding the creation of Tefillin are oral traditions that trace back to Moses, known as *Halachah leMoshe miSinai* - Received from G-d on Mount Sinai. These traditions were passed down by Moses to Joshua, and from there down to the leaders and sages of each generation.

These Tefillin specifications are not hinted at in Scripture, nor can they be deduced logically. Yet they are far from arbitrary. As Maimonides writes, "it is appropriate to contemplate these decrees and provide an explanation for them whenever possible". With this in mind, here are just a few explanations that the mystics give as to why Tefillin need to be made of animal hide.

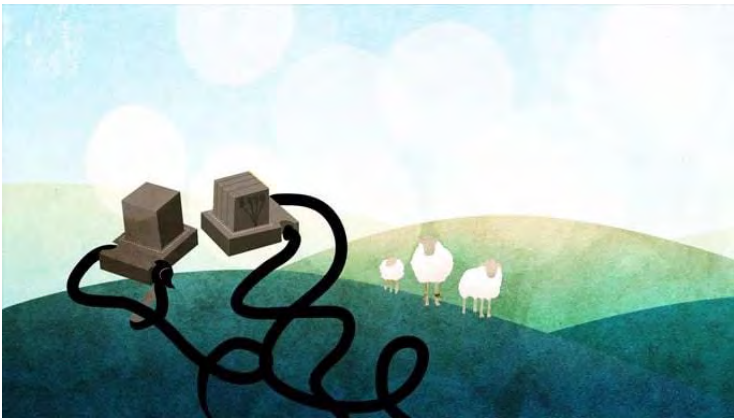
When we put on Tefillin, we place one box upon the left arm (signifying action) opposite the heart (the seat of the emotions) and the other box upon the head (the seat of the intellect). When doing so, we have contemplate the submission of one's mind, heart and actions to the Almighty. On the one hand,

we do not simply follow the impulses of the heart (since we can easily be tempted), but on the other hand, we can't simply follow our intellect (as that path can be detached and cold).

Based on this, some explain that by placing sacred leather parchments in a box made of animal hide, we subdue and transform our animalistic desires and impulses and use them in our service of G-d.

The mystics further explain that Creation can be separated into four major components: *domem* (inanimate/mineral), *tzomeach* (vegetation), *chai* (animal) and *medaber* (humankind).

In the process of preparing the hides and making the Tefillin, certain herbs (*tzomeach*) and water (*domem*) are used to process the hides (*chai*). When the person (*medaber*) performs the mitzvah of Tefillin, he is gathering and elevating all four components of creation and demonstrating how G-d is the master and creator of all.



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## WHY IS THERE ANTISEMITISM?

### Question:

It seems like anti-Semitism is everywhere these days, and almost becoming acceptable again. Why do so many people hate Jews? Why is anti-Semitism still flourishing today, even in modern society? And what can we do about it?

### Answer:

The deepest analysis of anti-Semitism can be found in a deceptively simple Talmudic passage discussing the Purim story, and its wisdom still rings true today.

Haman was an anti-Semitic minister in ancient Persia who wanted to see the Jews annihilated. He approached King Ahasuerus and offered to pay him a hefty sum in return for permission to fulfill his vile wish. The King responded, "Keep your money and do with the Jews as you please!"

The Talmud uses a parable to explain the king's response:

A farmer had a problem. There was a big mound of dirt in the middle of his field. His neighbor had a different problem, he had a ditch in the middle of his field. The owner of the ditch saw the mound and thought, "I would pay money for his mound to fill my ditch." The owner of the mound thought, "I would pay money to get rid of my mound and put it in his ditch." The two finally met, and the ditch owner asked to buy the mound. The mound owner said, "Please take it for free!"

In the same vein, when Haman offered to pay Ahasuerus to rid his kingdom of Jews, the king said, "Go

ahead! No need to pay." Ahasuerus saw the Jews as a mound sticking out in his kingdom, but what Haman saw was a hollow ditch, a deep hole.

And that is the story of anti-Semitism.

Ahasuerus and Haman represent two layers of hatred, the conscious and the subconscious. On the surface, anti-Semites hate Jews because they are a mound. But deep down, they hate Jews because they hate the ditch.

Anti-Semites make all sorts of contradictory statements about why they hate Jews. Jews are rich and own everything, or Jews are poor and stateless; they are religious extremists or they are secular cosmopolitans; they assimilate or they stay separate. Jew-haters say, "Go back to Israel!" and they say, "Get out of Palestine!" They say, "The Nazis should have finished the job," and they say, "The Holocaust never happened."

All of these accusations are really saying the same thing: the Jews are a mound in our field. You are in the way. You don't belong here. You are an obstacle, an eye-sore, a blot on humanity. But these are all just pretexts and excuses. None of these is the real reason for anti-Semitism. The true cause of anti-Semitism is not the mound, it is the ditch.

At their core, those who hate others actually hate themselves. Beneath their macho exteriors lies a profound emptiness, a vacuous hole in their souls. They subconsciously sense that their ideology is false, their beliefs empty, their lives void of meaning. And those who are empty hate those who are

full. When one lacks meaning, one envies those who have it. And there is no people that represents higher purpose and eternal truth than the Jewish people.

This is why there are anti-Semites who have never even met a Jew. It's nothing personal. Their hatred is a symptom of their anger at themselves, which they refuse to face, so they project it on another. And the ultimate other is the Jew, the eternal Jew who has watched civilizations come and go, who has outlived all the ditch owners that tried to wipe him out.

In every generation there are evil ideologies. They take on various facades, but they share one common feature: they all hate the Jews. If you want to know which ideology is the destructive force of the age, look at the ones that embrace anti-Semitism. No matter how cultured and intelligent they look, at their core lies a nihilistic ditch, and they are dangerous.

So what should Jews do about anti-Semitism? What can anyone do about someone else's existential emptiness?

We take our cues from the Purim story. The Jews of the time, under threat of annihilation, did not become less Jewish, but more so. We don't fight emptiness by becoming empty, and we don't make someone else's problem into our problem. In the face of irrational hate, we stay proudly and defiantly Jewish, trusting in G-d, and loyal to our people.

But the Jews of Persia also took political and military measures to protect themselves. Because while we hope that all those haters will one day find some meaning to fill their void, we will not sit by and be victims of those who haven't.

