

# THE CHABAD TIMES

A Publication of Chabad Lubavitch of Rochester



## CHANUKAH CELEBRATION



**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14**

**4:00 pm - Chanukah Party @ The Wintergarden**

**Featuring**

**The Rochester Boys Choir**

**Plus "A Thread of Kindness" Puppet Show**

**Hot Latkes, Delicious Donuts, Crafts & Chocolate Gelt Drop!**

**5:15 pm - Grand Menorah Lighting**

**Washington Square Park**

# Rochester Women ROC with Honey Cake Bake & Tambourine Decorating



# Never Say Never!

Shalom Uveracha! One of the more famous questions asked about Chanukah is the following: We celebrate eight days of Chanukah because the oil that should have lasted for one day miraculously lasted for eight days. But if we do the math we notice that the miracle is really for seven days since one day of the oil burning is perfectly normal – so why do we celebrate for eight days, shouldn't the Holiday just be for seven days? This question was first asked by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575), author of the Shulchan Aruch, and since then literally hundreds of answers have been suggested.

One of the answers given is that true, the “miracle burning” was just for seven days, but finding the pure oil – against the odds – was also a miracle. So we celebrate one day for the miracle of finding the oil and seven days for the “miracle burning” of the oil.

A variation to this answer is that the miracle was that the Jews even bothered to search for pure oil. Imagine the scene facing the Maccabees as they finally drive the Greeks from Jerusalem and now come to rededicate the Holy Temple. The Holy Temple has been desecrated, it is a mess. The Greeks have systematically defiled the entire oil supply for the Menorah. So why do the Maccabees search for pure oil? Why don't they face reality and recognize the futility of hoping that the methodical Greeks had overlooked some of the oil? Give up, forget it.

But no. We search. Maybe, maybe there is still some pure oil left. We don't give up even when it's hopeless, even when the odds against us are stacked up to the sky. This is the miracle of the Jew and Jewish survival - and this is

worth celebrating.

We all recently witnessed the miracle of the return of the hostages held in Gaza for two very long years. Although they suffered terribly they never gave up hope. In fact, several of the hostages recount how their faith in G-d got even deeper.

What is so awesomely inspiring is how the hostages managed to maintain their humanity, their Jewishness and their will to live in a world gone crazy with barbaric cruelty. “Never, never, never give up!” was their motto. It makes no sense – but since when did Jewish resilience and survival ever make sense?

And now that, thank G-d, it is all over they will begin to rebuild their lives. In spite of what they have seen with their own eyes they do not give up on their hope for life, their hope for Jewishness and their hope for humanity.

The Maccabees and the hostages had an overwhelmingly strong case to just give up, forget it. But they didn't. This is the miracle of the Jew and Jewish survival, and this is worth celebrating.

“*Bayomim hoheim, bizman hazeh*” In those days and in our days - the miracle continues. May G-d grant us the strength to continue forward in spite of the odds, and may we soon see a world without odds – the world of Moshiach.

Wishing you all a Bright, Inspiring & Soulful Chanukah!

*Chabad Lubavitch of Rochester*



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# THE MENORAH'S TRANSPARENCY

... and what the Rebbe's insight taught me about writer's block

by Rochel Holzkenner

*At 6:04 a.m. I admitted defeat. I could squeeze juice out of a rock sooner than I could cough out a string of words for my article. For two black hours I'd shifted my gaze from book to computer screen before emailing my editor: "Sorry, no Parshah (Torah portion) article this week." Why did I ever think I could write?!*

*The words in the book were informative but not inviting. I circled around them but couldn't find an entrance passage, and my fingers ran dry. In the Torah portion I saw a story of an ancient hero, but I couldn't see the story of me.*

*My editor's response came at 9 a.m. My resignation was not accepted as easily as I'd hoped.*

*"How about something on Chanukah?"*

*I prepared to reopen the book, to once again face alienation. This time I read the Rebbe talking about the Menorah. And about writer's block.*

Every Jewish action, has a shell and a soul. The shell is the instruction to fulfill: what to do, where and when to do it. Slice two challahs on Shab-

bat, in your home, and say a blessing. Flip the prayer book to page 119 and recite these words in the afternoon. But if you could crack open the shell of the rituals, you'd see an unadulterated soul. The Shabbat meal would look like spiritually charged light rays bouncing into the home. Turn any mitzvah inside out and you'll see a light - an active and energetic light that gravitates towards darkness and looks to shine in every black corner.

**The Menorah was born from struggle and commitment. A challenge is like a thick and opaque shell that seems devoid of hope and of light.**

**But ironically, it is the commitment in the face of challenge that generates a very tender, powerful light that will paint the shell transparent, and the shell will mirror the light within it.**

Turn any mitzvah inside out and you'd see . . . a spiritual Menorah - streams of light. Thus the Mitzvah of lighting the physical Menorah has the



gift of transparency, her shell is her soul - her physical qualities merely project her metaphysical existence.

We connect to G-d by kindling a flame. While we increase the Menorah's flames each night, the metaphysical light that is created also gains energy and potency. The Menorah wants to be lit at night, just like her inner light that has an affinity towards darkness and always seeks to illuminate where there is no other light available. The Menorah has no façade - its essence is exposed through its ritual.

Kindling the Chanukah Menorah is a magnificent gift that we received

## MUST I GIVE GIFTS EVERY NIGHT OF CHANUKAH?

by Yehuda Shurpin

### Question:

I heard that what makes Chanukah different and special is that you get gifts for eight nights. Is that true? Am I really obligated to give a gift every night?

### Reply:

Actually, there is no obligation to give gifts at all. The mitzvah of Chanukah is to light the Menorah each night. We do this to commem-

orate the miraculous victory of the Maccabees over the Greek-Syrian armies, as well as celebrate the great miracle that G-d performed for the Jews when they rededicated the Holy Temple. There was only one flask of pure olive oil to be found, and miraculously the oil burned for eight days.

But yes, in addition to the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah, there is a custom to give "Chanukah gelt," a gift of money, especially to children. Now, should this money be dispensed only once during the holiday, or on a daily basis?

For the most part, the widespread tradition was to give Chanukah gelt once during Chanukah. However, the Rebbe proposed that Chanukah gelt be given to the children every night of Chanukah, even if the gifts are small. Here's why:

An underlying theme of Chanukah (and Chanukah gelt) is Jewish education.

One of the reasons why the small band of Maccabees rose up against the mighty Greek-Syrian forces is that the Greeks were determined to stamp out Judaism by prohibiting the teaching of Torah to the chil-

from G-d after fighting for our freedom from Greek dominion. The Greek imperialists were vicious in their attempts to wipe out the Jewish spirit and silence us into submission. While they forbade the study of Torah under the threat of death, many Jews ignored this threat and risked their lives in order to hold onto the Torah and G-d's commandments.

This type of sacrifice and commitment is kind of like hanging onto a rope that is shaking violently. It takes enormous focus and a very tight grip to keep hanging. With no external support, all of the strength needs to be internally generated. The Jews who stood up for their beliefs in spite of the Greek dominion had to wring out every last ounce of strength and commitment to fight for their freedom. They pressed themselves to pull out any small drops of internal oil to fuel their battle.

Well, those drops were quite pre-

cious to G-d. They fueled a miraculous victory against the overwhelming Greek army. So proud was G-d that He too provided a few drops of oil that fueled light for many more days than was expected.

The Menorah was born from struggle and commitment. A challenge is like a thick and opaque shell that seems devoid of hope and of light. But ironically, it is the commitment in the face of challenge that generates a very tender, powerful light that will paint the shell transparent, and the shell will mirror the light within it.

On the Shabbat of Chanukah we read from the Torah the story of Joseph's rise to power - this because the story of Chanukah is also the story of Joseph.

"It came to pass at the end of two full years . . ." when Pharaoh had his fateful dreams.

Joseph was languishing in prison. The fittest were surviving and abus-

ing the righteous, and the light was nowhere to be seen. But Joseph remained committed to light. And then one day the light jumped alive.

In one day Joseph went from being a prisoner to being second to the King of Egypt. Like a coil that's pulled tightly and then released, the power that Joseph exerted in his dark prison cell projected him all the way to the king's inner chambers.

