

Wishing You A Happy Shavuot, May 25-27



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On Shavuot we celebrate the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai exactly 3,335 years ago. Your ancestors stood at the foot of the mountain. You, too, stood at the foot of the mountain together with your parents and grandparents - for the souls of all Jews from all generations came to hear the Ten Commandments from G-d Himself.

This year, attend the Reading of “The Ten Commandments” in synagogue on Shavuot and reaffirm our Covenant with G-d and His Torah.

Shavuot Services @ Chabad
Friday, May 26, 9:30 a.m.
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EVERY. SINGLE. JEW.

by Aharon Loschak

Norman Borlaug was a biologist and agricultural scientist who is credited with saving millions of lives through his work in developing special wheat varieties.

In the 1940s, Borlaug began working in Mexico as part of a program to improve wheat yields and help feed the country’s growing population. Borlaug and his team were eventually able to develop high-yield, disease-resistant varieties that could grow in assorted conditions. These varieties were then introduced to farmers in other parts of the world, including India and Pakistan, where they helped transform agriculture and improve food security.

Borlaug’s work is credited with helping to prevent famines in several countries and is estimated to have saved millions of lives. He

was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his contributions to global food security. In a 1997 article in The Atlantic, “Forgotten Benefactor of Humanity,” Gregg Easterbrook claims that the “form of agriculture that Borlaug preaches may have prevented a billion deaths.”

It’s not every day that what began as a small experiment in a forgotten field somewhere will yield results that eventually save a billion lives. But it is every day that the small things we do, the people we touch, have an outsized impact - far more than we often know.

The prophet Isaiah speaks glowingly of the future Redemption. One of the events he describes is the Ingathering of Exiles - that moment when G-d will return every Jew to the land of Israel:

And it shall come to pass that on that day, G-d shall... acquire the rest of His people, that will remain from Assyria and from Egypt... And He shall gather the lost of Israel, and the scattered ones of Judah He shall gather from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11).

It’s an exciting prospect. Imagine: every Jew, no matter where they live, no matter how remote or disconnected, will be whooshed away in a flash and brought to the Messianic utopia. How incredible will that be!

But what does that have to do with me and you right now? What will happen in the future is lovely, but what are we to make of that today, in New York, Johannesburg, Malmo, and Lima?

Here’s a thought: Isn’t it odd? Why, after all, would G-d bother to gather every

It’s not every day that what began as a small experiment in a forgotten field somewhere will yield results that eventually save a billion lives. But it is every day that the small things we do, the people we touch, have an outsized impact - far more than we often know.

single Jew? In another verse, Isaiah movingly describes how, “You shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel” - as if G-d will sweep the globe and personally pluck out every last member of the tribe. But why? What would be so bad if Moshe in the Appalachian Mountains or Naomi in Patagonia were left behind?

The simple answer is: Yes! It would be terrible. In G-d’s eyes, every single Jewish person is integral to the redemptive process. If it’s not literally every member, Redemption cannot and will not take place. It’s as simple as that.

“I will handpick each of you, one by one, and bring you back home” sends forth a dramatic message: You matter. Regardless of how trivial, insignificant, or remote you may think you are, you still matter. When the day of our nation’s long-awaited Redemption arrives, the entire process will hang in the balance until G-d knocks on your cabin, plucks you out and brings you back to the Promised Land.

The message of the Ingathering of Exiles, for all of us, right here and right now, is that we matter, and very much so. You may think you’re on a remote island and whatever you do has no consequence, but G-d begs to differ.

Remember the prophet’s clarion call: “You shall be

gathered one by one, O children of Israel.” That includes you. Yes, tiny little you. Everyone else in the world will have to wait until you’re ready to come along. And then, you’ll wait for the next person.

Go ahead and feel good about yourself, good about the fact that G-d is ready to put the entire project on hold until you’re on board. And then go and spread the word.

Do you know another Jew living nearby? Do you have a Jewish friend who also thinks they’re the only one on their hilltop, island, or neighborhood? Let them know that they’re special in G-d’s eye, and that the future Redemption will come only when they sign up.

And while we’re at it, why not sign them up now? Tell them about a mitzvah, a unique opportunity to connect with the G-d Who believes in them so much. Offer them the chance to study a Torah idea, to put on tefillin, to make a blessing over food, to light Shabbat candles, to pray. Any of the above is a gateway, a thread that connects us with G-d Who bestows upon each of us meaning, purpose, and endless value.

The future Redemption knocks at our door every day. And it’s telling me, you, and everyone else, “You’re too important to be left behind!”

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The Ten Commandments, otherwise known as the *Aseret Hadibrot* begin with *Vayedaber* ("And G-d spoke all these words") *laimor* ("to say").

Usually, when the Torah uses the term *laimor*, it means that it should be repeated to the Jewish people or to later generations. However, at the giving of the Ten Commandments, all of the Jewish people were present, and it is taught that even the souls of all later generations were there at the giving of the Torah. What is the meaning of the word *laimor* in this verse if everyone heard what G-d had said right then and there?

The Maggid of Mezeritch says that it means that we have to put the *vayedaber* into *laimor*. The word *vayidaber* shares the same root (DBR) with the term *Aseret Hadibrot* (the 10 Commandments), and *laimor* has the same root (AMR) as the term *Asarah Maamarot* (the 10 Divine Statements - 'Let there be... - which the world was created.

In other words, one shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that the Torah and the world are separate domains. One shouldn't say, "when I am doing Jewish things like praying, studying Torah, performing mitzvot, I will do as the Torah dictates. But, when I am doing worldly things, such as eating, drinking, and conducting business, I will act as the world dictates." G-d wants us to bring our Torah way into worldly affairs. We should eat, drink and do business,

but in the way that the Torah has taught us. Even when we talk, it should be apparent that Torah is our way of life.

The Midrash tells us that when G-d gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai, a longstanding decree that "what is above can't come below and what is below can't go above" was abolished. Our forefathers studied Torah and did mitzvot even before the giving of the Torah. Their mitzvot, however, didn't affect the physical world and failed to imbue the physical with holiness. The two worlds, above and below, didn't mix.

All this changed with the giving of the Torah. G-d gave us the tools to infuse the physical with holiness – the mundane and the holy could now become one.

This is clear from the Ten Commandments themselves. From all of the 613 commandments that G-d gave us, He chose to give these ten personally to every Jewish person. One would think that He would have chosen only the most spiritually sublime ideas to tell us. And, in fact, He began with "I Am the L-rd your G-d," and "You shall not have any other gods before Me," which are holy and sublime ideas. But, instead of remaining in the lofty realms, He continues with "You shall not murder" and "you shall not steal," the most basic physical no-nos. Even if G-d wouldn't tell us these, we would understand that they are wrong.

The fact that G-d juxtaposes His oneness together with not murdering and not stealing shows that He wants us to fuse the physical and the spiritual. This works both ways. That which is above comes below and that which is below goes above, as will be explained.

Murder and stealing are wrong, and each of us understands that, but we shouldn't only observe theses commands because they make



sense. We must keep them because of the "I am the L-rd your G-d" that is within these laws – meaning that they are G-d's will. This should be the primary reason for keeping them. And the same is true for all the Torah laws that make sense. We should keep them because they are G-d's will. This is "drawing what is above down below".

On the other hand, those who feel they have sunk so low that they need commandments to tell them that murder and stealing are wrong (and that G-d should have to say it with thunder and lightning, otherwise they wouldn't get it) should also contemplate on the greatness and oneness of G-d. This is "below going above".

How do we bring together the above and below, spiritual and physical? Through mitzvot. The 613 commandments that we received at Sinai came from the essence of G-d, as expressed by the first word of the Ten Commandments, *Anochi* ("I Am"), which refers to G-d's essence, above all of creation, physical and spiritual. It is the part of G-d that has no name nor description. Since it is above creation, it can fuse opposites, connecting above to below, and the spiritual to

Adapted from the works of
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson,
The Lubavitcher Rebbe
by Yitzi Hurwitz

the physical.

This is why our mitzvot can do this, while our forefathers' actions could not. With the giving of the Ten Commandments, our mitzvot gained the power of *Anochi*, G-d's essence, which can bring opposites together.

G-d did this because our essential purpose is to make this physical world into a dwelling place for Him. By infusing the physical world with holiness, we make it ready for Him to dwell in.

This is also hinted in the first three words of the Ten Commandments, *Anochi Havaya Elokecha*.

The name *Elokecha* is like *Elokim* and *Elokeinu*. It is, in fact, the only name of G-d that is written in the plural. It is also the only name that is written in the possessive, *Elokecha*, your G-d, *Elokeinu*, our G-d, etc. This is because it refers to how G-d relates to the physical world, and it fills everything in nature with the specific amount of G-dliness that is needed to exist. It is also the only name of G-d that is somewhat relatable to our human realm, which is why we say it in the possessive, *Elokecha*, your G-d, *Elokeinu*, our G-d. This is the name that "fills" the physical

world.

The name *Havaya* "surrounds" the world. It is beyond any physical limitations. *Havaya* is *hayah*, *hoveh* and *yehiyeh* (past, present and future) combined in one word. In other words, it is beyond space and time. It is above all worldly limitations.

Elokecha, which means "your G-d," denotes something personal, very much within this world.

Anochi, as mentioned above, is the essence of G-d, beyond all of existence, physical and spiritual, and therefore, can unite opposites, *Havaya* and *Elokecha*, connecting above to below.

May we be successful in bringing the two together through our mitzvot, making this world into a dwelling place for G-d. This will bring Moshiach. May he come soon.

Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz – father of seven, husband of Dina, and spiritual leader at Chabad Jewish Center in Temecula, CA – has been rendered immobile by ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). Unable to speak or type, he uses his eyes to write heartfelt thoughts on the weekly Torah portion.



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When Guilt And Judgment Become A Blessing

by Chana Margulies

A friend called to ask why I had missed a group meeting the night before and to see if I would be attending the following week.

I wanted to say, It is 9 in the morning. Don't shove your guilt onto me!

But I paused. I listened for the emotion. There are a lot of people on the committee. Why was she calling me?

She valued my input. She noticed that I wasn't there. She cared.

"Thank you for noticing," I responded, unsure of how she would respond.

"Oh, you're welcome. I like it so much more when you're there."

"Thank you, I was at a bat mitzvah the other night."

"Oh, wow I am so happy for you. Mazel tov!" And a moment later, "So, can you make next week's meeting?"

More pressure. I roll my eyes.

No, I tell myself, this is care. She is being vulnerable. I don't want my cynicism to be my lens. "I think so. Either way, thanks for thinking of me."