Haman never filled his ditch. But he gave us Purim. Every year Jewish children celebrate and make noise when they hear Haman's name read in the Megillah. Because we won't be swallowed into somebody else's dark ditch. We will continue to fight evil and emptiness, by bringing more light to the world. - Aron Moss



## Is It OK To Hide Being Jewish?

### Question:

I am having a debate with a friend. He has a good job in a big company, but he has not told them he is Jewish. He thinks his boss is an anti-Semite, and by hiding his Jewishness he is able to get away with things. Like Friday afternoons the staff all go out for a drink, and he leaves early. He says it's because he doesn't drink alcohol, so they let him off the hook. If he said it was for Shabbat they wouldn't accept it. I think it's wrong to hide who you are just to keep your job. Don't you agree?

### Answer:

As a rabbi, I have never had to hide my Jewishness to keep my job. That probably wouldn't work out so well.

But I'm not sure that is what your friend is doing either. Perhaps he is hiding his Jewishness not to keep his job, but to keep his Jewishness. There could be a clear precedent for that.

Esther is the heroine of the Purim story. She was a good Jewish girl who was forcibly taken to be queen by the Persian tyrant Ahasuerus. Her cousin Mordechai, head rabbi of his time, instructed her not to tell anyone in the palace that she was Jewish.

Why did he tell her to do that?

Some suggest that Mordechai wanted Esther to hide her Jewishness to protect her position as queen. But this doesn't fit the story. Esther did everything she could to avoid marrying the heathen buffoon of a dictator. If revealing that she was Jewish would disqualify her from being queen, that would be good news, not bad.

But Mordechai knew that she would never be allowed to openly observe Judaism in the palace. As long as no one knew that she was Jewish, she could surreptitiously keep her religion and no one would notice.

Esther couldn't ask to be served only kosher food. So she claimed that she was on a new radical diet and only ate seeds and beans. This she could get away with. She couldn't be seen to be observing Shabbat, so she requested that seven different maids serve her each day of the week. That way she could observe the Day of Rest without anyone noticing that her habits were different from one day to the next. Her week-day maids were never there to see that she did no work on Shabbat, and her Shabbat maid, who only saw her on Shabbat, thought she was just a spoiled princess who never lifted a finger.

Esther managed to observe Judaism under the very noses of those who would not have tolerated it. She is a precedent for all those Jews throughout the ages who were forced to hide their identity in order to preserve it.

Perhaps your friend is in the same predicament. It would be easy to tell him that he should either come clean or get another job. But maybe, like Esther, he doesn't have that choice.

At the same time, Esther teaches us that this charade cannot go on forever. When King Ahasuerus signed a decree to annihilate the Jewish people, that was Esther's cue. Mordechai told her, "Maybe this is why you ended up as queen in the first place - to save your people!" She could hide no longer. She took off her mask and revealed her true identity - a single act of bravery that saved the Jewish nation.

There comes a time when a Jew has to state openly and proudly who s/he is. That time will come for your friend too. He may be able to fly beneath the radar for a while. And as long as he is still being true to who he is, it may serve him better to keep his identity to himself.

But there will be a moment, when someone makes a snide remark about Jews, or when a job candidate is rejected just for being Jewish, or when his coworkers are piling scorn on Israel for its so-called crimes. At that time, keeping silent would mean not being true to who he is. That's when he will do what Esther did. He will say, "I am a Jew, and I will stand for my people." Maybe this is why he ended up in that job in the first place. - Aron Moss



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# Purim Holiday Guide - Wednesday



**Once Upon A Time...**  
It all began in the city of Shushan of Ancient Persia in the 4th century BCE. The reigning King Achashverosh hosted a series of lavish royal feasts in his palace that went on for 180 days - six months! Every citizen living in Shushan was invited. The Jews, too, participated in the great party. Intoxicated with the excitement of the festivities and days of endless drinking, King Achashverosh commanded his queen, Vashti, to appear before his guests wearing only her crown. Vashti refused. Enraged, the king consulted with his ministers and had Vashti executed.

**The Beauty Contest**  
The king now needed a new queen. Achashverosh had all the beautiful women of the country brought to the palace so that he might choose a wife. The king chose Esther (Hadasah), the cousin of Mordechai, who was one of the leaders of the Jewish people. Heeding Mordechai's advice, Esther did not reveal her identity as a Jewess, and observed Jewish law secretly in the palace.

**Mordechai To The Rescue**  
Mordechai would spend time at the palace gates every day, waiting for word from Esther. One day Mordechai overheard two of the king's chamberlains discussing a plot to assassinate the king. He told Esther of the plot and she informed the king. The plot was foiled, and Mordechai was credited with saving the king's life.

**The Anti-Semite**  
Meanwhile, Haman, a descendant of Amalek - the implacable enemy of the Jewish people - became Prime Minister of the king's court. The king had issued an order commanding everyone in the palace to bow down in deference to Haman, but Mordechai refused because Haman wore an idol around his neck. This so enraged Haman that he devised a scheme to annihilate all the Jews in the kingdom on the 13th day of the Hebrew month of Adar.

**Mordechai's Request**  
Hearing of the evil plan, Mordechai donned sackcloth and ashes and told Esther that she must go to the king and intercede on behalf of her people. To appear before the king without being summoned meant risking her life. Esther requested that all the Jews undertake a three-day fast of prayer and repentance. Mordechai gathered the Jews of Shushan - especially the children, 22,000 of them - and they fasted, repented and prayed to G-d.

**The First Feast**  
At the end of the three days of prayer, Esther stood uninvited before Achashverosh. Upon seeing her, the king immediately extended his scepter. "What is it?" Achashverosh asked. "What is your request?" "I would like to invite the king and Haman to a private party," Esther responded. During the feast, the king again asked Esther whether she had any request. "Yes," Esther responded. "I would appreciate if tomorrow, again, the king and Haman would join me for a feast." Haman left the party a happy and proud man. Oh, the honor he was being accorded! But standing at the king's gate was Mordechai - who still refused to bow to Haman - and Haman was enraged. When he arrived home, his wife and wise advisors counseled him to erect a gallows, and then to go to the king and request permission to hang Mordechai. Haman excitedly went ahead and put up the gallows.

**The Beginning Of The End**  
Sleep eluded the king that night, so he asked his servants to read for him from the Royal Chronicles. When they reached the episode where Mordechai saved his life, he realized that Mordechai had never been rewarded. Just at that moment, Haman appeared in the courtyard, planning to suggest to the king to hang Mordechai. When he entered Achashverosh's chambers, the king asked Haman, "What shall be done to a person whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman, who was certain that the king wished to honor him, responded: "Bring royal garment and a royal horse. And let one of the king's nobles dress the man and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'So is done for the man whom the king wishes to honor!'" "Great idea," Achashverosh responded. "Now go get the garments and the horse and do so for Mordechai the Jew!" Haman had no choice but to comply. On the next day he went and honored Mordechai as the king had ordered, and then immediately rushed to join the king and Esther for...