*In my own small way I know that dark cell too well. When all I see are the letters and words, but I can't hear the music behind them. And the light that pulls the lone details into a luminous tapestry is obscured.*

*But here is the Rebbe's take: if you keep knocking at the door of the shell, you may extract light that is so deep that it will turn the shell itself transparent.*

*You may extract a Menorah.*

dren and forcing Hellenism upon the Jewish population. Once the Maccabees were victorious and defeated the Greeks, it was necessary to renew and redouble the efforts in Jewish education. In fact, the Hebrew word Chanukah shares the same root as chinuch, "education." In fact, the Hebrew word Chanukah shares the same root as chinuch, "education."

One of the components of education is providing pupils, especially those who are less inclined, with rewards and incentives for their learning. Thus, during Chanukah, it is customary to give Chanukah gelt to children as an incentive to increase in their Torah and Mitzvot.

However, the connection between education, Chanukah and Chanukah gelt goes much deeper.

Infusing the Materialism with Spirituality

When the Greeks occupied Israel

and entered the Holy Temple, part of their intention was to eradicate the concept of holiness and spirituality and place the emphasis on materiality and hedonism. So rather than simply destroy the holy oil, they defiled it, symbolizing their attempt to "infuse Greek ideals" into the lives - and very possessions - of the Jewish people.

Therefore, Chanukah represents our rejection of materiality for its own sake. The best way to highlight the victory of the Maccabees and how the Jewish ideals triumphed is to impart the lesson that our material possessions, and especially our extra luxuries, are meant to be infused with a higher spiritual purpose.

Thus, when we give Chanukah gelt, we both celebrate Chanukah and teach the recipients to channel their material possessions toward spiritual ends. This is accomplished by teaching them the importance of

giving at least 10% (*maaser*) of the money to charity, as well as using the remainder for wholesome purposes.

Based on the above, the Rebbe emphasized that especially in these times, when the challenges of education and materialism are so great, this important lesson of Chanukah should not be limited to just one night but rather every night (except for Shabbat, when it can be given either before or after Shabbat). However, since the prevalent custom was to only give Chanukah gelt once, usually on the fourth or fifth night, and since if one gets the same reward repetitively it loses its educational value, the Rebbe proposed giving a larger amount on the fourth or fifth night.



# The Hostage's Tefillin Wrapped Round The World

by Yehudis Litvak

Speaking for the first time at Hostages Square in Tel Aviv, recently released hostage Bar Kupershtein extended a moving invitation to the gathered:

"I want to invite everyone this Friday, at 10 o'clock in the morning. I want to organize a mass Tefillin laying, where you all put them on together with me. Fulfill my dream with me! My dream was to lay Tefillin in captivity. And we'll do it for the freedom of our brothers still held captive."

With this invitation, Bar is expanding the Tefillin initiative begun by his mother, Julie Kupershtein, while he was held captive by terrorists in Gaza. Throughout the two-year-long ordeal, Julie has been inspiring people worldwide with her steadfast faith and urging Jewish men to lay Tefillin in the merit of Bar and other hostages.

Julie did not choose the spotlight. She is naturally a private person, busy with taking care of her disabled husband, a paramedic who was injured in a car accident, and her five children. When her son Bar was kidnapped by Palestinians on Oct. 7, 2023, she chose not to get involved in politics or the media. Instead, she threw herself into prayers and Mitzvot in his merit.

As a result of this decision, Julie received a shocking phone call. Speaking in a heavily accented Hebrew, the caller identified himself as a Hamas terrorist holding her son. The terrorist said, "You families of hostages have a lot of power, but you are not doing anything!"

Julie objected, "You don't know what I do or don't do. I pray, and I do things that create merits for Bar and other hostages."

The terrorist threatened that if she wanted to see her son ever again, she must get involved in protesting, criticizing Israel internationally and attempting to topple the Israeli



Julie Kupershtein shares Bar's Tefillin



Bar Kupershtein speaks at Hostages Square

One of Julie's requests to her fellow Jews was that Bar's Tefillin remain in continuous use while Bar was unable to use them himself.

In today's age of social media, Julie's request instantly spread and received a tremendous response. Julie chose to entrust the Tefillin to Tzvika Graiver, an attorney and entrepreneur from Bat Yam, just south of Tel Aviv.

Graiver did not have a personal connection with the Kupershtein family. However, shortly before he heard about Julie's request, he embarked on his own Tefillin initiative, putting up a Tefillin stand on the beach near his home, where he used his own pair to encourage others to do the mitzvah. "I put on Tefillin every day," Graiver says. "That's one of my favorite things to do." He wanted to share the mitzvah with other Jews and found that people appreciated the opportunity.

When Graiver offered to use Bar's Tefillin for his stand, which he even took with him on his business travels, Julie Kupershtein accepted the offer. Starting in May 2024, Bar's Tefillin embarked on a journey. The entire Graiver family got involved, including his young daughters, who prayed for Bar every day and asked for Bar to come back for their birthday present.

Graiver would set up a small desk with Bar's picture on it and tell people about Bar's heroism on Oct. 7. As a security guard, Bar could have escaped the Nova site. Instead, he chose to stay and use his paramedic training to treat the wounded and save lives.

One of the most poignant moments for Graiver was an encounter on the beach when he offered a young passerby to put on Tefillin. At first, the young man wasn't interested, but when Graiver explained that the Tefillin belonged to a hostage who was captured at the Nova festival while trying to save lives, the young man agreed.

"I wrapped it on him," recalls Graiver. "He didn't know how to do it. He took a tallit, put it on his head and faced the sea." The young man spent a long time praying. When he finished, he told Graiver that he himself was a Nova survivor.

When Graiver was himself called up to the army as a re-

servist, he took Bar's Tefillin with him and gave his fellow reservists opportunities to don them. Graiver's experience in Gaza strengthened his dedication to the Tefillin initiative. "I saw the tunnels, and I knew that the only way Bar was going to come back would be with G-d's help and the prayers of the Jewish people," he says.

When Graiver traveled to the United States, Canada, Mexico and Greece on business, he contacted the local Chabad rabbis, who immediately volunteered to help. While Graiver was busy with his work, Chabad rabbis "had my back," he says. "I knew that the Tefillin were in the best hands they could be."

In Miami, a local Chabad rabbi, with the family's permission, passed the pair of Tefillin all around Florida, with other Chabad rabbis driving for hours to pick it up and return it. The Kupershtein family was happy to see the initiative spreading far and wide with Chabad's involvement.

When Rabbi Mendy Kaminker of Chabad of Hackensack, N.J., heard about the initiative, he brought Bar's Tefillin to his community and posted on social media, inviting people to lay Bar's Tefillin. The response was incredible, he says. "People were crying and praying for the hostages. Everyone wanted to give Bar a hug, but because they couldn't, they performed a mitzvah that was like a hug. When you hold a holy object that belongs to a hostage, it's a whole new level of connection. The power of a mitzvah removes all barriers, all physical limitations."

Jews from all walks of life used the opportunity to lay Bar's Tefillin. Some use Tefillin regularly, while others hadn't done so in decades. A teenage boy put on Tefillin for the first time in his life. He was very happy to do something for the hostages.

Chabad of Hackensack's staff created a video for the Ku-

pershtein family, in which Jews wearing Bar's Tefillin conveyed their prayers and support. An older man with tears in his eyes said, "I'm so honored to be putting it on today for Bar. May he have strength, may you have strength, and may he come home very soon!" A middle-aged woman standing next to her husband, who was wearing Bar's Tefillin, said, "I just want you to know that we have Bar's picture on our door. We are thinking of him, we are praying for him, and he should only come home healthy and safe very soon!"

When Tzvika Graiver traveled to Georgia, he contacted Rabbi Mendy Gurary of Chabad Israeli Center in Atlanta, who was excited to bring this opportunity to every Chabad House in the state. "Our community is mostly Israeli," says Rabbi Gurary. "For them to wear a hostage's Tefillin and feel like they're doing something for the hostages while they're living in America, and making an impact on the hostages' return was very, very powerful. They really felt like they were holding something holy, something that connects them to the pain and to the hope that the hostages would return."