"Amazing. So nice chatting. Have a good one."

I got off the phone feeling elated. A conversation that would have been an argument became an early-morning source of blessing. A source of G-d's love for me in the world.



I wanted to say, It is 9 in the morning. Don't shove your guilt onto me! But I paused. I listened for the emotion. There are a lot of people on the committee. Why was she calling me?

We live in a world where what looks up is down and what looks down is up. It is *olam hasheker*, "a world of falsehood." G-d conceals Himself and asks that we search for Him. G-d asks that we peel back the veils of reality and discover the real Him- and then we can hear the "heart message" of all of creation.

To do so, we need to filter our perception through the reverse engineering of a blessing.

Blessed are you, Lord our G-d, King of the world ...

Baruch Atah Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech, Ha'olam ...

Olam: A challenge enters my space, and I see it through the lens of *olam*, "world," which etymologically is connected to *he'elem*, "concealment." I am dumbfounded, confused, angry and hurt. What is G-d trying to tell me? I don't get the message.

Melech: I look behind that veil of reality and see that there is order, purpose and systems in place. There is a "King," *Melech*, who runs the show.

Elokeinu: I strip past that level, and go to *Elokim*, G-d's name associated with judgment. I realize no one is trying to hurt me. Yes, there is an element of limitation here, but it is not meant to punish me. There is exactness in what I previously just felt as harshness. I start to feel how the boundaries and limitations are not random. They were constructed with me in mind. Life happens for me, not to me. I feel how G-d is within nature, as hinted to in the numerical value of *Elokim* being 86 - the same as "nature," *hateva*.

Ad-nai: Then I peel back another layer, *Ad-nai* - the letters *Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey*, G-d's name as sourced in compassion. I remember that the world was conceived in love. G-d who is beyond the whole world is interested in me, and my life, and He is behind it all, so there must be a gift in this.

Atah: Once I realize G-d wants only my good, I sweeten the judgment, and I reach, *Atah*, "You."

I remember that the desire for a world came from the level of "You," a place of absolute essence, which transcends any name. This is G-d as He is, standing alone to Himself, desiring to connect.

There is no way that my challenge is a punishment or cruel. This is an opportunity to reach my *atah* - "my essence," the part of me that remembers what it is like to be bound up with the Essence of life. Now I have the opportunity to reveal that part of me, while embracing and confronting the challenges that are placed before me.

Baruch: Now the world doesn't feel so lonely. It feels like home. Because He is here. And, so, I have reached *baruch*, I feel "blessed."

(Note: While we looked at the blessing backwards, the blessing is said the other way around in order to draw down these components.)



People whom I love speak, but I cannot hear them. I need to peel back the layers of disconnect, until I feel they are blessing me with their words.

Often, when I think they are trying to make me feel judged or criticized, they are, in fact, trying to make me feel protected, cherished and cared for. When I can see that, I can hear the "heart message" of creation. I can hear their essence, the way G-d is enlivening them to be.

Try it: Peel back the layers until you reach the person him/herself. Listen for what their heart is really saying. Ask yourself: What is it that they actually want me to feel? Listen for the emotion.



My husband said in an exasperated tone looking at my swollen neck: "You got a spider bite! Why didn't you

put something on it?"

I felt judged. Why are you yelling at me? Calm down, I wanted to say.

I took a breath and did a quick translation through the stages of a blessing. From concealment, to judgment, to love, to essence, to blessed.

I listened for the emotion. And I found the true message, I am here to protect you.

I responded in line with the perspective of "blessed", not "world-concealment". "Thanks for taking such good care of me. I'll put some more clay on."

"You're welcome," Ariel said with a beaming smile. "I love you and I worry about you. I want everything to be good for you."



The best part is when you

speak to the *atah*, the essence of the person, they act as if the layers of concealment were never there. They act in accordance with that deepest part. There is just their essence, their love, and what they are trying to say. Just as for G-d, there is no world concealing Him. There is just Him.

People look visibly relieved when I respond to their essence, not the concealment. Because I understand them. That was what they were trying to say all along. They just didn't know how to say it, or the message got lost in the oceans between our two worlds.

So be brave. Be bold. Peel back the layers. You'll create a bridge of connection and discover a million new resources for feeling blessed in this world.

The Gift Of Forgiveness

by Yisroel Susskind

"Resentment is an acid that damages its container."

From my perspective as a family therapist, the greatest treasure in our Torah inheritance is the instruction to free ourselves of anger and resentment, especially in dealing with close relationships. Literally hundreds of sources in Jewish writings over the ages warn us that sustained anger is forbidden, destructive and ultimately irrational. The biblical injunction is found in Leviticus 19:17-19: *"You shall not hate your brother in your heart... You shall not take revenge, and you shall not bear a grudge."*

The Talmud goes on to note that "anyone who foregoes revenge merits that G-d forgives all of his sins." It further advises that G-d loves a person "who does not get angry... and who does not insist on his due measure." Maimonides goes further, requiring a person to "wipe the wrong from his heart entirely, without remembering it at all." A contemporary psychologist will paraphrase this as "The challenge of relinquishing anger presents an incredible opportunity for personal growth."

Does this mean that we should be passive victims in the face of abuse? Absolutely not! The very same biblical portion cited above tells us that we must verbally confront someone who has wronged us, in order to avoid hating him in our heart. We must do so directly and emphatically, but without hatred and without destroying the relationship. Similarly, we have an obligation to protect ourselves and not put ourselves in a vulnerable position where the offense may be repeated. At the same time, we need to do so without speaking hostilely or taking an action that goes beyond self-protection, with-

out vengeance, or withdrawing into a cold and judgmental contempt or prolonged silence.

Many counselors report a recurring tragic family scenario: Over the years, a person has maintained an angry distance from a relative (a parent, child or sibling). Suddenly the relative dies, and the person's love, long masked by a veneer of anger, erupts into awareness, and he is racked by regret and guilt. "How could I have wasted these years, when I could have...?"

Traditional Jewish philosophy in general, and Yom Kippur in particular, offer us some protection from such tragedy. The Torah says: 1) Do not believe that you cannot forgive... it is always your task to achieve forgiveness; 2) understand that anger and resentment are sustained by irrational thoughts... if you deeply examine your anger, you will identify and correct these cognitive distortions; 3) there is a negative force in the world that seeks to destroy closeness... that force is the source of those irrational thoughts; 4) in personal relationships, underneath anger there is hurt, fear and, most importantly, a need to love and be loved.

Consider reaching out to someone in a spirit of loving forgiveness. May it be that, in the merit of your doing so, G-d chooses to reach out to us with the ultimate gift, bringing in the era of Moshiach.



FIND YOUR INNER PEACE

Welcome to FridayLight, a campaign encouraging Jewish women and girls to illuminate the world with the light of Shabbat. By observing this special tradition each and every Friday night, you will not only bask in a personal moment of inner peace, but also connect to a global community of Jewish women who together hold the power to bring light to the world.

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Visit FridayLight.org to get candle lighting times for your location, share your feelings, invite a friend to join, and more.



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3,335 Years Since Sinai The “3 Phenomenon”

by Tzvi Freeman

This Shavuot marks 3,335 years of Torah. That’s 3,335 years since we stood together as a single nation at Mount Sinai, trembling in awe as we accepted the entire Torah for all generations.

In addition to the three 3s in 3335, Sivan, the month in which the Torah was given, is the third month of the year - Nissan being the first.

The “3 Phenomenon” is more than cute. Listen to the words of the Talmud:

Blessed is the Compassionate One who gave a three-fold Torah to a threefold nation through a third child, after three days of preparation, on the third month.

So here’s your set of threes:

1. The Written Torah has three parts: The Five Books of Moses, The Prophets, and Scriptures. (In Hebrew, we call that Tanach - Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.)

2. The Jewish people comprises Kohanim, Levites, and Israelites.

3. Moses, who brokered the Torah covenant for us, was a third child, after Miriam and Aaron.

4. Three days beforehand, G-d told Moses to “Prepare for the third day.”

5. And Sivan, as we said, is the third month.

Again, not just cute. There’s a vital connection between the number three and Torah. Indeed, Torah could be called “The Third Way.”

Consider one of the major principles of learning Torah—indeed - the principal arbiter by which we determine halachah. Here it is, as articulated in the Beraitha of Rabbi Yishmael:

Two verses contradict each other, until a third comes and arbitrates between them.

Meaning, the Torah is written in such a way that contradictions abound - but they are meaningful contradictions, awaiting you to resolve them by finding the third key in the text.

The Third Way

The rule doesn’t just apply to verses in the Written Torah, but in every Torah discussion. When we study Torah to determine what it is instructing us, we consider and give credence to every opinion of the sages. We don’t say, “I don’t like this one. This is not true.” We say, “Why does this sage say like this and this says the opposite? What is behind their argument?”

They are sages after all, and their every word is Torah - even when they disagree.

By appreciating that, we come to a deeper understanding. And that ultimately leads us to a third way, one that satisfies the truth of both opinions.

The Torah is written in such a way that contradictions abound - but they are meaningful contradictions, awaiting you to resolve them by finding the third key in the text.

By appreciating that, we come to a deeper understanding. And that ultimately leads us to a third way, one that satisfies the truth of both opinions.

Think of the whole of Jewish tradition: Progress is central to Jewish tradition - we want the world to change, and that’s what Torah entered the world to do.

Yet, at the same time, we have survived these 3,335 years due to Torah’s capacity to transcend change. The text of Torah never became brittle and dry. It remained ever-youthful and fruitful, as though it was given just that day.

Like it says, “These words that I command you today...” Comment the sages, “Every day, the Torah should be new.”

How does that work? It works because we don’t need to adapt Torah to time and place. We don’t say, “Hey guys, this is not working anymore. Let’s just chuck out some stuff, bring in the new, and go with the flow.” Torah doesn’t need to be changed. None of its limbs require amputation, neither does it need prosthetics.

Rather, our approach is to delve deeper, to ask, “Where in our Torah is the key to the current moment?”

And Torah being a divine teaching, as long as we search deep enough, we will always find a key to open the door of wisdom for every time and place.

Call it an “organic progress.” Living organisms such as algae, squirrels, and human beings, are great survivors because they adapt. But that doesn’t mean they stop being what they are. Rather, in new situations, their cells look into their DNA and ask, “Where in our repertoire of chromosomes and markers are the tools we need to make this situation work best for us?”

There’s a distinction, however. All those living beings have their limitations. Torah has proven itself virtually limitless.