**The Second Feast**  
"What is your request?" a curious King Achashverosh asked Esther at the feast. "If I have found favor in your eyes, O' King," Esther replied. "Spare my life and the lives of my people." Surprised, Achashverosh asked Esther who had threatened her. She replied that it was none other than the wicked Haman. Haman was immediately hanged on the gallows he had intended for Mordechai.




**The Tables Are Turned**  
Although Haman was dead, his cruel decree remained unchanged. According to Persian law, once a king had issued a decree it could not






be rescinded. A new decree was issued, granting the Jews permission and the means to defend themselves against their enemies. The Jews experienced a stunning victory.

**In Commemoration**  
At that time, the 14th day of Adar was consecrated as the festival of Purim, to celebrate and commemorate the great miracle of our people's salvation and the downfall of the wicked Haman. This holiday, called "Purim", is the most joyous holiday on the Jewish calendar.

**Then & Now**  
The Talmud tells us that "whoever reads the Megillah backwards does not fulfill his obligation." Our Sages explain that "backwards" does not only mean in reverse order; it also means that whoever reads the Megillah merely as ancient history has missed the point. The Purim story is directly relevant to our contemporary world. As the Megillah itself tells us, when we celebrate Purim each year, the miraculous events of Purim - G-d's protection and the victory over our enemies - are "remembered and reenacted" in our lives.



## Smile! It's Purim!



Two guys were sitting and talking. Their conversation drifted from politics to cooking. "I got a cookbook once," said the first, "but I could never do anything with it." "Too much fancy cooking in it, eh?" asked the second. "You said it. Every one of the recipes began the same way - 'Take a clean dish and...'"

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

One morning, the teacher asks her class, "All those who want to take a tour of the sewer system, please put up your hand." No one raises their hand except Benjamin, so the teacher asks, "Why do you want to tour the sewer system, Benjamin?" "Because," he replies, "I heard my father tell my mother, 'Business has gone down the drain' and I want to see where the business went."

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On a beautiful Sunday afternoon,

during the French Revolution, the revolting citizens lead a clergyman, a drunkard and an engineer to the guillotine. They ask the clergyman if he wants to face up or down when he meets his fate. The priest says he would like to face up so he will be looking towards heaven when he dies. They raise the blade of the guillotine and release it. It comes speeding down and suddenly stops just inches from his neck. The authorities take this as divine intervention and release the clergyman. The drunkard comes to the guillotine next. He also decides to die face up, hoping that he will be as fortunate as the clergyman. They raise the blade of the guillotine and release it. It comes speeding down and suddenly stops just inches from his neck. Again, the authorities take this as a sign of divine intervention, and they release the drunkard as well. Next is the engineer. He, too, decides to die facing up. As they slowly raise the blade of the guillo-

tine, the engineer suddenly says, "Hey, I see what your problem is ..."

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Several men are in the locker room of a golf club when a cell phone on a bench starts to ring. Sidney picks it up, engages the hands-free speaker-function and begins to talk. "Hello," says Sidney. "Honey, it's me," says a woman, "are you at the club?" "Yes," replies Sidney. "Well I'm at the shopping center," she says, "and I've found a beautiful leather coat. It's \$450. Can I buy it?" "OK, " says Sidney, "go ahead and buy it if you like it that much." "Thanks," she replies. "I also stopped by the Mercedes dealership and had a close look at the latest models. I saw one that I really liked." "How much was it?" asks Sidney. "\$37,000," she replied. "For that price," says Sidney, "I would take it with all the options." "Great," she says. "Just one more thing. That house we wanted last

year is back on the market. They're only asking \$750,000 for it now." Sidney says, "Well then, go ahead and buy it, but don't offer more than \$720,000." "OK," she says, "I'll see you later. I love you." "Bye, I love you too." says Sidney and then hangs up. The other men in the locker room who heard all of this conversation are looking at Sidney in astonishment. Then Sidney shouts out aloud, "Does anyone know who this cell phone belongs to?"

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Bernie was unfortunate to be hit by a 10 ton crane and landed up in hospital in intensive care. His best friend Morris came to visit him. Bernie struggles to tell Morris, "My wife Sadie visits me three times a day. She's so good to me. Every day, she reads to me at the bedside." "What does she read?" "My life insurance policy."



# Friday & Thursday, March 16 & 17



long journey until the coming of Moshiach - speedily in our days.

## Mishloach Manot Gifts Of Food

On Purim we treat our friends to... treats. Send a gift of at least two kinds of ready-to-eat foods (for example, pastry, fruit, beverage), ideally by messenger, to at least one friend - men to men, women to women, kids to kids. The ideal messenger? A child, of course - they love it.

Being nice is always right. But, Mishloach Manot is more than nice, it's a Mitzvah that we're obligated to perform. It gives expression to our desire for Jewish unity and friendship. It enables us to bypass our "body" - our differences, and give expression to our Neshama (soul). In fact, it's a great opportunity to reconnect with someone from the past. Allowing our soul to overflow with joy and generosity can be contagious. Sharing food that can be enjoyed immediately does wonders to shore up friendships, heal old wounds, and make us each a part of one another.



## Celebrating Purim Body & Soul

The observance of the different Mitzvot and customs of Purim, each representing a perspective of the festival, as well as the spirit of the holiday, are to help us capture and experience what Purim stands for.

## Listen To The Megillah

Ancient history? Not for us. The Purim saga is something we must experience for ourselves. How? By listening to the reading of the Megillah (The Scroll of Esther) on the night Purim begins and again during the daytime. When Haman's name is mentioned, we twirl graggers and stamp our feet to "drown out" his evil name. Tell the children Purim is the only time when it's a Mitzvah to make noise!



The Megillah is unique among the books of the Bible. G-d's name does not appear, even once. All the same, G-d is constantly present, His name hidden amidst the words. Yes, it is easy to delude ourselves into believing that the Purim saga and the ultimate deliverance of the Jews was a natural occurrence. It is only by looking deeper, that we see the hand of G-d, like a master puppeteer, weaving disparate elements, disconnected plots, and subplots together toward an inexorable finale. In fact, this is one of the reasons for disguising ourselves on Purim - for G-d "disguised Himself within nature.

The Megillah is a sensational story. It's such a powerful reminder that G-d is always looking out for His People; sustaining us, giving us the courage and the energy to forge ahead against all odds. This has been true from the very birth of the Jewish people and throughout our

## Matanot L'evyonim Gifts To The Needy

Tzedakah (charity) is synonymous with being Jewish. And we don't need a special occasion to give charity. Nevertheless, Purim day is a special time when we must give material help to at least two people in need. The Mitzvah is best fulfilled by giving directly to the needy. If, however, you cannot find poor people, place at least several coins into pushkas (charity boxes).