For Tzvika Graiver, seeing Bar come home was the most satisfying experience of his life. The Graiver family went to visit him. "It was like meeting our son, our brother, a beautiful and exciting moment," says Graiver. His 4-year-old daughter was the first to recognize Bar from the picture on the Tefillin stands. Graiver returned Bar's Tefillin to him in another emotional reunion.

Graiver feels grateful to G-d for his role in Bar's story. "I feel that I was chosen for a very important mission," he says. "The Jewish people came together for this initiative and helped to bring Bar home. It shows that if the Jewish people want something and we gather together, nothing can stop us."



## THE HOSTAGES ARE BACK. NOW WHAT?

by Aron Moss

### Question:

For two years, we prayed for the hostages to be released. We prayed at shul, at home, with our children at bedtime. We said Psalms, cried, begged, and pleaded. Now, thank G-d, all the living hostages have come home and we couldn't be happier. The posters are being taken down, the urgency is gone. But I feel strangely empty. We put so much heart into this. Now what? I am overjoyed, but also a little lost.

### Answer:

We owe it to the hostages that their story should change us forever. We can't go back to who we were before. Whatever we did until now must not end. On the contrary, we need to go bigger.

We loved the hostages as our own brothers and sisters. That love must continue and extend to all our brothers and sisters. We cared for people we never met. Let's keep that going, and also care more for the people we have met.

We prayed for the hostages to be freed. Our prayers were answered. Now our prayers need to go to the next level. Not just for the remaining hostages to go free, but for the whole world to go free. Not just for peace in the Middle East, but peace everywhere. Not just an end to this war, but an end to all wars. Not just no more tragic death, but no more death at all.

Until Moshiach comes, we are all still captives - captives of a world that does not yet know its own light. We cannot rest until that light is revealed.

Sounds idealistic? Maybe. But after what we have witnessed, we know the impossible can happen.

We saw life return from the edge. We saw miracles unfold before our eyes.



The resurrection of the dead is no longer only a prophecy. We watched it happen. We saw Evyatar David, the hostage forced to dig his own grave, walk to freedom on his own two feet.

And the return of Jews to their G-d is not just a dream, it is reality. We saw Rom Braslavsky come home after two years in hell, and the first

thing he asked for was Tefillin. Souls have come back to their source. We have seen it: redemption is possible and miracles are real.

So do not stop praying; just shift your prayers. The same heart that cried for the hostages can now cry for all who are still captive: the lost souls, the disconnected Jews, the world still waiting to wake up.

That love and concern for people we never met was not a reaction to tragedy. It was a revelation of who we truly are at our core. We need to hold onto it. We really are one.

Keep doing good. Keep loving. Keep praying. Just go bigger. What we longed for in those dark days is exactly what Moshiach will bring: unity, light, freedom, and peace.

The hostages are home. But the story is not over. The next chapter is called Redemption. You did a mitzvah for the hostages, now do a mitzvah for the world. Now that they are free, let us pray that we will be too.



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kosher butcher," he chuckled.

"Eventually, I became an engineer," he said. "I worked for NASA, built missile systems in Boston, even taught at Brown for a while. But somewhere along the way, I drifted from it all, my father's Tefillin, my mother's chickens. And then these attacks in Israel started happening, and it all came rushing back - the fear, the hate. I remembered getting beaten on the school bus just for being Jewish.

"I'm very worried," Philip said softly.

"We may not be on the front lines," said Lezell, "but we're still connected, and every Jew can contribute. Would you like to put on Tefillin for Israel?"

"I've never had the chance," Philip responded.

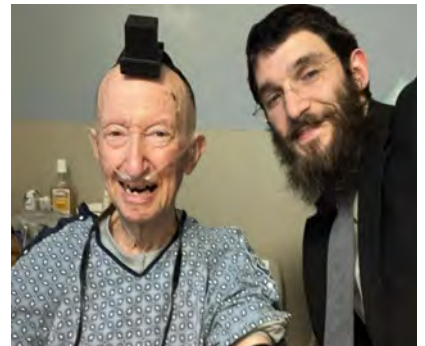
As Lezell gently wound the Tefillin around Philip's arm and then placed it on his forehead, a look of joy born from a buried nostalgia came across his face.

"I remember these," Philip whispered with emotion. "My father used to put them on every morning at five before milking the cows."

There, lying in a propped-up recovery bed, the nonagenarian had his bar mitzvah.

When the rabbi returned to Bay Path a week later, he was greeted by a middle aged man standing beside Philip. It was his son, Marc Levin, and he wanted to put on Tefillin, too. Moments later, Marc had his very own bar mitzvah, joining his father in linking with the generations that came before them.

Sometimes, it takes a war half a world away to awaken a pair of Jewish souls.



# Celebrating a Bar Mitzvah at 98 Years Old

## How the Israel-Iran War inspired a father and son to re embrace their family history

by Mendel Scheiner

In the early hours of Sunday, June 15, as ballistic missiles soared from Iran into Israel, their impact was felt more than 5,000 miles away across the world, on the Atlantic seaboard of Massachusetts.

That day, Rabbi Levi Lezell, director of Chabad of the South Shore, received a phone call from the Bay Path Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. A 98-year-old Jewish resident named Philip Levin, sensing he was nearing the end of his life, was searching for answers and asked if the rabbi could stop by.

As Lezell walked the fluorescent-lit hallways of Bay Path and entered Philip's room, he was met by an elderly man who still spoke strongly.

"My father came to America in 1888," Philip told the rabbi. "I was the youngest of six. We grew up on a farm in Connecticut, and my parents were proudly Jewish. My mother would send us on the trolley into Hartford to study Torah at the Garden Street Synagogue. I still remember our chickens squawking louder, frantically, as the bus passed the 'Welcome to Hartford' sign; they seemed to know the

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## Jewish Haikus

“The journey of 1000 miles begins with a single Oy”

Beyond Valium,  
peace is knowing one's child  
is an internist.

On Passover we  
opened the door for Elijah.  
Now our cat is gone.

After the warm rain  
the sweet smell of camellias.  
Did you wipe your feet?

Her lips near my ear,  
Aunt Sadie whispers the name  
of her friend's disease.

Today I am a man.  
Tomorrow I will return  
to the seventh grade.

Testing the warm milk  
on her wrist, she sighs softly.  
But her son is forty.

The sparkling blue sea  
reminds me to wait an hour  
after my sandwich.

Like a bonsai tree,  
is your terrible posture  
at my dinner table.

Jews on safari --  
map, compass, elephant gun,  
hard sucking candies.

The same kimono  
the important people are wearing:  
I got it at Loehmann's.

The shivah visit:  
so sorry about your loss.  
Now back to my problems.



Mom, please! There is no  
need to put that dinner roll  
in your pocketbook.

Seven-foot Jews in  
the NBA slam-dunking!  
My alarm clock rings.

Sorry I'm not home  
to take your call. At the tone  
please state your bad news.

Is one Nobel Prize  
so much to ask from a child  
after all I've done?

Today, mild shvitzing.  
Tomorrow, so hot you'll plotz.  
Five-day forecast: feh

Quietly murmured  
at Yom Kippur services,  
“Yanks 5, Red Sox 3.”

A lovely nose ring,  
excuse me while I put my  
head in the oven.

Hard to tell under the lights.  
White Yarmulke or  
male-pattern baldness.

Be here now.  
Be someplace else later.

Is that so complicated?

Drink tea and nourish life;  
with the first sip, joy;  
with the second sip, satisfaction;  
with the third sip, peace;  
with the fourth, a Danish.

Wherever you go, there you are.  
Your luggage is another story.

Accept misfortune as a blessing.  
Do you want to wish for perfect  
health, or a life without  
problems?  
What would you talk about?

Breathe in.  
Breathe out.  
Breathe in.  
Breathe out.  
Forget this and attaining inner  
peace will be the  
least of your problems.

Deep inside you are ten thousand  
flowers.  
Each flower blossoms ten thou-  
sand times.  
Each blossom has ten thousand  
petals.  
You might want to see a specialist.

Be aware of your body.  
Be aware of your perceptions.  
Keep in mind that not every physi-  
cal sensation is a  
symptom of a terminal illness.

Yenta. Shmeer. Gevalt.  
Shlemiel. Shlimazl. Meshuganah  
Oy! To be fluent!