Torah has unfolded its DNA for us in the nomadic world of Sinai, the agrarian settlement in Israel, when we were a mercantile class in Arabic civilization and Europe, and through the industrialization of the past 200 years. In each era, in literally every part of the world, we studied the same 53 weekly Torah portions with its 613 mitzvahs, applied our oral traditions of interpretation, and learned how Torah was to be applied in those times. The Torah simply became more and more fascinating as we went along.

Scientists test the veracity of a hypothesis by observing whether it applies under multiple conditions. The Torah has proven the ultimate veracity. Infinite depth in pragmatic application.

Always the same three-step process. The past says “We’ve always done it like this.” The present says, “But now the world has changed.” And the Torah provides a third way, saying, “You don’t need to change me. You must change yourselves to understand me better. Look deeper within me, deeper into how you always understood me, into what I always really meant. There you will find your path into the future, holding me yet tighter, yet closer to your hearts.”

The ultimate change is when the core never changes. Indeed, true change is the emergence of the true essence of things.

Three To The Core

We can go deeper than that. Torah is about the number three at its very core.

The first word of Genesis, •Continued on page 12

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What Makes A Marriage Tick?

by Shimon Posner

Newlyweds think the question doesn't apply to them and never will: they are the first to discover marriage and the final authorities on it too. After the honeymoon wears off the question looms large: and after the honeymoon is over anything can happen.

Marriages tick like clocks, and whether it is a wind-up or battery, there will be moments that they stop telling time and need some attention to get going again. When they stop telling time you may think they are broken: some people panic at this point and curse the day they bought this stupid, broken watch that breaks so easily. You have to have more faith in the manufacturer before you can be bothered with the watch.

Successful marriages have two qualities in common even though the marriages themselves are as diverse as the couples in them: acceptance and faith. The honeymoon ends when the spouse in question (always the other spouse!) does something thoroughly inexplicable and totally at odds with the logic of the judging spouse. Something that (try as they sincerely might) they cannot put themselves in that somebody else's shoes and come up with any justification for what they did. At this point they simply say, "I don't understand what s/he did, but who says I have to understand everything to live with it?" Couples who can't or won't reach that point throw the watch out with the battery.

Faith and acceptance. No matter what life brings, it will challenge, and a challenge by definition has no ready response. Trust in the manufacturer of life allows you to weather the storm and the drought — even when they follow each other in maddening succession.

Acceptance means that it's a good thing to put yourself

in each other's shoes, but not the only thing. Sometimes people don't want anyone else trying on their shoes.

Good marriages often lead to good lives. Acceptance can work well in any field of life, business partnerships, extended families, espionage. It is the quintessential Torah experience: Sinai. It was there that the Jews agreed to a relationship regardless of how much they agreed with G-d. "How could G-d..." does not have to be a prelude to ending a relationship: it can be a deepening of a relationship. "You may not be a perfectly understandable G-d in my mind, but you're still mine. So now if I'm not so perfect, I'm still Yours." A mitzvah doesn't need my stamp of approval; it just needs me.

But a marriage is doomed from the start if the very relationship itself is not hallowed, sanctified, holy. For why bother working through a tension if there will just be another one to follow and another one after that. The institution has to be not just a nice idea, not just an ideal, but a sacred, virtually inviolable, part of our lives. Otherwise it is a meaningless, wasted struggle for nothing. This - it's too in the guts to be called a 'core belief' - is something that our ancestor Abraham bequeathed to us.

So maybe faith and acceptance is essentially one thing: faithfulness. And maybe that is why after so many years, and so many disappointments, and things we simply can't understand, we still love this marriage and love this G-d of ours and His Torah. Maybe we don't say I love you often enough, maybe we don't say I'm sorry, maybe we forget a thank you, but we never forget each other. And for as long as there are a heaven and earth, as long as time itself is still being marked, we'll be ticking away.

Conversation Tips From Sinai

by Naftali Silberberg

What's the difference between speaking and nagging? Speech involves one individual speaking words and ideas, another individual hearing words and ideas. Nagging is defined as one person articulating words and thoughts, another person hearing - at best - grating static.

We usually have only one chance to communicate an important message. If we botch that opportunity, the odds of the recipient "getting" the message in a second go-round are greatly minimized. As such, substantial thought and planning should precede any conversation of significance.

In our nation's 3,305 year history, G-d has directly addressed us exactly once, when G-d descended upon Mount Sinai and gave ten commandments to an assembled nation. One communiqué that was intended to last more than three millennia. Without a doubt, the Creator of speech utilized this opportunity to its maximum, and assured that the words He uttered would enter one ear - and then stay put.

The Midrash says that the mighty voice that spoke the Ten Commandments had no echo. An echo occurs when sound waves encounter resistance, striking an impenetrable obstruction. G-d's voice had no echo because it penetrated. It pierced desert mountains and human minds and hearts - nothing and no one blocked the voice out.

In doing so, G-d also left

us a perfect prototype to follow on those occasions when we really want our words to be taken seriously.

Here are some conversation lessons I gleaned from the Great Communication:

Don't "btw" It

It wasn't sudden or unexpected. It wasn't "Oh, good that you're here. There's something I wanted to discuss..." or "What did you just do? We've got to have a talk right now!"

Three days in advance G-d relayed to the Israelites that He had an important message. When the time arrived, the nation was prepared, curious, and eager. The momentousness of the occasion had sunk in - and they were receptive.

Choose Your Timing

The Revelation took place "On the third day when it was becoming morning..." Considering that the Sinai event featured a spectacular "light and sound" show ("And all the people could see the sound and the flames"), would it not have been that more impressive and awe-inspiring had the event been scheduled for after dark?

Apparently G-d did not want to address a weary nation. He chose a moment when the mind is clear and most alert - and receptive.

Choose Your Setting

"When G-d gave the Torah, a bird did not chirp or take wing, an ox didn't low, angels didn't fly or sing G-d's praise, the sea didn't move..."

(Midrash). Contrary to popular conception, the Talmud tells us that G-d is not in the habit of performing miracles simply to impress. Every miracle has a purpose. So why did G-d hush all other voices aside for His own? Would His voice have been drowned out by all this common background noise? Or is the elimination of even minor distractions vital to creating an atmosphere wherein the listener is completely tuned in and receptive?

Use Both Sides of Your Mouth

The Midrash also tells us that G-d's voice serenaded the Israelites from all four directions, as well as from above and below. Before delivering your message, ask yourself: "Am I broadcasting this message from all directions? Or is there some part of me that is signaling a different message altogether?" If that is the case, have a conversation with yourself before attempting to convince another. If you have not internalized your own message, there's little chance that you will find the other person receptive.

Mince Words

The whole grandiose event centered around Ten Commandments, expressed in exactly 620 letters. It left room for the addressees to ponder the words and consider its multiple meanings and lessons. It gave room for thought instead of stifling it. Got the other person to think? He's already receptive!



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A STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE

by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

It is a moment of the very highest drama. The Israelites, a mere forty days after the greatest revelation in history, have made an idol: a Golden Calf. G-d threatens to destroy them.

Moses, exemplifying to the fullest degree the character of Israel as one who "wrestles with G-d and man," confronts both in turn. To G-d, he prays for mercy for the people. Coming down the mountain and facing Israel, he smashes the tablets, symbol of the Covenant. He grinds the calf to dust, mixes it with water, and makes the Israelites drink it. He commands the Levites to punish the wrongdoers. Then he re-ascends the mountain in a prolonged attempt to repair the shattered relationship between G-d and the people.

G-d accepts Moses' request and tells him to carve two new tablets of stone. At this point, however, Moses makes a strange appeal:

And Moses hurried and knelt to the ground and bowed, and he said, "If I have found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, may my L-rd go among us, because [ki] it is a stiff-necked people, and forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance."

The difficulty in the verse is self-evident. Moses cites as a reason for G-d remaining with the Israelites the very attribute that G-d had previously given for wishing to

abandon them:

"I have seen these people," the L-rd said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone so that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

"Nations will call on them to assimilate, but they will refuse. Mightier religions will urge them to convert, but they will resist. They will suffer humiliation, persecution, even torture and death because of the name they bear and the faith they profess, but they will stay true to the Covenant their ancestors made with You."

The fact that Rabbi Nissenbaum lived and died in the Warsaw ghetto gives added poignancy to his words...

How can Moses invoke the people's obstinacy as the very reason for G-d to maintain His presence among them,



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after G-d had used the very same reason to abandon them? What is the meaning of Moses' "because" - "may my L-rd go among us, because it is a stiff-necked people"?

The commentators offer a variety of interpretations. Rashi reads the word *ki* as "if" - "If they are stiff-necked, then forgive them." Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni read the word *ki* as "although" or "despite the fact that" (*af al pi*). Alternatively, suggests Ibn Ezra, the verse might be read, "[I admit that] it is a stiff-necked people - therefore forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance." These are straightforward readings, though they assign to the word *ki* a meaning it does not normally have.

There is, however, another and far more striking line of interpretation that can be traced across the centuries. In the 20th century it was given expression by Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum. The argument he attributed to Moses was this:

Almighty G-d, look upon this people with favor, because what is now their greatest vice will one day be their most heroic virtue. They are indeed an obstinate people... But just as now they are stiff-necked in their disobedience, so one day they will be equally stiff-necked in their loyalty. Nations will call on them to assimilate, but they will refuse. Mightier religions will urge them to convert, but they will resist. They will suffer humiliation, persecution, even torture and death because of the name they bear and the faith they profess, but they will stay true to the Covenant their ancestors made with You. They will go to their deaths saying *Ani ma'amin*, "I believe." This is a people awesome in its obstinacy - and though now it is their failing, there will be times far into the future when it will be their noblest strength!

The fact that Rabbi Nissenbaum lived and died in the Warsaw ghetto gives added poignancy to his words...

Many centuries earlier, a Midrash made essentially the same point:

There are three things which are undaunted: the dog among beasts, the rooster among birds, and Israel among the nations. R. Isaac ben Redifa said in the name of R. Ami: You might think that this is a negative attribute, but in fact it is praiseworthy, for it means: "Either be a Jew or prepare to be hanged."

Jews are stiff-necked, says Rabbi Ami, in the sense that they are ready to die for their faith. As Gersonides (Ralbag) explained in the 14th century, a stubborn people may be slow to acquire a faith, but once they have done so they never relinquish it.

We catch a glimpse of this extraordinary obstinacy in an episode - narrated by Josephus - one of the first recorded incidents of mass non-vio-



2023 CTeen Rally in Times Square

lent civil disobedience. It took place during the reign of the Roman emperor Caligula (37-41 CE). He had proposed placing a statue of himself in the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem, and had sent the military leader Petronius to carry out the task, if necessary by force.