Tzedakah on Purim is special, because it goes beyond mere generosity toward a needy individual. On Purim, Tzedakah becomes Jewish unity in action. It motivates us to transcend our complacency by bonding with a fellow Jew who is totally outside our social and economic orbit. We give to (at least) two needy people in order to reinforce our kinship with different types of people, even people for whom we lack an instinctive empathy. On Purim we share what we

king was having Mordechai's heroic deed read to him? Was it Esther's charm and Achashverosh's flippancy that made the king suddenly hang his favorite minister?

Purim was instituted because the Jewish people, at that time, understood that it was G-d Himself who did all of the above to save His people. He was just disguising Himself within a Persian palace soap opera.

When G-d took the Children of Israel out of Egypt on Passover, the entire neighborhood, from Giza to

have, because we've achieved that pure sense of oneness that is so elusive at other times.

## Seudat Purim The Festive Purim Feast

Of course, we eat on Purim. Can you imagine a day of Jewish rejoicing that doesn't include a festive meal? The Purim Feast is an occasion for every member of the family - immediate, extended, and friends - to celebrate with food and wine.



## Other Purim Observances Ta'anit Esther The Fast Of Esther

Purim is a day of unbridled joy. Yet the day that precedes it is one of fasting. Why? Because the Jews of Persia - aware that there can be no victory without Divine help - fasted and prayed on this very day.

Fasting is very effective in moving us from our material routine into a more refined, introspective state. It enables us to reach an inner dimension and achieve a higher consciousness.

## Machatzit Hashekel

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, every Jew was obligated to contribute a half shekel at this time of the year. We commemorate this by giving three half-dollar coins to charity - usually in the synagogue - either on the day of the Fast of Esther or just prior to the Megillah reading.



By contributing a half shekel we declare that as individuals we are incomplete, merely one half of an entity. The other half is G-d, with whom we bond. As we are all merely halves - incomplete beings - we achieve wholeness only by bonding with other Jews, and together we bond with the A-mighty. The Machatzit Hashekel reminds us that we are not alone and, indeed, cannot be alone.

## Special Prayers

Al Hanissim is recited during the Amidah (Silent Devotion) of the evening, morning, and afternoon prayers, as well as during the Birkat Hamazon (Grace After Meals.) During the morning service, there is also a special reading from the Torah.



## Parshat Zachor

On the Shabbat before Purim the Torah portion, "Zachor" (Remember) is read in the synagogue, and we are all enjoined to be present at that moment. The Torah commands us to remember the deeds of the nation of

Gaza and from Memphis to Mesopotamia, resonated with the miracles wrought by the G-d of the Hebrews. When a small jug of oil burned for eight days on Chanukah, the most skeptical Hellenist saw that it was an act of G-d.

Purim is unique in that the most miraculous of salvations was shrouded in the garments of nature, luck and coincidence. G-d was hidden and remained hidden. His name does not appear once in the entire Scroll of Esther! Purim is a masquerade in every way. The poppy-

Amalek, Haman's ancestors, who sought to destroy the Jews at their very birth upon the exodus from Egypt.



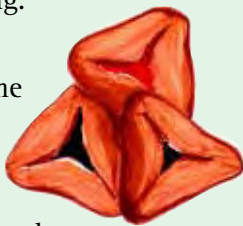
Amalek is not just a nation, it is a mindset of implacable hatred for the Jewish People. Even as we first tasted the sweetness of freedom immediately following our Exodus from Egypt, the Amalekites declared war. They made another attempt as we entered the Land of Israel forty years later, and on numerous occasions throughout our history.

There is a spiritual aspect to Amalek as well; an insidious toxin within us that invades our Jewish soul, a moral virus that attempts to derail us by pouring "cold water" to dampen our enthusiasm as we try to emancipate ourselves from our inner constraints and move onwards in our Jewishness. We counter this Amalek by reaching into our soul for that eternal bond with G-d, to that deepest space where doubt does not exist, where faith bonds us with the A-mighty.

## Hamantashen Recipe

Hamantashen, a traditional Purim delight, is a three-cornered pastry filled with "mohn" (poppy seed) or other sweet filling.

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup oil
- 1/2 cup margarine
- 3 eggs
- 4 cups flour
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 3 tsps. baking powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 lbs. "mohn" filling



Cream sugar, oil and margarine. Add eggs and juice and mix well. Blend with dry ingredients and roll into a ball. Divide into four parts. Roll out each piece very thin (approximately 1/8 inch) on a floured board. With the rim of a cup or glass (depending on desired size) cut into the dough to make circles. Place 1/2 to 2/3 teaspoon of filling in the middle of each circle.

To shape into triangle, lift up right and left sides, leaving the bottom side down, and bring both sides to meet at center, above the filling. Lift bottom side up to center to meet other two sides.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Brush dough with beaten egg before baking. Place on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 20 minutes.

Yields 4 dozen Hamantashen.



Why do we disguise ourselves on Purim? Because on Purim nothing is as it seems. Was the banishment and execution of Vashti simply one of those things that happen when a debauched Persian emperor gets drunk? Was it just coincidence that Mordechai happened to overhear a plot to kill the king? Did Achashverosh choose Esther to be his queen because she happened to be the most beautiful woman in the empire? Was it plain bad luck for evil Haman that he happened to visit Achashverosh just when the

king was having Mordechai's heroic deed read to him? Was it Esther's charm and Achashverosh's flippancy that made the king suddenly hang his favorite minister? Purim was instituted because the Jewish people, at that time, understood that it was G-d Himself who did all of the above to save His people. He was just disguising Himself within a Persian palace soap opera. When G-d took the Children of Israel out of Egypt on Passover, the entire neighborhood, from Giza to

seed filling is barely peeking out of the folds of dough of the Hamantash (or is it prune?). Not to mention the meat (chicken?) filling in the kreplach is completely concealed. Not paradoxically, Purim is also the most joyous festival on the Jewish calendar. It's great to celebrate miracles, but how often does a miracle come your way? Far more exhilarating is the realization that nothing is as it seems, that G-d is always pulling the strings, even when things seem to be "just happening."





# The Other Side Of The Tapestry

by Shifra Hendrie



ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA  
FEBRUARY, 1979

I sat in the hall waiting for the program to start. I felt alone in a room filled with hundreds of people. I had cancelled my trip to the country. Instead, I was here, in this hall full of Chassidic Jews - a stranger in a strange land.