# Finding Healing Or Helping Others?

by Levi Shmotkin

Taibel Lipskier was born to a Russian Jewish family in the tumultuous first years of Communist Russia. Her mother died at a young age, leaving her to care for her younger siblings. Eventually she married, and after years of hardship, the couple and their children escaped the Soviet Union. After spending time in various displaced persons camps, they finally made it to the United States.

Life as new immigrants wasn't easy. After a failed attempt at farming in New Jersey, they relocated to Brooklyn. Making a living sufficient to sustain a family was a constant challenge - by then there were ten children. Naturally, the upheavals of her life took their toll on Taibel, and she suffered from anxiety and depression. She decided to consult the Rebbe for guidance on how to improve her psychological and emotional state.

The Rebbe gave her unexpected advice: "Go to as many weddings as possible and dance, and inspire other people to dance too."

As it happens, Taibel was an exceptionally skilled dancer. She followed the Rebbe's advice, and for decades she would go to every possible wedding and dance the night away.

"She lived in Brooklyn," her grandson explained, "where at the time there were many young women getting married who had little or no family in attendance. My grandmother would show up and dance, sometimes for hours, with the bride and her friends, bringing immense joy to all."

Rishe Deitsch was raised in Massachusetts and at the age of fourteen she left home to study in Brooklyn. The pace of New York living, and the frenetic energy of its weddings, were entirely new to her.

"One night," she later recalled, "I was at a wedding and I

was wallflowering it. I didn't know these dances, and the speed and noise were all new to me. I knew I couldn't keep up, so I didn't even try. Suddenly this older woman, this whirlwind dancer, grabbed my two hands with her two hands and pulled me into the center of the circle. I tried to pull away and explain I'm-from-Worcester-I-don't-dance, but she couldn't hear me anyway. And she had me with an iron grip. So I took my only option, other than to faint: I danced!

"It would not be an exaggeration to say I had more fun in that one dance than I had ever had in my whole life up until that point. She whirled me around, she flipped me this way and that way, and I just followed her lead, since I had absolutely zero choice in the matter (remember: iron grip). After it was over, she asked me my name. I was way too shy to ask her name, but later someone told me it was Mrs. Taibel Lipskier.

"I always remembered the dance, but I didn't know there was something deeper to it. It was only many years later that I heard the story of what she went through and the Rebbe's guidance to her."

"It wasn't like she was outgoing by nature," her grandson observed. "It was actually quite contrary to her nature. But she constantly did it, and she did it with every fiber of her being. And ultimately, we saw how the joy she brought to hundreds and thousands of people over the decades came back to her; we saw how it gave her so much joy and strength and fortitude and resilience."

Thinking about it all these years later, he reflected: "Many of us are dealing with unresolved wounds. We want to extricate all that darkness from our system, from our psyche, from our environment and home. But sometimes the most effective solution is not to fight the darkness, but to kindle a flame of joy - by dancing and inspiring other people to dance. In that dance, with the pure intent of bringing joy to others, a passion of fire and warmth is created in us and around us, allowing the darkness to dissipate and be banished."

Takeaway: Becoming a giver is key to inner health and resilience. Open your mind and heart to see those around you. Be sensitive to their needs, and try to brighten their lives.

If you feel down or dispirited and inclined to retreat inward ("Once I feel better about myself I'll be able to start thinking about others"), the Mitzvah of caring for others is an effective way to refresh your own emotional state.



Taibel Lipskier



Volunteers at Colel Chabad's Pantry Packers in Jerusalem preparing food packages for needy families

# "Journeys" - A Voyage At Three Levels

by Chana Weisberg

## *The Baby:*

Not too long ago, I was one with you, dear Mother. Encompassed by your limbs, carried by your bones. I breathed with your breath. The blood coursing through your veins pumped into mine. I moved with your every movement.

We were inseparably one.

## *The Soul:*

Before my descent to this world, I was one with You, G-d, like the fetus in the mother's womb.

I was encompassed within Your will, fused within Your light.

My awareness of my utter dependency on You was palpable, absolute and forever present.

I was inseparable from your Oneness.

## *The Jewish People:*

Our nation was conceived with our holy patriarchs and matriarchs, who refined their personalities so that their own inclinations, emotions and actions reflected Your qualities.

They purged themselves of all traces of self and ulterior motive. Their every action was possessed by You, the very vehicles for the expression of Your will.

Like the fetus within its mother's womb, and like the soul encompassed in You, their connection with You was palpable, their communication with You uninhibited, their awareness of their absolute dependence on You constant.

Our nation was formed on the premise that You and we are inseparably one.



## *The Baby:*

Then came my birth.

Descending, descending.

Physically, it was the most painful journey I have ever experienced.

I did not want to be myself. I did not want to become independent. I wanted to remain surrounded by your warmth, listening to the comforting rhythmic beating of your heart.

I wanted you. Only you.

Alas, the choice was not mine. I emerged into a cold room, surrounded by strangers.

I heard myself cry out so loudly.

But you were quick to comfort me. You enveloped me in your large embrace. You caressed me. You rocked my tiny body. Day and night, you pampered me, caring for my every need, for my every whim.

My eyes were once again fixed only on you. I still felt that I was a part of you.

Once you held me in front of a mirror, but I had no idea it was me. There was no concept of me. Everything was you. You were my entire world.

## *The Soul:*

I leave behind the spiritual idyll to journey to a place of struggle and hardship; a place in which material concerns consume my days and nights, sapping my energy, confusing my priorities.

It is a difficult descent, the most difficult journey of my life.

But in times of spiritual closeness, I still sense Your warmth and Your presence.

Even down here, in this world, there are moments when I feel connected, enveloped by Your warmth.

I am aware of You caring for my every need. I feel confident in Your embrace.

In those moments, I lose my sense of aloneness, knowing that all is from You.

That there is only You.

## *The Jewish People:*

In the beginning of our nation's journey, we palpably felt Your presence enfolding us. Our lives revolved upon our spiritual destiny and routines. The Holy Temple, Your home on earth, was a central part of our lives. The daily services were the highlights of our days.

Miracles abounded. You nurtured us. You protected us openly. You cared for our every need.

Though, on one hand, we were independent beings, we still palpably sensed Your constant presence in our lives.





*The Baby:*

And now, why do you leave me? I watch you walking towards the door, jacket slung over your shoulder. You blow me a kiss as you wave goodbye.

I crawl over to you, clumsily trying to stand, grasping your skirt.

If I knew words, I'd protest loudly.

Instead, all I can do is whimper. My vocal cords form a crude guttural 'mama' sound. My voice becomes louder, stronger.

No, don't go, I wish I could say. I need you. I need you to hold me. To hug me. To reassure me. To play with me lovingly.

What is it you are saying?

You'll be back so soon, you reassure me.

But don't you realize that I have no concept of time? That these partings are so heart-wrenching for me? That I live with the present and that each moment feels like my eternity?

Stay, I wish I could convince you. Hold me. Hug me.

*The Soul:*

Challenges are so much a part of my journey.

At those times, I feel a keen ache of separation from You. Our connection is hidden. I feel so far away. So alone.

Traversing a distant land, navigating an unknown path.

I feel abandoned.

I try to cry out to You, but I've forgotten my language. Only the crudest sounds emanate from the depths of my being.

I am in a cold world, one that confuses me, distorts my true will, and obscures the truth of Your reality.

I make valiant attempts to reconnect with my source of life.

*The Jewish People:*

Our nation has experienced times of separation from You. Times when You seem to have abandoned us. Your embrace was not at all apparent. Your presence was hidden.

We were driven from our homeland, forced away from everything dear to us. Our path was unclear. We felt abandoned. Hopelessly trying to cling to You, while being chased to distant lands.

Exile.



*The Baby:*

I am a little bigger now. I have begun to sit up on my own, and I can move around and begin to explore my surroundings. I see myself as an individual, with my own body, my own thoughts and my own feelings. I am beginning to express myself.

I am gaining more independence. You take pride in each of my developments. But as I do, I feel myself growing apart from you. I no longer see you as a part of me. And on those occasions, I feel such intense fear when you leave, fear that you are abandoning me.