This is how Josephus describes the encounter between Petronius and the Jewish population at Ptolemais (Acre):

There came ten thousand Jews to Petronius at Ptolemais to offer their petitions to him that he would not compel them to violate the law of their forefathers. "But if," they said, "you are wholly resolved to bring the statue and install it, then you must first kill us, and then do what you have resolved on. For while we are alive we cannot permit such things as are forbidden by our law..."

Then Petronius came to them (at Tiberius): "Will you then make war with Caesar, regardless of his great preparations for war and your own weakness?" They replied, "We will not by any means make war with Caesar, but we will die before we see our laws transgressed." Then they threw themselves down and stretched out their throats and said that they were ready to be slain... Thus they continued firm in their resolution and proposed themselves to die willingly rather than see the statue dedicated."

Faced with such heroic defiance on so large a scale, Petronius gave way and wrote to Caligula urging him, in Josephus' words, "not to drive so many, ten thousand of these men to distraction; that if he were to slay these men, he would be publicly cursed for all future ages."

Nor was this a unique episode. The rabbinic literature, together with the chronicles of the Middle Ages, are full of stories of martyrdom, of Jews willing to die rather than convert. Indeed, the very

concept of *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of G-d's name, came to be associated in the halachic literature with the willingness "to die rather than transgress." The rabbinic conclave at Lod (Lydda) in the 2nd century CE, which laid down the laws of martyrdom (including the three sins about which it was said that "one must die rather than transgress") may have been an attempt to limit, rather than encourage, the phenomenon. Of these many episodes, one stands out for its theological audacity. It was recorded by the Jewish historian Shlomo ibn Verga (15th to 16th centuries) and concerns the Spanish expulsion:

One of the boats was infested with the plague, and the captain of the boat put the passengers ashore at some uninhabited place... There was one Jew among them who struggled on afoot together with his wife and two children. The wife grew faint and died... The husband carried his children along until both he and they fainted from hunger. When he regained consciousness, he found that his two children had died.

In great grief he rose to his feet and said: "O Master of all the universe, You are doing a great deal that I might even desert my faith. But know You of a certainty that - even against the will of heaven - a Jew I am and a Jew I shall remain. And neither that which You have brought upon me nor that which You may yet bring upon me will be of any avail."

One is awestruck by such faith - such obstinate faith. Almost certainly it was this idea that lies behind a famous Talmudic passage about the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai:

And they stood under the mountain: R. Avdimi b. Chama b. Chasa said: This teaches that the Holy One •Continued on page 13

The Holiday of Shavuot

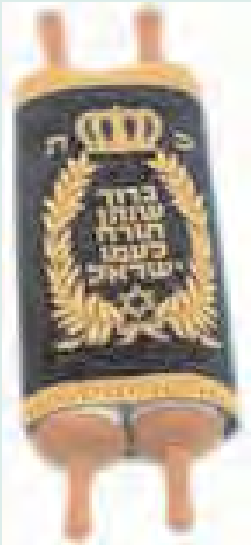
Shavuot is the second of the three major Jewish festivals, (the others are Passover and Sukkot) commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai 3330 years ago. Shavuot marks the beginning of the Jewish people as a nation. It is the time when G-d pronounced the Israelites as His “chosen people” and “a holy nation”.

The Torah was given seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt, and is considered the culmination of the “birth” of the Jewish people, which began at the exodus on Passover.

The word Shavuot means weeks, for it marks the completion of the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot during which the Jewish people were extremely eager, counted the days and prepared themselves for the giving of the Torah. During this time they cleansed themselves of the scars of slavery and became ready to enter into an eternal covenant with G-d with the giving of the Torah.

Now, too, as commanded in the Torah, we count the 49 days between the first day of Passover and the festival of Shavuot.

Shavuot also means “oaths”. The name indicates the oaths which G-d and Israel exchanged on the day of the giving of the Torah to remain faithful to each other forever.



The Torah is the very essence of the Jewish people. It is our way of life and the secret of our freedom, our nationhood and our existence. Even before the redemption from Egyptian bondage, G-d told Moses that He would redeem the Jewish people in order that they would receive the Torah. For there can be no true sovereignty for a Jew without Torah.

The Ten Commandments, The Torah, & the Mitzvot

At Mount Sinai, the entire Jewish nation, millions of men, women and children, witnessed the revelation of G-d as He spoke the words of the Ten Commandments. It is this event, the revelation of

Shavuot Holiday

Be There With Your Children

This year, on Friday, May 26, in synagogues across the world, the Jewish people will stand together once again to experience the Giving of the Torah with the reading of the Ten Commandments. Wherever you are, you are invited to take part - just as you did 3335 years ago.

Our Sages recount that when the Jewish people came to receive the Torah, G-d asked for guarantors. They offered every responsible party they could imagine, but G-d was not satisfied; until they declared, “Our children will be our guarantors!”

So make sure to bring along your guarantors - the children, right down to the newest sponsors - when you come to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments at the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot.

G-d Himself, without a mediator, that established for all of the people, the truth and eternity of the Torah.

After the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses ascended to the peak of Mount Sinai, and stayed there for forty days and nights. During this time, G-d taught him the entire Torah, as well as the principles of its interpretation for all time. He also gave him the two precious stone tablets, in which He engraved the Ten Commandments.

Upon his descent, Moses taught the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah was then taught and transmitted from generation to generation, until this very day.

What is the Torah?

The word “Torah” means instruction or guide. The Torah is composed of two parts: the Written Law and the Oral Law. The written Torah contains the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. Together with the Written Torah, Moses was also given the Oral Law, which explains and clarifies the Written law, much like a constitution and its bylaws. It was transmitted orally from generation to generation and eventually transcribed in the Talmud and Midrash.

The Torah & Its Commandments

The Torah relates how G-d created the universe, how the human race came into being from Adam and Eve, how our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob fared, how the Jewish people became a nation, chosen by G-d to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ through receiving and observing the Torah. The Torah contains 613 commandments, of which 248 are positive (what to do) and 365 are negative (what not to do). Masorah (Tradition) In addition to the precepts, commandments and prohibitions written in the Torah, G-d taught Moses more laws, which he was to memorize and orally convey to his successors, who in turn were to uphold this tradition from generation to generation. Many laws and customs have thus been practiced by us traditionally, as if they were actually written in the Torah.

The Prophets

Following the passing of Moses, as G-d promised, He revealed himself to individuals of great piety and spirituality. These are the prophets who recorded G-d’s instruction and messages. In all there are 19 books of the prophets. In all we had 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses whose prophecies were recorded for their everlasting importance.

The Holy Writings

These include the books like Psalms, Song of Songs, Ruth and Esther, 11 in all. All of which were written by one or another of our prophets by divine inspiration (“Ruach Hakodesh”)

The Revealed & Hidden Parts of the Torah

The Torah in its origin and essence is G-d’s infinite wisdom and will. And it is the infinite G-dly wisdom that is concentrated in the human logic and practical laws of the Torah addressing mundane worldly matters.

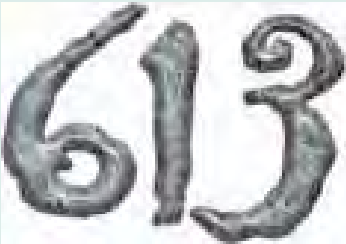
The Torah, as it deals with practical laws, is the revealed part of the Torah. The internal and mystical element of the Torah, focuses on the G-dly dimension of the Torah and mystical significance of the Mitzvos, which are the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidut. They are, as referred to in Jewish tradition, the neshama (the soul) and essence of the Torah. Both the hidden and revealed are inseparable parts of the Torah, received from Sinai and transmitted from generation to generation throughout our history.



The Mitzvot

There are 613 Divine commandments embracing every facet of our lives, both the duties to fellow man and the way to worship G-d. The positive commandments, numbering 248, equal the number of organs in the human body, implying that a person should serve the Creator with every part of his being.

The 365 negative commandments are equivalent to the number of blood vessels in the human body, indicating that when we guard ourselves from transgressing these prohibitions, as we might be



tempted to do by desires inherent in the blood, each one of our blood vessels, remains “unblemished” and pure. The negative commandments also equal the number of the 365 days of the year.

The Significance of Mitzvot

Mitzvah literally means commandment. However, it also means companionship (from the Aramaic tza-vta - companionship). Upon fulfilling a commandment one becomes united with G-d, who ordained that precept. For, regardless of the nature of the commandment, the fulfillment of G-d’s desire, creates a relationship between the creator and the human who executed it. By fulfilling His wish a person accomplishes an infinite purpose and is in G-d’s “company”.

This is the interpretation of our sages’ statement (Avos 4:2) “the reward of a mitzvah is the mitzvah”, indicating that the mitzvah itself is the greatest reward, for this sets us in a companionship with the eternal and infinite G-d. All other rewards are secondary in comparison to this great merit.

Shavuot Calendar

5783-2023

Times are for the Rochester area only

| | |
|--------|---|
| May 25 | Eruv Tavshillin Light the Yom Tov candles at 8:20 p.m. and recite blessings 1 & 2. Tikun Lail Shavuot during the night. |
| May 26 | Everyone should attend services in the morning & hear the reading of the Ten Commandments. Light the Shabbat & Yom Tov candles from a pre-existing flame* at 8:21 p.m. and recite blessings 3 & 2. |
| May 27 | Yizkor is recited during services. Shavuot ends at 9:32 p.m. |

*A pre-existing flame is a flame burning continuously since the onset of the Shabbat such as a pilot light, gas or candle flame.

BLESSINGS FOR CANDLE LIGHTING

1

Boruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sheh Ki-de-sho-nu Be-mitz-vo-sov Ve-tzi-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Shel Yom Tov.

2

Bo-ruch A-to Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom She-heh-che-yoh-nu Vi-ki-ye-mo-nu Ve-he-ge-o-nu Liz-man Ha-zeh.

3

Boruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sheh Ki-de-sha-nu Be-mitz-vo-sov Ve-tzi-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Shel Shabbat V'Shel Yom Tov.

Guide 5783 - 2023

From Our Tradition About The Torah & The Giving Of The Torah

Kesser - A Crown

The Ten Commandments consist of 620 letters, equaling the number of the 613 Mitzvos and the 7 Rabbinical Mitzvos (such as Chanukah, Purim, etc.).



620 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word “Kesser”- a crown.

Each mitzvah is considered a part of G-d’s crown. When fulfilling a mitzvah a person offers a crown to the Almighty.



the Jews joined together with a feeling of unity and harmony. This oneness was a necessary prerequisite to the giving of the Torah.