I grew up like any other middle-class American. We were proudly Jewish, but Judaism didn't play a big role in my life. My mother grew up in Chicago in an observant home, and Chicago is where I lived as a very young girl. I was very close to my grandparents, especially my European grandfather, who was a warm and charismatic man, both a learned rabbi and a successful businessman. One of the most precious memories of my childhood is of Grandpa holding me on his lap while he told me stories of his own childhood - stories that seemed like fairy tales to me then.

As a young child I had an unquestioning belief in G-d, as almost all children naturally do. But even so, and even though I was so passionately

attached to my grandfather, the basics of Jewish law - things like keeping kosher, the Sabbath and other mitzvot - seemed confusing and somewhat foreign to me.

I went to college, debated philosophies, dated, and had fun with my friends. I never forgot that I was Jewish, but the older I became and the more I was exposed to, the more my skepticism grew. Eventually I came to define myself as an agnostic, open still to a more generic spirituality, but not particularly interested in anything Jewish. I had a hard time believing that if there was actually a G-d, He could be very interested in me or my life.

In 1973 my beloved grandfather passed away, and my grandmother followed him two years later. At that point, whatever little bit of connection to our Jewish roots my family still maintained began to erode. One Spring I knew it was over when I realized I didn't know when Passover was, and worse, that there was nobody in my family I could call and ask.

Then one day, out of the

blue, my younger brother declared that he wanted to become observant. As he began to study, he also began to introduce me to the wisdom that he found so compelling - the vast mystical world of Kabbalah and Chassidut. Although at first I listened just to be a supportive sister, I soon began to be intrigued by the things I heard. The more I learned, the more I felt pulled toward this wisdom, and the more I felt that what I was learning was a deeper truth than any I had ever encountered before. I wanted to respond to that truth. So with equal parts of excitement and reluctance, I decided to try two of Judaism's most central commandments, eating kosher food and observing the Sabbath.

But it was a struggle. Even though I resonated more and more with the wisdom and truth that I sensed within the words of Torah and Chassidut, I really didn't feel at all ready for an observant life. It was simply too different, too demanding, too foreign to everything I had known before.

It was all the more foreign because, living in Minnesota, hardly any of my friends were Jewish. Nothing about my lifestyle was Jewish. The more Torah I learned and integrated, the more I felt acutely and painfully out of place. In addition, I felt that the kind of intimate, loving, trusting relationship with G-d that Chassidut described was too good to be true. How could I be sure that there was a G-d at all, much less one who would notice or care about me?

So when the opportunity came up to drive to the country that Friday night with some friends, I was very tempted to go. But at the last minute I decided to give the Sabbath one last try and I said no to the drive.

So there I sat, that Saturday night, feeling that I had very little in common with the Chassidim who filled the room, but still curious to get one final glimpse into their fascinating, mystical world.

The rabbi whom everyone had gathered to hear, Rabbi Solomon S. Hecht, lived in Chicago. He was known as an unusually talented speaker, and the small Chassidic community of St. Paul, MN, had been trying to book him for a solid ten years. His talk

began.

"I'm truly happy to be here", began the rabbi in a deep, sonorous voice. "It's Divine Providence that I am finally here with you tonight, ten years after your community first invited me to come.

**Divine Providence?  
I mused to myself.  
That's an  
interesting concept.  
Could it be true?  
Was it Divine  
Providence that I  
didn't make it to  
the country and  
ended up here  
myself?  
Then he began a  
story that caught  
my attention. In  
fact, it riveted me...**

"In fact," he continued, "the Rebbe often quoted the Baal Shem Tov, first of the Chassidic masters, concerning the principle of Divine Providence. He constantly emphasized that everything a person sees, he's meant to see, and everything that he hears, he's meant to hear. He taught that whenever something happens that makes a particularly strong impression on a person, that person needs to be aware that this experience was custom-created by G-d specifically for him, in order to give him direction and insight in fulfilling his Divine mission.

"So," the rabbi concluded, "The fact that I'm here tonight - together with all of you - is surely significant."

Divine Providence? I mused to myself. That's an interesting concept. Could it be true? Was it Divine Providence that I didn't make it to the country and ended up here myself?

The rabbi continued speaking. He talked of the Previous Rebbe, telling stories of his life - stories that illuminated his greatness, his genius, his holiness, his kindness.

Then he began a story that caught my attention. In fact, it riveted me:

"After the Second World War we collected money to distribute to the desperate refugees left in Europe.

"Mr. Samuel Broida, owner of a kosher meat packaging

company in Chicago, was the president of our fund.

"Altogether we managed to collect \$180,000, a great deal of money at that time. Mr. Broida was delegated to take the money to Europe, to help a group of refugees who had fled from Russia to a suburb of Paris. When he returned home, he told us that something had happened to him; something he would never forget:

"When I was in Paris," said Mr. Broida, "I wanted to understand more about how these people lived through the difficult years of the war. I spoke to older people, to middle-aged people, to young couples. Then, at random, I approached a little boy of about eight years old. I told him that I would be returning to America and that I would like to give him something - something special, something that he wanted very much. I asked him what that something might be. It was his answer that I will never forget."

"So we asked Mr. Broida", continued Rabbi Hecht, "just what this child had said that was so unforgettable.

"He answered: 'You have to understand that these people had nothing - nothing at all. They were absolutely devastated by the war. I thought the poor little boy would ask me for shoes, clothes, food, candy, a suit, a hat... but I was wrong. He asked for none of those things. Instead, he said to me, 'I want to have the merit to go to America and see the Lubavitcher Rebbe someday.'

"I myself," continued Mr. Broida, "am not a follower of the Rebbe. I've heard stories of the Rebbe, of his miracles, of the power of his blessings, of his holiness and greatness. But I didn't really believe them."

"But this child's parents and grandparents were followers of the Rebbe. They came to Paris from Russia, where the Rebbe had lived until some 30 years ago until he had to leave."

"Now this Rebbe lives in America. But his influence and reputation has not diminished at all. How is this possible? How is it possible for any human being to leave such a powerful impression that he is more real to them than their hunger, their devastation or their poverty? And

•Continued on next page



# Happy Purim

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*Wegmans*



*Cont. from previous page*

this was a small child! He didn't know I would ask him this question. His answer was completely spontaneous. How it is possible that a small child, a poor child, a hungry child, wants nothing in the world but to catch a glimpse of this holy man?"

"If a Rebbe," concluded Mr. Broida, 'thirty years after leaving a place, leaves this kind of impression, then it has to be because he truly is the kind of human being that I myself assumed could not exist. The kind of human being that is head and shoulders above the rest of us. That is what I will never forget.'"