What is it that you say? That my separation anxiety is a part of the process of my maturation? You try to explain to my young mind that it signifies my growth. That this leap in understanding will open new opportunities for my growing emotional and physical independence.

You explain that all, but still I miss you when you are not here with me. I relish my new capabilities, my new awareness, my new achievements. But still, when you open that front door to leave, my anxiety intensifies. I still just want you.

*The Soul:*

My descent into this world and my feelings of independence ultimately lead to an enduring growth. Immersed in a physical world, enclothed in a physical body, I have grown separate from You.

But it is now that I feel an unquenchable yearning and a love for You, a boundless and all-consuming desire to be re-absorbed into Your very Self.

Ultimately, this journey to a far-away land enables me to reach greater heights. My inner powers, my hidden resources of strength and my deep, deep love for You, are only now forced to the surface.

*The Jewish People:*

The purpose of our exile is the subsequent ascent to be experienced in the Era of the Redemption, which will be even greater than during the time of the Holy Temple.

The darkness and abandonment that we experiences as a nation evokes a greater measure of light as the intensity of our bond with You becomes revealed.

On the surface, we seem to be growing apart from you. As we mature as a nation, through our efforts as an independent self, through our own emotions, and through our thoughts and capabilities, we activate the deeper dimension of love for You that lies buried within our hearts.



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# CHANUKAH — IN A NUTSHELL



## A Brief History

What happened on Chanukah? Was this a struggle for political independence or was it a lot more? What's the inside story? The following is a brief history:

## How It All Began

Some 2,350 years ago, around the year 336 B.C.E., the king of Macedonia (northern Greece), Alexander the Great, decided to conquer the world. He waged war and surprisingly, was very successful in conquering nation amassing vast territories, including the Middle East and Israel. After his passing, his generals divided up his empire. Israel eventually ended up under the control of Syria under the rulership of Alexander's general, Seleucid.

The primary observance of Chanukah is lighting the Menorah. For eight consecutive evenings, we kindle the Menorah's flames, adding a new light each evening.

Each candle with its unique lesson and each night with its own light. Each night, we sit near the Chanukah candles and observe the flickering lights. Each night we listen as the new candle unfolds its secret and tale.

For thousands of years they have been aglow; each with its own story with its own experience. They are eager to share with us their lifelong journey. They speak of oppression and freedom; of the experiences of old and of life today; of the power of right over might and spirit over matter; of the story of victory of light over darkness.

When lighting the Chanukah flames this year, let your gaze lead you to the deepest levels of meaning that Chanukah has to offer. The holiday commemorates the oil lamps in the Temple which burnt miraculously for eight days - but at the most personal level, the eight days are a journey in which we learn to traverse spiritual territory, one day at a time.

Initially the Jewish people and the ancient Greek-Syrians got along. Both valued wisdom, philosophy and intellect. A lot of Jews even assimilated and many studied Greek philosophy, such as Aristotle and Plato. A Greek king, Ptolemy, even had the Jewish Torah translated into Greek. However, a Seleucid king, called Antiochus, decided that this was not enough and that everyone, both Jew and non-Jew, must convert to the beliefs of Hellenism (Greek culture and religion).

## Laws Against Judaism

Antiochus' evil plan came into full force around 175 B.C.E., about 150 years after Alexander conquered the Middle East. Antiochus forbade the Jews from observing mitzvahs, in particular - ritual circumcision, Shabbat and the study of Torah. The Greeks violated Jewish women and intimidated the general population with violence.

Intolerance reigned supreme, as Antiochus forced Greek culture onto all nationalities. Antiochus believed that Hellenizing his colonies would strengthen the Seleucid Empire. It was not long until one after another, each nationality succumbed and accepted Greek gods and culture.

Hellenism, the sweep of Greek culture, meant acceptance of its pagan gods and the Greek philosophy-belief in the ultimate reliability of human reason and in the idol of physical beauty for its own sake. In Greek culture, the Torah could be admired as a work of great wisdom and beauty - as literature, philosophy, history and ethics, but it could not be revered.

## Enough is Enough

Some Jews indeed fell prey to Hellenistic culture, and even gained prominence in Greek society. They took Greek names and dressed like the Greeks. However, the rest of the Jews stuck to their principles - to their belief in one G-d as handed down from their forefathers. Despite every attempt by the Greeks to stamp-out Jewish practice, Jews persevered. Jewish children studied Torah, but pretended to be otherwise occupied with spinning tops (a.k.a.

dreidels) when Greek soldiers approached. Circumcision and Shabbat was still practiced, often with great sacrifice. The toll of these observances continued to rise as many Jews lost their lives. Something had to be done.

## Matityahu

The integrity of the Jewish people was at stake, both physically and spiritually. There was one major problem: At that time the Greek-Syrian Army was one of the world's greatest superpowers. Its army, based upon the Greek phalanx and Indian war elephants, was practically invincible.

In 165 B.C.E., one of Antiochus' followers set up an altar in the village of Modi'in. This was where Matityahu, an elderly Jewish Cohen (priest), lived. A Greek officer demanded that Matityahu offer sacrifices to the Greek gods. Matityahu replied:

*I, my sons and my brothers, are determined to remain loyal to the covenant which our G-d made with our ancestors!*

Incensed, Matityahu attacked the Syrian/Greek officer. This quickly escalated into armed conflict, and Matityahu and his five sons defeated the Seleucid garrison, marking the start of the Revolution.

## The Maccabees

Before his passing, Matityahu called his sons together and urged them to continue to fight in defense of G-d's Torah. He appointed his middle son, Yehudah, as leader. It was not long until Yehudah was called, "Maccabee," a word composed of the initial letters of the four Hebrew words *Mi Kamocha Ba'eilim Hashem*, "Who is like You, O G-d."

Antiochus sent various generals to wipe out Yehudah and his revolutionaries, the Maccabees. Each time Antiochus sent another phalanx, the Maccabees were victorious. To quash the rebellion, Antiochus eventually sent an army of more than 40,000 men against the Jews.

The Maccabees announced, "Let us fight unto death in defense of our souls and our Temple!" Like their forefathers the Maccabees engaged with their spiritual weapon of prayer to G-d. After a series of battles, the Maccabees were victorious. Everyone acknowledged that it was a miracle. True, the Seleucid Empire had phalanxes and war elephants, but Our G-d is more powerful than any army.

## The Dedication

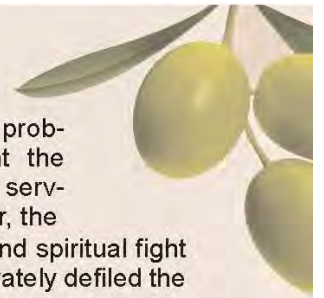
The Maccabees then returned to Jerusalem to liberate it of the idols placed inside by the Greek-Syrian vandals. Yehudah and his followers built a new altar, which they dedicated on the 25th of Kislev, in the year 164 BCE. Chanukah, which means "dedication" in Hebrew, begins on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev.

Still, the Maccabees had a problem? They wanted to light the menorah – one of the daily services in the Temple. However, the Greeks in their ideological and spiritual fight against the Jews had deliberately defiled the supply of oil in the Temple.

Miraculously, after searching, they found one cruse of pure olive oil that had not been tainted or destroyed. But this small vial

which was fit for use in the Temple, was only sufficient to light the Menorah for one day. G-d made a miracle and the oil burned for a full eight days; which was enough time to produce new kosher oil. Once again, G-d had His people under His protection.

The following year, the Holiday of Chanukah was established to commemorate and celebrate the miracle of the oil and the Maccabees' military victory. Its message of heroism, trust in G-d and religious freedom speaks to us all and is still relevant over 2000 years later.



## Chanukah Bytes

### The Time

At Night. The lighting is in the evening when it is dark. This, in order to light up the darkness.

### The Place

Outside. The intent is to spread the light to "the street," outside the warm, beautiful environment of one's home.

### Light

A Little Light Dispels Much Darkness.

### Adding Light

One must continually increase the light; what was complete and enough for yesterday is not enough for today.

### Oil

The Miracle of Chanukah happened with oil - the liquid which penetrates everything it touches, and no matter how much you mix it, it does not adapt.