Sight and Sound

The Book of Exodus relates that when G-d gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai, “The people saw the voices.” “They saw what is ordinarily heard,” remark our sages, “and they heard what is ordinarily seen.”

As physical beings, we “see” physical reality. On the other hand, G-dliness and spirituality is only something that is “heard”—it can be discussed, perhaps even understood to some extent, but not experienced first hand.

But at the revelation at Sinai, we “saw what is ordinarily heard” – we experienced the Divine as an immediate, tangible reality. On the other hand, what is ordinarily “seen” – the material world – was something merely “heard”, to be accepted or rejected at will.



Shavuot Customs

Tikun Lail Shavuot

On the first night of Shavuot, it is customary to stay up all night and study Torah. Our sages relate that on the night of Shavuot the Jewish people went to sleep, in preparation to receiving of the Torah. At day break, when G-d appeared to give the Torah they were sleeping. In contrast, we now prepare ourselves by studying Torah all night, ready to “receive the Torah” once more when G-d again offers us the Torah with renewed vigor.

Dairy Foods & Blintzes

It is customary to eat dairy products on Shavuot. A number of reasons have been given for this custom. Among them: the Torah is compared to milk. Also on Shavuot, immediately after receiving the Torah, the Jewish people were required to eat kosher. The only foods available for immediate consumption were milk products.

The custom to eat cheese blintzes on Shavuot is based on a play of Hebrew words. The Hebrew word for cheese is Gevinah, reminding us of the “controversy” of the taller mountains, each claiming to be worthier than Sinai for the privilege of receiving the Torah. They were therefore called Gavnunim – “humps,” because of their conceit, while Sinai, small and humble, was chosen for its humility.

Ruth

In many synagogues the book of Ruth is read on the second day of Shavuot. There are several reasons for this custom: A) Shavuot is the birthday and yahrzeit



(day of passing) of King David, and the book of Ruth records his ancestry. Boaz and Ruth were King David’s great grandparents. B) The scenes of harvesting, described in the book of Ruth, are appropriate to the Festival of Harvest. C) Ruth was a sincere convert who embraced Judaism with all her heart. On Shavuot all Jews were converts having unconditionally accepted the Torah and all of its precepts.

Fruits, Flowers & Greens

It is customary on Shavuot to adorn the synagogue and home with fruits,



greens and flowers. The reason: Fruits- In the time of the Temple the first fruits of harvest were brought to the Temple beginning on Shavuot. Greens- Our Sages taught that on Shavuot judgment is rendered regarding the trees of the field. Flowers- Our Sages taught that although Mount Sinai was situated in a desert, in honor of the Torah, the desert bloomed and sprouted flowers.

Yizkor

On the second day of Shavuot the Yizkor memorial service is recited



Additional Names of Shavuot

Shavuot is also called Atzeret, meaning The Completion, because together with Passover it forms the completion of a unit. We gained our freedom on Passover in order to receive the Torah on Shavuot.

Another name for Shavuot is Yon Habikurim or the Day of the First Fruits. In an expression of thanks to G-d, beginning on Shavuot, each farmer in the Land of Israel brought to the Temple the first wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates that grew in his field.

Finally, Shavuot is also called Chag HaKatzir, the Festival of the Harvest, because wheat, the last of the grains to be ready to be cut, was harvested at this time of the year. On Shavuot two loaves of wheat bread from the new harvest were offered at the temple in Jerusalem.

Cheese Blintzes

Cheese blintzes are a special favorite on Shavuot when it is customary to eat a dairy meal. They are served hot, with sour cream or applesauce.

Batter:

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 1 Tbsp. sour cream
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 package vanilla sugar
- pinch of salt

Filling:

- 16 ounces cottage cheese
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 Tbsps. margarine or butter, melted
- 2 Tbsps. sugar
- 1/4 cup raisins (optional)
- 1/3 cup oil for frying

Batter: Combine eggs and milk. Add sour cream and blend well. Add flour gradually. Mix well until batter is smooth. Heat on a low flame a small amount of oil in an 8 inch frying pan, until hot but not smoking. Ladle a small amount of batter (approx. 1 ounce) into pan, tipping pan in all directions until batter covers the entire bottom of the pan. Fry one side until set and golden, (approx. 1 minute). Slip pancake out of pan and repeat until all batter is used. Add oil to pan as necessary.

Filling: In another bowl mix all ingredients for filling. Fill each pancake on golden side with 3 Tbsps. of filling. Fold in sides to center and roll until completely closed. Replace rolled blintzes in pan and fry for 2 minutes, turning once.

The Lowest Mountain

We all know that the Ten Commandments were given on Mount Sinai. Why Sinai? Say the Sages: Sinai is the lowest of all mountains, to show that humility is an essential prerequisite to receiving the Torah.

Why then on a mountain? Why not in a plain - or a valley? The Code of Jewish Law states at the very beginning: “Do not be embarrassed by mockery and ridicule.” For to receive the Torah you must be low; but to keep it, sometimes you must be a mountain.

Purpose Of The Torah

The Midrash relates that when G-d was about to give the Torah the heavenly angels argued that He should offer it to them. Upon G-d’s request Moses replied, “Have you been in Egypt? Do you have an evil inclination?

This implies that the Torah was given in order to elevate humanity as well as the world in general. Precisely for those who have an evil inclination and need to be refined, was the Torah given.

“Na’aseh V’Nishmah”

Our sages relate that when G-d was about to give the Torah, He offered it first to all of the nations of the world. After inquiring what was written in it, each of them found in the Torah something not agreeable to their system and way of life. When He offered the Torah to the Jewish people, without even asking what it contained, they immediately exclaimed, “We will do and listen.” This unconditional devotion and acceptance of G-d’s law, prompted G-d to give them the Torah.

A Triple Torah

Everything connected with the giving of the Torah was of a triple nature: the Torah consists of Chumash (the five books), Prophets, and the Holy Writing (TaNaCH). It was given to Israel, comprised of Kohanim (priests), Levites and Israelites, through Moses, the third child in the family, after three days of preparation, in the third month (Sivan).

Three Knots

The Zohar declares “three are interlocked together: Israel, the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He.”

49 Days Of Counting

Upon their leaving Egypt, when Moses related to the Jewish people that G-d will give them the Torah, the Jewish people were extremely eager and impatiently counted the days. Hence the Mitzvah of counting the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot.

As One Man, With One Heart

Our Sages relate, that when the Jews camped before Mount Sinai, they were “as one man, with one heart”. Many of their other journeys were characterized by differences of opinion and even strife. However, when they prepared to receive the Torah,



Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) - literally: "Master of the Good Name" (also known by the acronym "Besht") - was the Eastern-European 18th century founder of the Chassidic movement. The Baal Shem Tov was a leader who revolutionized Jewish thought and breathed new life into a fainting nation. The effects of his teachings continue to be felt today – both by his direct followers, known as Chassidim, and by countless others, who have been deeply impacted by his teachings and philosophy. The Besht's yahrzeit is on the first day of Shavuos.

Pushcart Prophet

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov was teaching his disciples when they were disturbed by a knock on the window shutter. A peasant, hauling a cart of tools, peered through the window. "Need any fixing?" he called. "Any shaky tables, broken chairs? A loose brick in the hearth, perhaps?"

"No, no," came the impatient reply from within, where all were eager to get on with the interrupted lesson. "Everything is in perfect condition. There's no need for any repairs."

"Indeed? Nothing to repair?" called the peasant. "That simply cannot be. Look well, and you're sure to find something that needs fixing!"

The Baal Shem Tov then addressed his students: "Many times I have taught you that nothing is by chance in G-d's world; that every event and experience is purposeful, that everything one sees or hears is a lesson for one's service of the Almighty. Think of the words we just heard from this simple peasant. How profoundly relevant they are to each and every one of us! Is everything really in perfect condition? At times it might seem so; but if one truly searches his heart and evaluates his life, is he not sure to find something that requires repair...?"

Undying Love

by Shoshannah Brombacher

A wealthy, but haughty, young merchant once came to visit Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.

People seeking an audience with the Baal Shem Tov usually came asking for guidance in their service of the Creator, or for advice and blessing in their material affairs. But this visitor lost no time in explaining that he had no special needs or particular problems which required any intervention or blessing. In fact, a rather lucrative business deal had brought him to a nearby town, and since it was so close, and having heard so many fanciful stories about the chassidic master, his curiosity led him to see for himself what all the talk was about.

"Well," said Baal Shem Tov, "if there's nothing you feel that I can help you with, perhaps you'd like to stay for a while and listen to a story?" The man agreed and so the Baal Shem Tov began:

"Once upon a time there were two childhood friends who were inseparable as they grew up together. However, when they become adults, their ways parted. One became wealthy and the other was very poor. In order to save his family from hunger, the poor man sought out his childhood friend and asked the rich man for help. The wealthy man did not hesitate. 'Didn't we always promise each other that we'd remain friends forever and share in everything that we have?' he reminded his friend, and offered him half of his fortune.

"As often happens with the

passing of time, the wheels of fortune reversed, and the one who had before been wealthy was now very poor, while the friend to whom he had earlier given half his fortune had become quite rich. Confident that he would now receive reciprocal help from his now wealthy friend, the poor man sought him out and explained his situation. But instead of helping him, the man with the newly acquired wealth refused to part with any of his fortune.

"Time again witnessed a reversal of fortune, so that the poor man became rich and the rich man again became poor, as each returned to their original situations. Now it happened again that the one who had before refused to part with any part of his fortune began to feel the hopeless despair of impoverishment, and went to his friend begging for forgiveness. The man who was now wealthy readily forgave his former childhood friend, but this time he insisted that the friend give him a written agreement that if he were ever in need again, the friend would share his blessings with him.

"Well, in the passing of time the two men again experienced reversals of fortune. But, true to form, the man who had signed the note refused to honor it, and his friend and his friend's family found themselves homeless and penniless.

"Years passed. The two men died. When they came before the heavenly court to

•Continued on page 12



The Dancing Jews

by Eliezer Steinman

The Baal Shem Tov was once asked: "Why is it that Chassidim burst into song and dance at the slightest provocation? Is this the behavior of a healthy, sane individual?"

The Baal Shem Tov responded with a story:

Once, a musician came to town – a musician of great but unknown talent. He stood on a street corner and began to play.

Those who stopped to listen could not tear themselves away, and soon a large crowd stood enthralled by the glorious music whose equal they had never heard. Before long they were moving to its rhythm, and the entire street was transformed into a dancing mass of humanity.