"After this," Rabbi Hecht continued, "Mr. Broida asked me if I would take him to New York to meet the Rebbe for himself. This was 1947, just a couple of years before the Rebbe's passing. The Rebbe's health by this time was frail. He had been imprisoned and severely tortured by the Soviets who found his powerful religious leadership a great threat to the communist regime. The Rebbe was able to see very few people each day and there was a long waiting list, but I managed to get Mr. Broida an appointment. And he told me afterwards that it was one of the most profound and incredible experiences of his life."

"But then," continued the rabbi, "Something even more amazing happened. A Rebbe, like any person who receives the confidence of others, never repeats a word of what happens in a private audience between him and any other person. If a lawyer or a doctor is bound by confidentiality, how much more so a Rebbe! Nevertheless, after Mr. Broida saw the Rebbe, the Rebbe called me into his office. And these were the Rebbe's words:

"'In my conversation with Mr. Broida,' the Rebbe told me. 'I asked him about his business, his community work. And then I asked him about his children. He burst into tears and told me that of his six children, none was observant anymore. I promised him,' continued the Rebbe, 'that Judaism would come alive again one day in his grandchildren.'

"I have often wondered since then," concluded Rabbi Hecht, "what happened to the Rebbe's promise. Mr. Broida passed away years ago and I don't know what happened to his family. But one thing I do know. The promise of a tzadik, of a Rebbe, is never made in vain."

The speech was over. I sat in my seat with tears pouring down my face.

I knew what had happened to the Rebbe's promise.

Mr. Broida was my grandfather.

Rabbi Hecht that night had begun his talk with an explanation of Divine providence. That was no accident. In fact, nothing ever is.

If I had taken the Friday night ride to the country, if Rabbi Hecht had told a different story, if he had told this one and just not mentioned my grandfather's name, I would be living an entirely different life. And you would not be reading these words today.

**"I have often wondered since then," concluded Rabbi Hecht, "what happened to the Rebbe's promise. Mr. Broida passed away years ago and I don't know what happened to his family..."**

**The speech was over. I sat in my seat with tears pouring down my face. I knew what had happened to the Rebbe's promise.**

Our lives are like the reverse side of a great tapestry. From the back, all we can see are the knots, the imperfections, some bumps, some smears of color. It all looks random and chaotic.

Only from the front side of the tapestry is it possible to see how it all fits together. From the front you can see that every stitch and every knot forms an integral part of a vast, magnificent picture.

In life, for the most part, we only see the back. We have to use our intuition, our knowledge, and our wisdom, to try to fit the parts together, to guess at the picture that might be on the other side.

But on that night, I, the agnostic, was granted a rare privilege. I was given an open glimpse of the other side of the tapestry.

In that glimpse I saw many things. I saw the complex and awesome power of Divine Providence and the infinite care with which G-d weaves together the events of every person's unique personal life. I saw the awesome power of a true tzadik, his ability to see beyond time and beyond worlds, to reach into the reservoir of souls and empower a specific soul to fulfill its destiny. I saw the power of a Rebbe to make an



The author's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Broida, in front of an ambulance they donated to Israel (c. mid-60's).

impossible promise - and keep it.

And last but not least, I saw that G-d plants messages for us all. Messages that, if we let them, can change our lives. Sometimes our messages are big and blatant, sometimes small and subtle. But they are always there if we want to see them.

When I stumbled over my destiny I wasn't expecting it. In fact, it was the furthest thing from my mind. Yes, I was Jewish by heritage - but at that point I wasn't even sure that I believed in G-d. Yet when I ran headlong into an alternate plane of reality, I saw clearly that it was vaster, deeper and far more compelling than anything I had believed possible before.

The Torah teaches us to view the entire world as being perfectly balanced. That means that our one act, no matter how small, can tip the scales. It can literally make all the difference in the world.

When we live in a state of separateness, as if our lives' challenges are random and without purpose, we will inevitably be at odds with, and resistant to what life brings. This state of resistance stops the flow; creates a stagnancy that makes things extremely difficult to change.

But when we connect to the fundamental truth of this world - that we, and all of the events of our lives, are part of the gigantic, ever-unfolding tapestry - our minds will be clear, our hearts open and serene, and the choices we make will be the made with wisdom, purpose and power. And because our awareness and our choices are in harmony with our larger purpose, doors will open that we could not even see before.

Because each of our actions are a part of the whole, the cosmic tapestry, as we move together toward our common destiny, each bit of goodness and G-dliness we each bring into our own lives will help to bring us all safely home.

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***and may others follow your shining example!***

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# Judaism and Wine

## 1. Wine Was Poured On The Altar

Scripture devotes considerable attention to the *korbanot* - sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle and Holy Temple. Often, these sacrifices were accompanied by *nesachim*, wine libations, poured into a special cavity on the giant copper altar. One week a year, on Sukkot, water was also poured.

## 2. The Nazirite

While wine has always been an integral part of how our people have dined and celebrated, there was someone for whom wine was anathema: the Nazirite, who vowed not to drink wine, cut his or her hair, or come into close contact with the dead for a period of time. The Nazir was often one who had lived excessively and suffered the consequences, and was now (temporarily) going to the other extreme to balance things out.

## 3. Kosher Wine?

Most plant-based foods are inherently kosher (provided that there is no cross-contamination with non-kosher food, insects are not present, and agricultural laws are adhered

to). Wine, however, is an exception. Due to its special place in worship (including idolatry), there are extra restrictions on the making and handling of wine, and the production and handling of kosher wine must be done exclusively by Jews. Once wine has been boiled, it is rendered unfit for worship and no longer subject to this restriction. This cooked wine is known in Hebrew as *mevushal*.

## 4. Beginning & Ending Shabbat & Holidays

The Torah commands us to "remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it." The sages understand this to mean that we must verbally declare Shabbat a holy day, so on Friday (or holiday) nights, before we sit down to dinner, we say a prayer over wine in a ritual known as Kiddush (sanctification). Kiddush is recited again the following day. After the Shabbat or holiday has ended, we perform a similar ceremony (including sweet-smelling spices and a candle, in addition to the wine) known as Havdalah.

## 5. Four Cups On Passover



by Menachem Posner

On the first (two) night(s) Passover, we celebrate our nation's miraculous exodus from Egyptian slavery, becoming free people, dedicated to G-d. The ritual-rich feast, known as a Seder, involves drinking four cups of wine.

## 6. Grape Juice Is A Good Stand-In

While bona fide alcoholic wine is preferred for Kiddush and most other ceremonial purposes, especially the Passover Seder, grape juice is a passable alternative for someone who cannot tolerate wine, or an addict for whom wine is downright dangerous.