### 8 Lights

The Festival is celebrated with a candelabra of eight lights, signifying the celebration of the supernatural. As our sages explain, the number 7 symbolizes the natural order (as in seven days of the week). The number 8 symbolizes that which transcends the natural order.



# MENORAH

## HOW-TO

### Where do I place the Menorah?

Many have the custom to place the menorah in a doorway opposite the *mezuzah* (such is the custom of Chabad-Lubavitch) so that the two *mitzvot* of mezuzah and Chanukah surround the person. Others place it on a windowsill facing a public thoroughfare.

### How do I set up the Menorah?

It is preferable to use cotton wicks in olive oil, or paraffin candles, in amounts large enough to burn until half an hour after nightfall. If not, regular candles can be used as well. The candles of a menorah must be of equal height in a straight row. The *shamash*, the servant candle that kindles the other lights, should stand out from the rest (i.e. higher or lower). The Chanukah lights must burn for at least half an hour each night. Before kindling the lights, make sure that there is enough oil (or if candles are used, that they are big enough) to last half an hour.

### Who lights the Menorah?

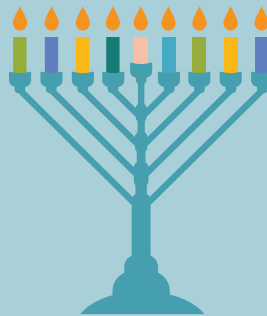
All members of the family should be present at the kindling of the Chanukah menorah. Children should be encouraged to light their own Menorahs. Students and singles who live in dormitories or their own apartments should kindle menorahs in their own rooms.

### How do I light the Menorah?

On the first night of Chanukah one light is kindled on the right side of the menorah, on the following night add a second light to the left of the first and kindle the new light first proceeding from left to right, and so on each night.

### What about Shabbat?

On Friday eve the Chanukah lights are kindled before the Shabbat lights (which are lit 18 minutes before sundown). Additional oil or larger candles should be provided for the Chanukah lights ensuring that they will last half an hour after nightfall. ●



ON WEEKDAY NIGHTS OF CHANUKAH, AFTER SUNSET, GATHER AROUND TO LIGHT THE MENORAH. SEE SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR SHABBAT. BEGIN BY LIGHTING THE SHAMASH CANDLE AND HOLDING IT IN YOUR RIGHT HAND (OR LEFT HAND IF YOU ARE LEFT-HANDED). WHILE STANDING, RECITE THE APPROPRIATE BLESSINGS BELOW. THEN, LIGHT THE CANDLES, STARTING WITH THE NEWEST CANDLE ON THE LEFT AND CONTINUING TO LIGHT FROM LEFT TO RIGHT.

## BLESSINGS

### FOR LIGHTING THE MENORAH

**1.** *Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-nai E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech ha-olam a-sher ki-de-sha-nu be-mitz-vo-tav ve-tzi-va-nu le-had-lik ner Chanukah.*

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

**2.** *Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-nai E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech ha-olam she-a-sa ni-sim la-avo-te-nu ba-ya-mim ha-hem bi-z'man ha-zeh.*

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

**3.** On the first night of Chanukah, or on your first time lighting a menorah this year, add the following:

*Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-nai E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech ha-olam she-heche-ya-nu ve-ki-yi-ma-nu ve-higi-a-nu liz-man ha-zeh.*

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

After kindling the lights, the *Hanerot Halalu* prayer is recited. See our website for full text.

**DESIGNED BY G-D THE ORIGINAL MENORAH WAS CARVED OUT OF A SOLID CHUNK OF GOLD.**

Then, a thousand years later, the story of Chanukah occurred, and Jews started lighting miniature, less expensive Chanukah menorahs. It seems unlikely that your menorah at home could outshine that seven-branched menorah that stood proudly in the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet, surprisingly, according to Chabad teachings, the light of your menorah outshines the Temple's original menorah in many ways.

*We asked our editors to shed some light on what makes your menorah at home so powerful that it wins the "Ultimate Candelabra" title. Here's what we found:*

To start, we find four primary differences between the two menorahs:

1) The number of candles lit in the Temple's seven-branched menorah remains the same daily, while your Chanukah menorah changes and grows from one to two to three until eight.

2) You light your Chanukah menorah when it's dark outside, specifically after sundown, while the High Priest lit the Temple's menorah in the sunshine during the day.

3) The golden menorah was kept inside the Temple, forever confined indoors, whereas your Chanukah menorah is lit outdoors, at the front door facing the street, or in a window.

4) The Temple's menorah glowed in a time of prosperity and spiritual clarity, during the days of Moses or the reign of King Solomon. In contrast, the Chanukah menorah was born in a period of intense spiritual struggle and hardship under the oppressive rule of the Syrian-Greeks.

The Rebbe sees these differences as the reasons and ingredients that create

your powerful Chanukah lights. For example, when life is good and the sun is shining, we produce a light that is good enough for our homes and Temples. But when we are oppressed by a heavy darkness that lurks outside, we must find a light strong enough to face and illuminate the darkness.

That's the power of your Chanukah menorah's light. It knows that when you face darkness and spiritual hardships, you don't have the luxury of remaining the same person as yesterday; you need to grow and increase your light daily.

The fact that the Chanukah menorah is lit in the evening demonstrates how the light needed tonight differs from the light we needed during the good old Temple days. Today, we can't survive on an "indoor menorah" or by merely illuminating our homes; we need a spark and flame that can thrive in the streets. We put our menorahs in our windows and doorways because its light can brighten the world.

The Rebbe sees these four discrepancies as the four steps in how to win the war against darkness:



**1 Grow and increase daily.** A little movement forward and slight increases in your Divine light make your light so much more potent.

**2 Create light according to the darkness.** When the flames of antisemitism flare up and a new darkness confronts us, we need to find a more powerful Jewish light that has never shone before.

**3 Shine outward.** Today, we are all ambassadors of light, and we must warm the cold, unholy streets and spread the light and joy of Judaism with others.

**4 Don't be scared of the darkness.** Like the fearless Maccabees, be courageous enough to shine, engage, and transform the darkness.

**In conclusion, *You can outshine any darkness* if you're brave enough to face a dark world and add one extra candle each night.**

—  
*Benjamin Sherman is a staff writer for Chabad Magazine. He lives in Southern California with his wife and children.*

## I AM SCARED TO CELEBRATE CHANUKAH THIS YEAR!

by Tzvi Freeman

Hey Rabbi,

I got your invitation to the public Menorah lighting ceremony. I would love to come, but I feel unsafe attending a public Jewish gathering in the current mood out there.

A humungous Menorah is a lightning rod. I used to put my Menorah in the front picture window of our house, but now I'm scared of having my window smashed.

My advice to you is to lay low until things get friendlier again. See you some other time.

*Nora Foby*

Hi Nora,

You could be right. It depends. Are we commemorating Chanukah, or are we living it?

If we're commemorating it, what's the point anyways? What happened happened. So why bother coming?

But it looks to me like you're living it. The Hellenists and the Maccabees are fighting it out inside you, right now, in those words you wrote to me.

Let's go back to Mattityahu and his sons in the town of Modi'in where the story of their revolt began.

The Jews were absorbed within a cosmopolitan empire, similar to the Persian Empire before it, but with a yet more compelling and powerful culture. Such empires tend to pride themselves in their diversity yet rarely have the patience to truly accommodate it. It's just so much more expedient and efficient to have everyone be the same.

Alexander the Great was especially known for his admirable speeches about tolerance and the like. "Whatever possession we gain by our sword cannot be sure or lasting, but the love gained by kindness and moderation is certain and durable." Keeping to such notions in practice was another matter.

Alexander built temples in conquered lands to the local deities. He played a kind of mix and match with gods and forms of worship. It was a pragmatic way of building alliances and keeping the conquered acquiesced so they would happily pay their taxes.

But his governors who took rule after him weren't al-

ways as savvy. To make things worse, many prominent Jews of the time also pushed for assimilation into Hellenist culture.

Then, as now, a sort of double-talk dominated the conversation. Conformity was dressed up as freedom, homogeneity was masked as progress, and authoritarianism masqueraded as intellectualism.

Nobody wanted to say, "Wear the toga and you're in," so instead they said, "Bro, your style of dress is so last year."