A deaf man walking by wondered: Has the world gone mad? Why are the townspeople jumping up and down, waving their arms and turning in circles in the middle of the street?

"Chassidim," concluded the Baal Shem Tov, "are moved by the melody that issues forth from every creature in G-d's creation. If this makes them appear mad to those with less sensitive ears, should they therefore cease to dance?"

River Crossing

by Yanki Tauber

In the years before he went public with his teachings and founded the Chassidic movement, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov would often wander about the countryside where the Jews of Eastern Europe lived in isolated hamlets or managed lonely wayside inns. Rabbi Israel would mingle with these Jews, drawing inspiration from their simple faith and dispensing words of encouragement in turn.

One day, the Baal Shem Tov arrived at a small cross-roads inn, many miles distant from the nearest Jewish community. He was warmly invited in, and served a refreshment by the innkeeper's family. "Where is your father?" he asked the children. "He's praying," they replied, and Rabbi Israel settled down to wait for his host.

An hour passed, then two. It was late afternoon by the time the innkeeper emerged from his room. After greeting his guest, he apologized for his long absence. "I am an ignorant Jew," he explained shamefacedly. "I can barely

pronounce the words from the prayerbook, and deciphering its instructions, written in vowel-less Hebrew, is beyond me. So I have no choice but to recite the entire prayerbook, from cover to cover, every day."

"Perhaps I can be of assistance to you," said Rabbi Israel. For the next hour, he sat with the innkeeper, patiently instructing him on the proper use of the prayerbook. On small slips of paper, Rabbi Israel wrote out, in simple Yiddish, "morning prayers," "special addition for Mondays and Thursdays," "grace after meals," "afternoon prayers," "evening prayers," "for Shabbat," "for Rosh Chodesh," "for Rosh Hashanah," and so on, and inserted them to mark the proper place in the innkeeper's prayerbook. "Thank you so much," said the innkeeper, when Rabbi Israel took leave to resume his journey. "Now I can begin to pray like a proper Jew."

But the innkeeper's joy was short-lived. Later that day,

•Continued on page 12

the prayerbook inexplicably fell from its shelf, and every last slip of paper inserted by the Baal Shem Tov fluttered from its pages. "Woe is me!" cried the innkeeper. "Who knows how many months will pass until a learned Jew will again come this way?" Determined not to let this opportunity to begin praying properly escape him, he grabbed the prayerbook and the notes and ran off in the direction that his guest had gone.

After several miles of brisk walking, he finally sighted the Baal Shem Tov far ahead. From the distance he saw Rabbi Israel reach a river. "How will he cross?" wondered the innkeeper, "This time of year, the water is too deep and swift to ford." He was about to shout a warning, when he saw Rabbi Israel spread his handkerchief on the water, step onto it as if it were the sturdiest of rafts, glide smoothly across, and disappear into the woods on the opposite bank.

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“Be Prepared”

by Yossy Goldman

Seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt, the Children of Israel stood at Mount Sinai. They were told there would be a great Revelation; the Almighty would descend and give them His holy Torah and the Jewish way of life.

But before they could receive the Torah, they required “*shloshet yemei hag-balah*”, three days of separation, - a period of physical and spiritual purification. After all, it's not every day that the Almighty Himself comes calling!

Every spiritual occasion requires preparation. Before we pray, we wash our hands. Before reciting the *Shema*, we cover our eyes to focus our minds and hearts on this moment of meditation. Before the silent devotion of the *Amidah*, we take three steps backwards. Before we per-

form most mitzvahs, we recite a blessing.

Likewise, in life. A wedding only takes a few hours but involves months of preparation. The excitement is mostly in the time preceding the actual simcha. Planning, making all the arrangements, deciding on everything from a venue to a menu... it's all part of the fun.

Delivering a baby takes a few hours (if you're lucky and there are no complications), but the process of childbirth began nine months earlier.

Essentially, every important life occasion involves preparation which becomes part of the experience itself. Without it, we would miss out on most of the anticipation, excitement, the adrenaline, and all the fun. The preparation is not only a prelude to the event but part and parcel of the actual experience. Without it, we would miss out on so much of the excitement.

I remember traveling from South Africa to New York and surprising my dear mother, of blessed memory. When she opened the door and saw me, she was totally stunned. It was indeed a great and happy surprise for her. But afterwards she asked me not to play that trick again. When I asked why not, she said that I had deprived her of weeks of eager anticipation.

So when it came to receiving the Torah from G-d at Mount Sinai, the 49 days of preparation, and particularly those three days of intense purification, were absolutely necessary.

And so it is in our own lives.

Take Shabbat for example. There are many who observe Shabbat, but they miss out on Erev Shabbat. Erev Shabbat refers to Friday, which is dedicated to preparing for the holy day. It's not only for shopping or baking challah and cooking up a storm. It's not only for getting the house and dinner ready. Erev Shabbat is also the time to prepare ourselves accordingly. Unlike so many of us who fall into Shabbat at the very last minute.

In fact, isn't it fascinating how no one is ready for Shabbat until the last minute?

It doesn't seem to matter whether Shabbat begins at 4 p.m. in the winter or at 8 p.m. in the summer. If it weren't for the proverbial “last minute,” no one would ever be ready!

Actually, I shouldn't say no one. There are many good people out there who get it right and do prepare in plenty of time for Shabbat.

Many years ago, in the old Jewish neighborhood of Yeoville, Johannesburg, we were invited for Friday night Shabbat dinner to one of the Emanuel families living there. The Emanuels were of German extraction and had played a significant role in shaping religious Jewry in the early days of Johannesburg, when the observant community was very small and nowhere as big and dynamic as it is today. Interestingly, our hosts asked us not only to come for dinner, but to please come to their home much earlier so that we could be there when the mother of the home would kindle the Shabbat candles.

I must tell you, it was a memorable experience! The Emanuel tradition was for the whole family to gather around the Shabbat table, dressed in their Shabbat finery, before the mother lit the Shabbat candles. They were all there to say “amen” to her blessing and watch as she offered her silent prayer for her family with her hands covering her eyes. It was such a beautiful contrast to the way I – and millions of others – rush into Shabbat with only moments to spare. Well over 40 years later, that image is still clear in my mind and continues to inspire me.

Whether it is Shabbat, a blessing, a mitzvah, or a joyous celebration, let's make an effort to do like the Boy Scouts: “be prepared!”

Mikvah Time

by Roni Leob Richter

I am writing these words from a different time.

The year is the same, the days are the same, but the months are different.

The time in which I exist today is neither solar nor truly lunar. It is a time quite individual - created by G-d especially for me.

Today is one cyclical month since my first immersion in the mikvah. This day, this time, is shared among only three: G-d, my husband and me. Today I am brought back to the very moment of recreation of self that took place for the first time on the day of my wedding.

In the excitement and anticipation that preceded the wedding, I had counted the days, checking them against G-d's calendar and my own body's. The rebirth for which I was preparing would take place in a home of sorts, under the *chuppah* (marriage canopy). My fiancé and I, often swamped with the details of wedding plans, finally began to focus more on the spiritual preparations we needed to make in order to escort the *Shechinah* (Divine presence) to our wedding and into our lives.

The most important part of this self-preparation was gaining the ability to slip ourselves into mikvah time. This step would prove monumental, for within the entire planning process there was nothing so full of potential and meaning for me as mikvah. Somehow I felt that only after I had experienced this immersion would I be able to understand the oneness that defines the relationship between husband and wife.

I walked to the mikvah on a beautiful Thursday, on a Rosh Chodesh (first of the month). I had spent the early part of the day preparing my body for immersion. Filing, trimming, scrubbing, soaking, combing and inspecting, I realized that this was the first time I had ever spent such concentrated time focused on my body. Yet, inherent in this moment of complete physical absorption was a palpably electric surge I felt run



through me as I connected, for the first time, the spiritual and physical aspects of myself.

As I walked up the hill to the mikvah, a song came into my head and I stopped short. The song was *Shir Hamaalot*, a Song of Ascents, originally sung by the Levites as they stood on the stairs that led to the Holy Temple. The words of the psalm speak of the Jews returning to Jerusalem as if in a dream, filled with laughter and singing. And here I was, a modern Jewish woman, feeling that the boundaries of time had blurred. I walked on smiling, simultaneously there at that moment and a part of all time.

I approached the mikvah alone, and as I reached it, I saw the smiling face of a friend who said, “You shouldn't have to go to the mikvah alone the first time.” My joy and nervousness blended with the comfort I took in the familiarity of her presence, and with a sense that I would never really be alone at the mikvah. I felt, as we entered, that there exists a collective *neshamah* (soul) shared by all Jews throughout history. The mikvah is the link of all those years, the container of that soul. The waters of the mikvah today come from the same waters from which mikvahs have been filled since the beginning of time. I imagined that by immersing myself in those waters, I could, in that silence under water, hear the voices of my ancestors.

Later, as the *shomeret* (mikvah attendant) held my shaking hands in hers, the power of this process filled me with tears. For when I was completely enveloped by those waters, I had realized that this birth was not of a new me alone. The still voice of the mikvah told me that this was the birth of “we.” From now on, mikvah time would be counted by two. From now on, this merging with the collective Jewish soul would enable me to merge with the other half of my own soul, this man I love.



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describing the creation of the world, is the letter *Bet* - the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. That's because this world as it is handed to us people is all about the number two. There's heaven and earth. We are body and soul.

We grapple with good and evil. We live, then we die.

Every word we speak has its opposite. Every object that exists could equally not exist. Every moment in time, every space, every sound, vision, and event can be reduced to a binary series of yes and no, is and is not. It's a binary world.

And that's how people attempt to survive within the world. There are those who choose heaven and those who choose earth. Those who choose the body and those who choose the soul. Those who embrace life and those who worship death.

Until Torah enters. Torah says that in the beginning, the same G-d who created heaven created earth. The same G-d who formed your body breathed within you a soul. The same G-d who gives life takes it away.

And He saw all that He created and it was good, very good. It is only that it is left up to us to find the inner truth, that brings all this into harmony. And that is the way of Torah, the third way.

Torah teaches that when we see evil and suffering in the world, it is not so that we should run from it, but heal it. The needs and passions of our bodies are not to be shunned, but sublimated and even sanctified through rituals, blessings, and moderation. Even the ego itself has its place, so that a person will take responsibility for the world in which we were placed "to serve and protect."

"Turn from evil and do
RIVER CROSSING
Continued from page 10

In a flash, the innkeeper was at the water's edge. Spreading his handkerchief on the water, he stepped onto it and glided across, and ran down the path Rabbi Israel had taken. "Wait, Rabbi!" he called. "Wait! You cannot go until you mark my prayer-book again! All your notes

good. Seek peace and chase after it." That is the way of Torah: Not to be satisfied with obliterating evil or doing good, but to seek peace between all that G-d has created, including the opposites within your own life.