## 7. Purim The More The Merrier

On the holiday of Purim, we recall how G-d "turned the tables" on those who tried to destroy us in ancient Persia. The day's celebration includes hearing the story of Purim read in the Book of Esther, giving charity, sending food gifts to friends, and feasting. At these feasts, the sages tell us, one who can safely do so should imbibe lots of wine.

## 8. Marriage Is Sealed Over A Glass (Or Two)

The marriage ceremony consists of two stages. The groom places a ring on the bride's finger, followed by a blessing said over a cup of wine. Then the nuptials are finalized with the recitation of seven blessings, also over a cup of wine. In each instance, the wine is sipped by both the bride and the groom.

## 9. Torah Has Sad Wine Stories

There are instances of people getting drunk and messing up in the Torah "...for nothing causes more heart-break than wine." After surviving the Great Flood, Noah planted a vineyard, got drunk, and shamed himself. Then we have Lot, who was given strong wine by his daughters, who then got him to impregnate them. Oy vey!

## 10. The Reviews Are Mixed



Despite these stories, nowhere does the Torah even hint at forbidding alcohol consumption, except in specific cases, such as a priest who is about to serve in the Holy Temple or the Nazirite. Looking at scripture, we get a sense that wine is both appreciated and viewed with suspicion, and rightfully so! Here are some examples:

Positive: "My wine brings joy to G-d and man." (Judges 9:13).

Negative: "Do not be among wine-guzzlers, among gluttonous eaters of meat for themselves." (Proverbs 23:20)

It's Complicated: "Give strong drink to the one who is perishing and wine to those of bitter soul." (Proverbs 31:6)

## 11. The Special Blessing

Before we eat or drink anything, we say a blessing specific to each class of foods. So we have one general blessing for things like water and meat, which do not grow from the ground, another blessing for tree fruits, and another for things that grow in or near the earth. Two exceptions are bread and wine, which each have their own unique blessings. Before drinking wine we thank G-d, "Who creates fruit of the vine." According to the sages of the Talmud (Berachot 35b), wine was singled out because it both gladdens a person and satisfies his hunger.

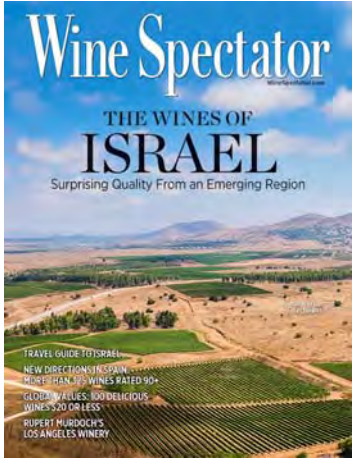
## 12. 'L'chaim - To Life!

Before partaking of adult beverages, Jews traditionally toast *l'chaim*, "to life!" One reason for this salutation is precisely because drinking wine can lead to either camaraderie, good cheer and happiness, or misery, hurt-feelings, and shame. With this in mind, we express our prayer-

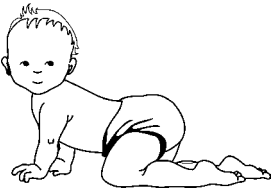
ful wish that our drinking bring out the best of each of us and be a joyful, respectful, celebration of life.

## 13. Feast Of The Future

In the future, when G-d will bring the Final Redemption, He will serve us a sumptuous meal with meat from a giant bovine (the *shor habor*) and an equally gigantic fish (the *leviathan*). And of course, it will be followed by wine, which we will hold while reciting Grace After Meals. This wine is known as the *yayin hameshumar*, which can either mean "preserved wine," because it has been carefully guarded from the beginning of time, or "strained wine," because it had been strained from all impurities and dregs while still in the grapes.



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"Modesty is one of my more outstanding qualities." Anonymous.

Growing up, there was a song I'd enjoy from an album called Journeys. It was a parody about wedding extravagance. In the song, a man tells his friend about the wedding he's planning for his daughter. Flowers would be imported from overseas, a 100-person band would entertain the guests with their symphony and an outlandish Viennese table would culminate the meal. Finally, each guest would receive a token gift before leaving: an entire set of the Talmud.

"But what about modesty?" asks his friend after hearing of the lavish plans.

"But, of course!" the father of the bride responds. "On the invitation, I will write that all guests should come to the wedding in modest attire."

Apparently, there are many facets to this trait we call modesty. While the way you dress may be the most obvious, modesty is certainly not limited to appearance.

In biblical times, modesty played a pivotal role in thwarting Balaam's evil

intent. Balaam was a non-Jewish prophet employed by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the Jewish people. Now, Balaam knew that a military attack would be futile; the Jews had a track record of supernatural and forceful victories in war. So Balaam tried to weaken them at their source, by diminishing their spiritual connectivity. As a spiritual guru, he felt he had the skills needed to undermine their connection to G-d.

Ironically, whenever Balaam opened his mouth to curse the Jewish people, out flowed the most magnificent blessings. Finally, after his second fruitless attempt to lash out words of destruction, he said something very telling: Telling, since it exposed the reason for his inability to curse them.

"How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your dwelling places, O Israel!" (Numbers 24:5)

The Midrash explains that Balaam was noting the modest way in which the tents of Israel were aligned. They were staggered so the entrance of one tent had no visual access to the entrance of its neighboring tent. At

each of their stops over their 40-year trek, the people made sure to erect their tents in this modest arrangement. Apparently, it was this exceptionally sensitive quality among them that made it impossible for Balaam to harm them.

Modesty means having healthy boundaries. Today, modesty is underrated. As Americans, we're hooked on TV shows that dig into the most personal parts of people's lives and display them to millions of viewers. Conversely, many teens (and adults) are misled to believe that if they don't expose what is meant to be sacred and private, they are prudish.

People who are careful not to gossip, are merely expressing their appreciation for healthy boundaries. Who gave me permission to analyze another's life? I shouldn't be looking in their window. And if I am exposed to a private bit of information about my friend, I need to be sensitive. Gossiping is violating the sacred space of another person.

The Jews were in transit, and yet they still made sure to uphold this subtle expression of modesty as they assembled their tents. Preserving strong and healthy boundaries was high on their priority list. Mirroring their efforts, G-d shielded them from harm with a protective barrier, and Balaam was unable to diminish their prowess.

"How goodly are your tents, O Jacob!"

# Tied To Tradition

by Aharon Loschak

Born in 1909 in Mirgorod, Ukraine, Rabbi Meir Avtzon was a devout Chabad chassid who battled valiantly for the survival of Judaism in the Soviet Union. After spending more than seven years in the gulag for the crime of studying and teaching Torah, he, together with his wife and eldest child, escaped Russia for the religious freedom of the West.