They couldn't say, "Dump your ancient wisdom - it's not the vogue of the Empire," so it came out as, "That's so irrational and particularist, it's morally repugnant."

Eventually, they pushed for legislation. Next thing you knew, everything that had held us together as a people was a criminal offense.

At first, traditionalist Jews such as the Hasmoneans backed off, retreating to the towns and villages of the Judean hills, waiting for the wave to pass - as you suggest we do now. But when royal edicts and Greek officers came after them even there, they knew it was time for someone to take action.

The rest is - well, it's not history, because the story never ended. It's still playing out - on campus, in the shopping mall, and throughout social media. And the Maccabees continue to walk with their heads high. Because that's the only way to win the war.

You could say that this was the birth of a critical adaptation for the Jewish people. This is where we learned that survival depends on the courage to stand proud despite all odds. It was a successful adaptation and there was never a time it wasn't needed.

At the beginning of the industrial era, there were those who advised to be a Jew at home and just another citizen on the street. They claimed that acting as a Jew in the open will cause more antisemitism. Jewish traditions, rituals, and beliefs, they said, had to be modified to match Enlightenment values.

Needless to say, none of that worked. On the contrary, it backfired.

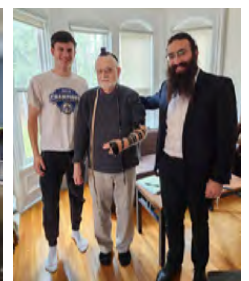
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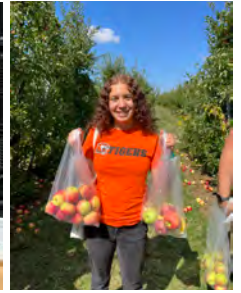


Rachel Posner took this photo of the family Menorah in Kiel, Germany in 1931, across from the local Nazi party HQ. She wrote on the back, "The flag says 'death to Judaism,' the light says 'Judaism will live for ever'".



**“Chabad Across Town” Photo Pages  
Spreading Jewish Light, Warmth & Joy:  
Brighton, Geneseo, Rochester Institute  
of Technology (plus new construction!),  
University of Rochester, Young Jewish  
Professionals, Pittsford, CTeens,  
Wisdom Circle for Seniors**









## WHAT ONE MENORAH LIGHTING CAN DO

by Chana Sara Einseiger

There was always something about lighting a Menorah. Even when I was in foster homes as an adolescent, it was something I wanted to do. Maybe it was knowing that my ancestors did the exact same thing, or that millions of people all over the world were staring at the candles too. Or maybe it was just that candlelight is so warming when the ground outside is covered in snow. I'm not sure, but I certainly never expected that lighting a Menorah would have any impact on my day-to-day existence.

Nearly three years ago I decided to drop Judaism entirely. I was fed up with the entire venture. The synagogue I attended was costly and uninviting, not at all what I had expected. There would be no community to raise my daughter with, no traditions to pass on to her. Needless to say, I was a little bitter about the whole thing.

But, of course, every year I lit a Menorah. When my daughter was old enough to appreciate it, I decorated the house with Chanukah flags and garlands, window stickers and crafts. Maybe at some point in her life she too would enjoy the feeling of comfort and safety that I got from the flickering candles.

The synagogue still sent me a newsletter occasionally, and that year I saw that various synagogues were holding public Menorah lightings around the county. A giant Menorah! Perfect! I dressed up my little girl in a pretty blue dress and built her anticipation to see a Menorah as tall as a tree.

It turned out to be less dramatic than I had hoped - just a small crowd had gathered to see the lighting. Some homeless men were milling around. There was talk of free latkes and hot drinks in a nearby building afterwards, but as soon as the lighting was over I scooped up my daughter and made a dash for the car. My exodus was interrupted by the rabbi. He introduced himself and gave my daughter a little Menorah necklace.

"Do you belong to a synagogue?" he asked.

"No," I replied. The memory of the other places I had been to, their high fees and constant focus on what my occupation is, rather than who my daughter and I are, made me suspicious of this rabbi. Does this one want twice the cost of my medical insurance for my daughter to play

around his children?

The rabbi told me the address of his synagogue. I narrowed my eyes. "And how much does it cost?"

His face lit up. "This is why I do this," he said. He told me there were no membership fees. I was astounded.

So I went to the local Chabad Lubavitch. Yes, it was awkward. There was a definite language barrier, and I often had trouble following the service. But the people were friendly, and I didn't have to sign a contract to be there. So I went back again, even though going to a Chabad synagogue - if you weren't raised in the world of Judaism - is like diving before you learn to swim.

After some coaxing, the rabbi's wife, Devorah, convinced me to sign up my daughter for Sunday Hebrew school. On the first day, they were having a shofar factory. The smell of

power drills running into animal bones and shellac was awful, but my daughter loved it. She looked around wide-eyed at the other kids, made a friend, and was fascinated with the shofar she shellacked. I was sold.

On my way out, the rabbi said to me, "Look what one Menorah lighting can do." I smiled, but didn't think much of it.

Time has gone by, and now I can't forget the rabbi's words. Yes, when I attend a service I still prefer to hide in the kids' room, where I have some idea what I'm doing (mostly staring at the fish tank), and most of my agnostic-style views haven't changed, but plenty has. My daughter finished a year in Hebrew school and is learning a new language. She is so proud of all her projects, and so happy with the friends she has made.

Because she enjoyed Hebrew school so much, I enrolled her in the Chabad preschool. She loves her teachers, and I'm glad that she's in such capable hands. She has developed socially and gained a bit more confidence. After more coaxing from Devorah, she even attended summer camp. So much has changed in our routine, changes that will be there for years to come. She is making memories that she can treasure for life.

That is what one Menorah lighting can do.



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# WHY ME? THE HIDDEN BLESSING IN STRUGGLE

by Mendel Kalmenson

One of the most transformative and enduring texts of Jewish spirituality is the Tanya, written by the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement, Rabbi Schneur Zalman, known as the Alter Rebbe. Having achieved great renown, he had become so inundated by thousands seeking his counsel

that he decided to write a book that would articulate Judaism's approach to many of the most universal and pervasive human struggles. In his introduction, he describes the purpose of this holy work as replacing the need for face-to-face private audiences. In this way, the Tanya was essentially the first Jewish self-help book ever written.

In Chapter 27, the Alter Rebbe addresses the spiritual seeker perpetually struggling to achieve righteousness amid the relentless temptations and machinations of their indwelling negative inclination.

At his wits' end, this proverbial spiritual struggler, the *beinoni* of the Tanya, despairingly laments: "I feel like I am endlessly treading water; lots of motion, but no progress."

The Alter Rebbe provides the following uplifting counsel: "One should not feel depressed or troubled at heart, even if you are to be engaged in this battle every day of your life."

He then offers perhaps the three most radical words in the Tanya:

*"Ulay l'kach nivra."*

That is, "Perhaps you were created in order to struggle."

Put simply, here we learn that Jewish spirituality sees struggle as part of our very purpose in life.

This profound teaching turns our understanding of life's many challenges on its head. In it, we learn that life's struggles, both inner and outer, are not impositions to be avoided or solved. Rather, each challenge is a providentially placed opportunity to extract and transmute the light hidden in even the most trying of circumstances.

As a contemporary Chassidic thinker put it:



"Some think life is all about doing good and keeping away from evil. To them, struggle has no purpose of its own - to have struggled is to have failed. Success, they imagine, is a sweet candy with no trace of bitterness.

"They are wrong, tragically wrong. Struggle is an opportunity

to reach the ultimate - when darkness itself becomes light. In the midst of struggle, an inner light is awakened. Light profound enough to overwhelm the darkness, encasing it and winning it over."

## EPIC FAIL

The story of humanity's very first struggle, as recounted in the Torah, represents arguably the most far-reaching tragedy of all time. Adam and Eve's inability to obey G-d's command to refrain from eating the forbidden fruit, and their subsequent banishment from the Garden of Eden, are generally understood to be the root source of humanity's perpetual struggle with temptation.

During a talk given on Simchat Torah in 1963, the Rebbe explained the deeper meaning embedded in this quintessential story, which was previously obscured by prevailing interpretations.