It turns out that all these dualities of our world find a divine purpose in Torah. They're not opposites just because that's the way the world is. They serve as a kind of dialectic of infinity, pointing to an origin that transcends all binaries.

Eat, Drink & Celebrate

All this makes sense of an otherwise astonishing halachic ruling:

Shavuot, on our current calendar, falls on the sixth day of Sivan, the day on which the Torah was given. That's an awesome day to commemorate. How do you commemorate the day on which we stood at Mount Sinai as our entire reality was shaken from beneath us, as all the world came to a silent halt and we "saw the sounds and heard the sights" - lifted for a moment into an utterly spiritual dimension?

Intuitively, we would imagine such a day would have to be the most spiritual day of the year - a day to spend entirely in a synagogue, or perhaps out in a desert somewhere far from civilization, not even thinking about food, sleep and



have fallen out!"

Hearing the man calling out to him, Rabbi Israel stopped and turned, to see his recent host running toward him, clutching his prayer-book in one hand and the slips of paper in the other. "How did you get here?" asked Rabbi Israel in amazement. "How did you cross the river?"

"With my handkerchief,

other mundane needs.

But the Torah tells us just the opposite. Each time the Torah mentions the festival of Shavuot, it tells us it is "a festival for you." The traditional understanding of "for you" is that we must feast and physically enjoy the holiday.

Practically speaking, if a person had a frightening dream the night of Shavuot and asks his rabbi, "Am I allowed to fast? I mean, it will be painful for me to eat! I really need to fast." The rabbi must answer, "On any other holiday, even on Shabbat, I would tell you that according to some opinions you can fast. But on Shavuot, you must eat. The Torah says so."

Because that is what Torah is all about: Celebrating the ultimate spiritual experience in a physical way. Because it is all one.

Progressive Harmony

Ultimately, the goal of Torah is not to simply preserve tradition, but to create change and progress. It's only that real progress is essentially accumulative - not a rejection of past values, but a deeper understanding, an unfolding, a harmony. Until we achieve the ultimate harmony, a time when the entire occupation of the world will be divine wisdom, may that be sooner than we can imagine.

same as you," replied the simple Jew. "By the way, that's some trick you've got there. I never would've thought it could be done that way."

"I think," said the Baal Shem Tov slowly, "that G-d is extremely satisfied with your prayers as they are. Perhaps you should continue to pray just the way you have up until now..."



"The Wheel of Life" by Shoshannah Brombacher

UNDYING LOVE
Continued from page 10

account for their lives, the meanspiritedness of the selfish man's life weighed heavily against him and he was condemned to punishment, while the forever kind and forgiving friend was sent to his eternal reward in paradise. However, the good friend could not accept the destiny of his fellow's soul and petitioned the Heavenly court that, in spite of the selfish and shameful manner in which his friend had repeatedly treated him, he nonetheless still loved him and did not wish to see him suffer on his account.

"The heavenly tribunal was in an uproar," the Baal Shem Tov continued his tale. "This was certainly a very unusual case! It was decided that the only way to solve this case was to return both men to earth, so that the sinful man would have one last opportunity to atone for his egotistical behavior. And so, the sinful man was returned as a prideful wealthy merchant while the other was returned as a common street beggar.

"And so it came to pass that, one day, the righteous

beggar knocked on the door of the rich man begging for food. He had not eaten for a long time and was literally on the verge of starvation. But he was rudely and callously turned away. And so, the beggar died . . ."

At this point in the story, the rich man, with tears streaming down his face and a lump in his throat, could barely speak. "Yes... yesterday ... yesterday I turned a beggar away from my door . . . Later I heard that a beggar was found dead in the street. Was . . . was he the beggar in your story?"

No answer was necessary. By now the tears were flowing freely. The man was overcome with remorse and repentance. He was desperately anxious to know how or what he could do to make amends for his sin.

The Baal Shem Tov explained that his former friend, the beggar, had a widow and orphaned children. He was to go and give three-quarters of his fortune to that family and G-d would accept his sincere repentance.



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Two Remarkable Visits To The Ohel

by Sofya Sara Esther Tamarkin

I met Marina in a women's dancing class. We shared similar backgrounds. Marina was born in Moscow, and when she was 13 years old, her mother, Irena, was diagnosed with breast cancer. Irena passed away four years later when Marina was just 17.

Marina was deeply influenced by her mother's illness, feeling her own mortality and worrying about a possible genetic predisposition towards the illness that took her mother's life.

Marina married at 19 and three years later moved to the United States. Soon after immigrating to Philadelphia, she had a baby girl, whom she named Irena after her mother.

Life was challenging for my friend. Marina became a single mother when her daughter was just 4 years old, and a year later, little Irena was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. For years, Marina dedicated her every moment to helping her daughter navigate her formative years.

As Irena became more independent, Marina rebuilt her life and excelled in a career with a prominent pharmaceutical company. Just as life seemed to become stable, at the age of 46, Marina went for a regular checkup and was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer.

Marina called me right away to share her news.

During our conversation, Marina explained that all her tests were now pending results and that there was nothing else to do but to wait. Perhaps this was the most difficult of all tasks: to wait. I understood my friend's agony.

She knew that I would understand her yearning to pray. In her moment of darkness, Marina was feeling a deep connection to her heritage. I suggested that we make a trip to the Ohel in Queens, N.Y., the Rebbe's resting place.

I have gone to the Ohel many times in the past during the most challenging moments in my own life. This was the place where I allowed myself to be most vulnerable, allowing tears to freely roll down my face in deep prayer and contemplation.

Praying at the graves of the righteous has been a Jewish custom all throughout the ages. The Talmud teaches that Caleb, one of the spies sent to inspect the Holy Land,

Marina explained that all her tests were now pending results and that there was nothing else to do but to wait. Perhaps this was the most difficult of all tasks: to wait. I understood my friend's agony.

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left the rest of the slanderous group to visit the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. He prostrated himself before the cave in prayer, "My fathers, plead for mercy for me that I be saved from the evil designs of the spies" (Sotah 34b). In the merit of the righteous, whose grave is being visited, the dead ask for mercy for us in Heaven (Ta'anit 16a).

As we were driving to New York's Old Montefiore Cemetery, Marina and I spoke about the Rebbe's unconditional love, his teaching of Torah values and his unimaginable determination in the face of challenges, both personal and generational.

When we finally arrived at the Ohel, we saw people from all walks of life reading Psalms and praying. The Rebbe's resting place that he shares with his father-in-law-Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the Previous Rebbe - has become a space where people from all types of backgrounds beseech G-d for salvation and mercy.

Marina recalls: "It was terrifying to be diagnosed with the same illness that took my mother's life.

"At the Ohel, I lit a candle, placed a handwritten note on the grave of the Rebbe, and spent time reading Psalms and simply crying in prayer for my life.

"I will never forget that evening. It is an indescribable gift to have a place to come to when you are in desperate need to be heard. And I know I've been heard!

"When we were done, I felt both joy and hope, as well as a deep understanding that the world has a Creator who runs it in accordance to His plan. My visit to the Ohel gave me the resilience to go on, and strength to overcome fear, panic and pain."

That evening, before leaving the Ohel, Marina decided that regardless of the difficult road ahead, she would fight for her life with every fiber of her strength. Marina and I also committed to returning to the Rebbe's Ohel a year after this visit. We pledged that our second trip would be a celebration of Marina's victory over her illness.

Until then, Marina made a promise to herself that she would remain positive about her future and not succumb to fear. Her commitment to keep an optimistic mindset was something that the Rebbe was very passionate about.

The Rebbe was even sensitive to the effects of one's choice of words. For example, he refused to use the word "deadline," which warns of "death," and spoke instead of a "due date," which has an association of birth and the creation of new life. When he was asked about a hospital in Israel, the Rebbe insisted that the hospital change its name from the common Hebrew term "*bet cholim* - house of the ill" to "*bet refuah* - house of healing." The Rebbe knew that this seemingly subtle change of expression makes a tremendous difference to the attitude of the patient.

In the months that followed our Ohel visit, Marina had aggressive treatment that included chemotherapy, surgery, radiation and hormonal therapy. She lived through that challenging year as a true warrior, staying true to her commitment to think positively and have faith in the best possible outcome.

As she explains, "Eventually, that very difficult year came to an end. As promised, I was ready to make my gratitude trip to the Rebbe.

"During my most grueling procedures, I reminded myself that I promised I would return to the Ohel. I am grateful

beyond words that I was able to fulfill this promise.

"Just like the first time, Sofya and I drove to the Rebbe's Ohel. I was overwhelmed by emotions of gratitude. We once again lit the candles and were immersed in prayers.

"In my heart, I felt the Rebbe's love and that fueled me with a commitment to embrace each day with renewed positivity and meaning.

"I cherish those two Ohel visits: the one before I knew what lay ahead and the one after, when I was given another chance at life.

"I left the Ohel with a warm feeling of the Rebbe's

A STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE *Continued from page 7*

blessed be He, overturned the mountain above them like a barrel and said, "If you accept the Torah, it will be well. If not, this will be your burial place." Said Rava, Even so, they re-accepted the Torah in the days of Ahasuerus, for it is written, "the Jews confirmed and took upon them", meaning, "they confirmed what they had accepted before."

The meaning of this strange text seems to be this: At Sinai the Jewish people had no choice but to accept the Covenant. They had just been rescued from Egypt. G-d had divided the sea for them; He had sent them manna from heaven and water from the rock. Acceptance of a Covenant under such conditions cannot be called free. The real test of faith came when G-d was hidden.

Rava's quotation from the Book of Esther is pointed and precise. Megillat Esther does not contain the name of G-d. The rabbis suggested that the name Esther is an allusion to the phrase *haster astir et panai*, "I will surely hide My face." The book relates the first warrant for genocide against the Jewish people. That Jews remained Jews under such conditions was

support during a very challenging year. I am grateful to be alive."

About 10 years before her visit, Marina received a Jewish name, Rochel Brocha. She chose the name Rochel after our matriarch who was known for her selflessness, unconditional love and unwavering faith. My friend, Rochel, is an example of inner strength. She lives her life with gratitude, seeking out opportunities to do good, to make life better for others and to transform the world into a more wholesome environment.