After seven years in DP camps in Europe, the Avtzon family, which had then grown to include six children, settled in Detroit, Michigan. Yet even in the land of plenty, Rabbi Avtzon remained steadfast in his efforts to serve G-d and help others do the same.

His first job in Detroit was as a *melamed*, a teacher, in a local afternoon Hebrew school.

On the first day at his new job, the old-world Russian chassid walked into a classroom of American boys. His English was limited, and he began with the very basics. "In the morning when we wake up," he told the children, "we recite *Modeh Ani*, we wash our hands, and then we get dressed."

Rabbi Avtzon continued, "When we put on our shoes, we make sure to put on the right shoe first before the left shoe. Then, we are careful to tie the left shoe before the right shoe in honor of the Tefillin that are tied on the left arm."

And so the lesson went on.

When one of the boys arrived home that evening, his father asked him, "What did you learn in Hebrew school today from your new teacher?"

"The rabbi taught us how to tie our shoes," the boy replied.

"What? For this we pay him? To teach you trivialities like how to tie your shoes? We need him to teach you Hebrew reading, some history, and maybe about the holidays!" fumed the angry father. "That greenhorn must be fired immediately!"

This particular father was one of the wealthiest mem-

bers of the community, and his wish was the school's command. Sure enough, Rabbi Avtzon found himself without a job.

Years passed, and one day in the early 70's a well-heeled gentleman knocked on the door of the Avtzon home in Oak Park, a heavily Jewish suburb of Detroit.

Taking an enormous wad of cash out of his pocket, he offered it to the rabbi, "This is for you, and I want to beg your forgiveness."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Rabbi Avtzon.

"Do you recall your original Hebrew school lesson and the boy whose father got you fired?" the gentleman asked.

"Yes," Rabbi Avtzon replied.

"Well, that boy is my son. He grew up and strayed far from the Jewish path, leaving behind the rituals and values of our home. This went so far that, to my distress, he was engaged to a non-Jewish woman. He had clearly forsaken Torah Judaism, and neither my wife nor I could talk sense into his head.

"And then, suddenly, on his wedding day, he called it off and announced that he wanted to return to his Jewish roots.

"Do you know why? When he got dressed that morning, he bent down to tie his shoes and remembered your lesson that day in Hebrew school. He recalled his Jewish upbringing and realized right then and there that he could not turn his back on his heritage."

Rabbi Avtzon was delighted to hear of the turn of events but refused the cash. "If my lesson made such an impression on your son, then I have gotten the best reward I could ever want. No payment is necessary."



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AGING & RETIREMENT  
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that tell about all our standards?

So there are two vastly divergent views on aging - that is, "You are old and worn out, thus not very useful" versus "You are wise and experienced, thus indispensable."

The Torah assures us that old age is a virtue and a blessing. We are told to respect all the elderly, regardless of their scholarship and piety, because each year of life yields wisdom and experience that the most accomplished young person cannot possibly yet possess.

But in many societies today, old age has come to be a liability.

Youth, meanwhile, is considered the highest credential in every field from business to government, where a younger generation insists on learning from its own mistakes instead of standing on the shoulders of their elders. At fifty, a person may begin to hear insinuations that his job might be better filled by someone twenty-five years younger. Society, in effect, is dictating that one's later years be marked by inactivity and decline. The aged are encouraged to move to retirement villages and nursing homes; after decades of achievement, they are thought to be of relatively little use, their knowledge and talent now deemed worthless.



On the surface, this modern attitude may seem at least partially justified. Is it not a fact that a person physically weakens as he or she advances in years? Is it not an unescapable fact that the physical body of a seventy-year-old is not the physical body of a thirty-year-old? But then is a person's true worth to be measured by his physical prowess? This question goes beyond the question of how we treat the elderly; our attitude toward them reflects our very concept of "value." If a person's physical strength has waned while his wisdom and insight have grown, do we consider this an improvement or a decline? Certainly, if a person's priorities in life are material, then the body's physical weakening means a deterioration of spirit as well- a descent into boredom, futility, and despair. But when one regards the body as an accessory to the soul, the very opposite is true:

the spiritual growth of old age invigorates the body. And the later years allow us to positively reorder our priorities, which is difficult to do earlier, when the responsibility to earn a livelihood is at its peak.

The idea of retirement is rooted in societies' notion that life is composed of productive and non productive periods. The first twenty to thirty years of life are seen as a time when a person is training for a productive life. The next thirty to forty years are when his creative energies are realized; he begins to return what has been invested in him by his now passive elders, and, in turn, begins investing in the still passive younger generation. Finally, as he enters his later years, he puts his period of "real" achievement behind him. If a creative urge still strikes, he is advised to find some harmless hobby to fill his time. Indeed, time has become something to be filled. In a sense, he has come full circle to childhood - once again, he is a passive recipient in a world shaped by the initiative of others.

The time to passively enjoy the fruits of one's labor does indeed have its time and place - in the World to Come. The very fact that G-d has granted a person a single additional day of bodily life means he or she has not yet concluded his or her mission in life, that there is still much to achieve in this world.

THE REBBE'S ADVICE  
Continued from page 5

regarding a part-time position that would give me an opportunity to share my professional knowledge. The schedule was flexible, with a commitment of two days each week. I had always been involved with the Beth Rivkah School in my community, and now I became readily available for workshops and lectures. There was also a group of young women who contacted me to arrange a workshop series on creative writing, which turned out to be a most satisfying and rewarding experience.

In my community of Crown Heights, there are ongoing classes and wonderful lectures on Jewish scholarly topics. Now, my mornings often begin with a brisk walk, followed by a 9:45 lecture - that is, on days that are free. New York City provides endless opportunities for lectures and classes, day and evening, and I always find the challenges of learning to be very invigorating.

I became a docent, a guide, at the Museum of Jewish Heritage at Battery Park. After one term of classes on a once-a-week basis and two months of practicum, observing and following museum guides, I became a certified guide in March 2001. Once a week, I volunteer to guide groups through the museum. It was an exciting experience to apply and be accepted into this volunteer program. And there are countless other meaningful volunteer opportunities available - visiting the sick, assisting newcomers, joining the *Chevre Kadisha* burial society - the list is endless. Helping others is a truly rewarding experience for me.

The Rebbe is my inspiration in this golden stage of life. He was a master at using every moment of every day to its limit. He constantly initiated new projects and new activities. The last period of his life saw the most fruitful expansion of Chabad Houses throughout the world. The word "retirement" was never in his vocabulary.

Now, it is the Rebbe's vision for non-retirement that guides my life after "retirement."

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