Marina's journey reminds me that life is the greatest opportunity granted to us.

proof positive that they did indeed reaffirm the Covenant. Obstinate in their disbelief during much of the biblical era, they became obstinate in their belief ever afterwards. Faced with G-d's presence, they disobeyed Him. Confronted with His absence, they stayed faithful to Him. That is the paradox of the stiff-necked people.

Not by accident does the main narrative of the Book of Esther begin with the words "And Mordechai would not bow down." His refusal to make obeisance to Haman sets the story in motion. Mordechai too is obstinate - for there is one thing that is hard to do if you have a stiff neck, namely, bow down. At times, Jews found it hard to bow down to G-d - but they were certainly never willing to bow down to anything less. That is why, alone of all the many peoples who have entered the arena of history, Jews - even in exile, dispersed, and everywhere a minority - neither completely assimilated to the dominant culture nor converted to the majority faith.

"Forgive them because they are a stiff-necked people," said Moses, because the time will come when that stubbornness will be not a tragic failing but a noble and defiant loyalty. And so it came to be.



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OPEN EVENINGS



My daughters and I attended the Second Pesach Seder at Chabad. We're glad we made the choice to come to the Chabad Center, as it was, in the words of my older daughter, Susan, a memorable experience.

The facility, which we'd never been to before, was clean and bright, and conveniently and efficiently laid out and very comfortable. We came to the Chabad Center largely out of curiosity, sparked in part by our being smitten with watching a television series titled "Shtisel" named after a Haredi family in Israel. It's about the personal relationships of the members of the family and their interactions with others, and teaches that although the family members are Chassidic and dress and act somewhat differently from the rest of us in many ways they are in fact very much like us.

The Seder last night was interesting, most enjoyable and informative and I learned a lot about Pesach that I hadn't known before - thanks to your very helpful introduction and ongoing explanations. The Haggadah that was used was surprisingly modern in its approach and thoughtful suggestions. Our evening meal was delicious and the folks who prepared the food and the servers obviously went to a great deal of effort, time and care in preparing and serving us.

Above all, we appreciated how warm and friendly you were in greeting and accommodating us and making us feel welcome. I thank you again, wish you and your family a Sweet Pesach, and enclose a modest contribution as a token of our appreciation.

Arnold Chekow,
Susan Chekow Lusignan
& Laura Chekow



...I am happy to contribute to help you continue all the beautiful & holy work Chabad does to educate our Jewish community.

Miriam Weidenfeld



Thank you for everything you have done for our family - not just for the beautiful service you led but for all your help and support throughout Philip's illness. It meant so much to all of us that you officiated and I think that it was just what Philip would've liked - unpretentious - just as he was.

It was a great comfort to me that you knew Philip well... With much gratitude,

Ilene Wexler



Please accept the enclosed. I put money in my Chabad Pushka container before I light Shabbos candles. Thank you for all the good mitzvahs

you do in our community.

Judy Schulman



Enclosed please find a modest contribution, for all the good and great things you make happen. Sincerely,

Judy Wolfe



Thank you for everything you do! This donation is for Nurit's Memory. Stay safe & healthy. G-d Bless!!

Rachel Levy



We deeply appreciate everything you do!

Jeff & Lyn Springut



Thank you for helping keep my husband's memory alive. You are all very precious to my whole family. Love,

Ruthie Goldstein



I hope that this year brings you success in all ventures and hope that your mitzvoth are recognized for their sincerity. I am enclosing a small recognition of the works you do to enrich our community.

Marcia Nabut



...Things remain busy in Philadelphia. It is humbling to see the transitions as we move forward in our world - professionally, academically, personally. We remain grateful for our good fortune and opportunities. We took a family trip to Israel last June. Amazing, of course. After several Covid simchas, we are starting to plan in earnest for Charlie's Bar Mitzvah in January 2024. May there always be joy in our futures (and several catch up Mazel Tovs on your ongoing blessings). Indeed, it feels like the "Rochester Years" were a lifetime ago, but as is the case during these nostalgic and soul searching weeks, it is with great fondness that I think back on those times. Wishing everyone the best,

Jodi Foxx
UR Medical School '94
& Adam, Mia & Charlie

Enclosed is a contribution to help support all of the wonderful things Chabad does for our community. You bring light and warmth to all of us in the middle of a dark, cold Rochester winter. Best wishes!

Alexander, Michelle,
and Ed Sassaman



Hi, a quick update - our oldest daughter got married this summer by her Chabad Rabbi Greenberg (Muldenberg - Allentown, PA)... We enjoy the Monday night zoom class with you.

Barbara & Mark Chazen
UR Medical School '91



Thank you so much for your calendar. Wishing you a good year. Fondly,

Faye Herr



Thank you so very much for your time and guidance! The "My G-d" class was also excellent and very much appreciated... With all the best - Shalom, Most sincerely,

Carolyn Singer Bornstein



Please find enclosed my check... In a year filled with incredible pain, sadness and grief, still, somehow you and Chabad have managed to bring light into this world, and into our synagogue, and for that I know that we all are so very grateful. Loss on any level can be unbearable, and for me, personally, it almost always is, yet you, with your whole heart, have made it slightly less unbearable, and for some, like me, that is no small thing.

I hope that you, your families and Chabad continue to have much peace, love and joy. Thank you for bringing that into all of our lives every day and in all that you do for our community. Sincerely,

Adryann Strauss



Thank you for leading the weekly Torah portion discussions! All the best,

Igor Spivak



The enclosed check is a small donation to assist in your activities. I hope it will help you continue your many wonderful programs for our Jewish community. Sincerely,

Carol Shulman



Thanks so much for all that you do for the Community!

Cheryl & Bob Andler



I love receiving the Calendar every year. The art work is always so beautiful. Thank you so much.

Jennifer Litwak



Thank you for an enjoyable Seder this year. I always appreciate how much you all do for our community. Masha o.b.m. would be proud. She'll always be with us. Sincerely,

Michal Ventimiglia



It has been a difficult three years. I hope you are well. Wish I could have come to Rochester but know that my thoughts & prayers were with you and your family. B'Ezrat Hashem - I will see you next year during my 40th reunion. We are all good... Please use this small donation for your Passover Seder with the U of R students. Wishing you all the best and a happy Pesach.

Moshe Stein, UR '84



Thank you for your help through a difficult time. Our discussions were helpful & your perspective greatly appreciated! The Tanakh was

illuminating in many ways and helped guide me further in understanding a little bit more clearly my heritage, Hashem's plan for my life, and my place in His creation. May Hashem bless you & your good works for the community here in Rochester, and your family & loved ones. Warmly,

Shlomo Arie Yitzak



Thank you for your thoughtful attention - always! With love & gratitude,

Marina & Yuri
Novozhenets



Thank you for always inviting me to lunch when I am in Rochester. I sincerely appreciate your warm hospitality! Warmly,

Toby Friedman



...It seems like every year at Rosh Hashonah & Yom Kippur, we are on "The Road". We have attended services in Hawaii, Stamford CT, Glen Cove NY, Cleveland OH etc, etc, etc., yet somehow the warmth & welcoming of your Congregation sticks in our minds. Thank you. Also, I sincerely want to thank you for continuing to send me your "Chabad Times", which I look forward to receiving & reading. It touches my heart! Please consider sending regular copies to my children... TODA!

Brian Green



Love Your Fellow

"Love your fellow as yourself" -Leviticus.

"This is a major principle of the Torah" - Rabbi Akiva.

"A soul enters this world for seventy or eighty years just to do a favor for another" -the Baal Shem Tov.

Perhaps nothing has been as detrimental to the Jewish people as the modern idea that Judaism is just a religion. We are much more than a religion; we are a single soul radiating into many bodies, bonding them as one.

A healthy body is one where every part works in harmony. A healthy Jewish people is one big, caring family where each individual loves the other like his or her own self. Where one Jew faces rough times and the others hold his hands. Where one meets good fortune and all of us celebrate. Where no one is labeled or alienated for his or her beliefs, behaviors or background. Where each runs to do an act of kindness for the other, and shuts his eyes and ears to the other's shame.

"Love for those closest to home nurtures love for the extended family of humanity, and from there, love for all G-d's creatures. But if love doesn't start at home, from where will it come?

Practically speaking . . .

1. Start each morning by saying, "I accept upon myself the mitzvah to love my fellow Jew like myself."
2. Follow Hillel's golden rule: "If you wouldn't like it done to you, don't do it to the other guy."
3. Speak only good about fellow Jews. Don't even listen to a bad word, unless some real benefit will come through your conversation.
4. Care for your fellow Jew's property and possessions as you care for your own.
5. Always be on the lookout for opportunities to do another Jew a favor.
6. Bring Jewish people together. Tear down the false barriers of age, affiliation and ethnicity.
7. Invite other Jews to share in the most precious thing we have, our Torah and mitzvahs.



Thank you...

...for giving our kids such a wonderful summer! All your hard work, energy and enthusiasm made camp so enjoyable so that our kids looked forward to coming every day. Your genuine warmth and care for the campers was really felt. We feel so lucky that our kids got to have such terrific counselors!

- **Shlomo & Adina Burger**
...for a wonderful summer full of fun!

- **Annaelle Geller**
...my children had an awesome summer thanks to you.

- **Devora Scutaru**
for the great summer!

...for giving Gabi such a great summer!

- **Suzanne & Tom Triebwasser**
we appreciated all of your hard work to make this the best summer ever!

- **Sophie & Gracie Zour**
...for doing a great job!!!

- **Aviel & Zemirah Eidelman**
...for an incredible summer!

- **Mayer & Chava Katz**
...for helping Paysach and Michal have such a great camp experience this year!!

- **Yoni & Miriam Polatoff**
...for making camp such a fun place!

- **Eliezer & Fradel Lehrer**
...for all the attention you have given to Efraim. He had an

amazing summer at camp!

- **Sarah Gestetner**
...for all the love and care you gave Miriam this summer!!! She had the best time and that is really thanks to you guys. we are so grateful!

- **Michal Goldstein**
...for giving Esther Rochel another great Summer and amazing memories. She always talks about all the activities down to each detail. We really appreciate all the love and devotion each day.

- **Yisroel & Bekka Levinson**
...for taking such good care of Tamar this summer. She had an awesome time!

- **Shoshana Noble**
...for all your hard work! Have a good rest of the summer!

- **Talya Brea**
...for helping make this summer so much fun for Menachem! He really loved going to camp and we know that you had a lot to do with that! Tizkeh L'Mitzvos!

- **The Caro's**
...Zysh had an amazing summer! He called you the best counselor and was very sad to say "goodbye". He really hopes to stay in touch. Thank you so much for your hard work and dedication.

- **The Akkerman Family**
...for an amazing summer!!!

- **Shira Twersky**



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