According to the Rebbe, Adam's test was the archetypal trial of the human condition, and the Garden of Eden was the proving ground for humanity.

Would the first human beings obey the first Divine commandment ever given?

Given the significance of those primordial conditions, Adam's every move would impact and set the course for human history from that moment forward.

The stakes couldn't have been higher.

According to the Rebbe's rendering, it was precisely because of the enormity of Adam's responsibility that the snake, symbolizing the human inclination to disobey the Divine, exerted such enormous energies and focused all of its strength on sabotaging Adam's mission.

Seen through this lens, the story of Adam's struggle with

the serpent teaches that the more resistance we encounter when faced with a particular challenge to do something noble, the more essential overcoming that challenge is to the fulfillment of our purpose in life.

The Rebbe concluded the talk, saying:

“We find this to be the case in our own lives as well. A spiritual or moral matter that objectively should be a simple and easy matter for a particular individual to accomplish - and, indeed, is simply and easily accomplished by others - proves incredibly difficult for that person to achieve. Precisely because it is critical to that person’s individual mission in life to accomplish this matter, the difficulties and challenges he or she faces are proportionally formidable.”

Rather than discourage us, the greatness of our challenges in life should serve as an indicator of how important it is to persist in our efforts, and it should reassure us that since we were presented with such a challenge, we were certainly also granted the resources and fortitude to surmount it.

This powerful teaching highlights an essential aspect of the principle of specific Divine Providence. Namely, and perhaps counter intuitively, that the more difficult the struggle, the more integral that struggle is to your life’s mission.

#### THE BIGGER THEY ARE, THE HARDER THEY CALL

The Rebbe saw all kinds of opposition and challenges to the path of righteousness as surefire indicators that one is on the right path, going so far as to say that the more opposition one encounters when doing something positive, the more certain one should be that such a challenging endeavor is connected to their purpose in life.

Rabbi Menachem Hacohen was elected to the Knesset in the 1970s and experienced severe opposition from certain political circles because he didn’t toe the party line. When the attacks reached their peak, Menachem came to the Rebbe and shared that he was thinking of retiring due to the increasing intensity of the personal attacks.

“Maybe I’ll just leave this entire business. What do I need it for?” he asked.

“What you are doing is good; you mustn’t stop. And you shouldn’t be afraid of anyone,” the Rebbe replied, adding: “The Chassidic movement became stronger because it had opponents...”

The same insight helped invigorate Rabbi and Rebbetzin Binjamini, who had been sent repeatedly to revive and establish Jewish schools throughout Brazil, each time facing

considerable opposition from local communities.

“Why is everything so difficult?” the Rebbetzin once asked the Rebbe.

The Rebbe replied: “Since you are fighting assimilation, the forces of negativity are trying to fight back. It’s not a reason to be dismayed, but to do even more.”

#### AN ENVIABLE POSITION

No matter the nature of one’s struggle - whether it be internal or external, perpetual or fleeting, physical or spiritual - G-d provides us with the commensurate abilities, tools, and strength to help us overcome them.

A beautiful example of this empowering perspective can be found in the story of a traditional Jew who found himself in a relationship discouraged by the Torah. Arriving before the Rebbe, he explained that he desperately wanted to live in alignment with the Torah and G-d’s will, but he had powerful inclinations that persistently led him astray.

After describing his situation, the man fell silent and prepared himself for admonishment, expecting to be told in no uncertain terms how gravely he had failed to live up to G-d’s commandments.

The Rebbe remained silent for a moment and then finally said softly, “I envy you.”

Surprised and confused, the young man clearly did not know what to make of the Rebbe’s reply.

The Rebbe explained:

“There are many ladders in life; each person is given his or her own. The ladders present themselves as life’s challenges and difficult choices. The tests you face are the ladders that elevate you to great heights - the greater the challenge, the higher the ladder. G-d has given you this difficult test because He believes you can overcome it, and He has endowed you with the ability to do so. Only the strongest are presented a ladder as challenging as yours. Don’t you see, then, why I envy you?”

#### WHY ME?

Each of us is given our own ladders to climb. Their many rungs comprise the personal hurdles of morality and circumstance that we must overcome to reach our highest potential and achieve our true purpose. Seen in this light, life’s challenges become rungs to ascend rather than roadblocks to avoid, providentially placed in our path to help us reach our greatest spiritual heights.

By overcoming the challenges that wait along the path

Rather than discourage us, the greatness of our challenges in life should serve as an indicator of how important it is to persist in our efforts, and it should reassure us that since we were presented with such a challenge, we were certainly also granted the resources and fortitude to surmount it.

of our purpose, we unleash inner strength and manifest capabilities that a life of ease and privilege could never impart or invoke.

“Every flower must grow through dirt,” goes the saying.

This perspective emerges from the Rebbe’s unalterable awareness that the Divine permeates every aspect of existence. Even the direst circumstances and personal challenges are infused with Divine sparks waiting to be unleashed. As far as the Rebbe was concerned, there is no struggle that is merely a burden. Indeed, the Rebbe believed that the greatest challenges conceal the greatest light and that the deepest depths also house the greatest spiritual rewards.

A breathtaking example of this spiritual truth is found in the Rebbe’s exchange with a young man who was suffering from excruciating personal spiritual challenges.

He penned a letter to the Rebbe, asking one simple question: “Why me?”

The Rebbe responded:

“We do not know. The mysteries of people’s journeys are beyond our human finite comprehension.”

The Rebbe then offered a revitalizing insight, saying: “One observation that can be suggested... If an individual experiences a particularly difficult, or trying, situation, it may be assumed that Hashem has given him extraordinary powers to overcome the extraordinary difficulty. The individual concerned is probably unaware of his real inner strength; the trial may therefore be designed for the sole purpose of bringing out in the individual his hidden strength, which, after overcoming his problem, can be added henceforth to the arsenal of his revealed capacities, in order to utilize both for infinitely greater achievements for the benefit of himself, and others.”

Put simply, sometimes a person possesses an incredible

inner light that can change the world. There is no way for this person to discover that secret power within himself and call it his own without being compelled to overcome a major challenge.

It is often the case that we ourselves are unaware of the inherent power and truest potential of our own souls. It isn’t until we are forced by adversity to dig deep and find our greatest strengths that we are empowered to change the world. We are thus impelled to travel to an uncharted place in ourselves, which would have otherwise remained undiscovered. In that process, we unleash the true power and light of the soul, which, when integrated, can illuminate our lives and our world in incredibly powerful ways.

Where others might have looked down on the young man with disdain or pity, the Rebbe saw someone graced with tremendous spiritual strength, signaled by the very struggles that made others doubt his inherent sacredness. Where others saw a tragedy of morality,

the Rebbe saw an opportunity to reach for unmatched spiritual heights. The young man wasn’t crippled by a crisis of virtue - he had been sent as an emissary into the deepest darkness because his potential to shine the light of G-d was of a greater magnitude.

Indeed, it would have been easy for G-d to clear the way for us, allowing us to coast effortlessly along the paths of our lives. But in His infinite wisdom and benevolence, G-d orchestrated for each of us to encounter roadblocks and obstacles that invoke our greatest potentials.

In this way, the uphill battles of our lives become spiral paths leading us ever higher and closer to G-d and to fulfilling our most sacred purpose.

No matter the nature of one’s struggle -  
whether it be internal or external,  
perpetual or fleeting, physical or spiritual  
- G-d provides us with the  
commensurate abilities, tools, and  
strength to help us overcome them.

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I AM SCARED...

*Continued from page 17*

So let’s talk straight and practical: To hide your Jewishness under a cloak is to smother it. When you carry it into the open, you gain admiration and respect. And truly enlightened values can only gain by exposure to authentic Jewish tradition.

The good news is that we are living today within nations that pay more than lip service to diversity. To be a traditional Jew on the street is to embrace modern val-

ues. To hide is to surrender to those who would roll back everything that has been accomplished in the long, great struggle for human freedom and dignity that we Jews began back then.

We are all Maccabees today. Every one of us is a torch bearer. And the only way that torch will be seen and followed is if we hold it high, in public, for all to see.

# Can AI Replace Rabbis?

by Yehuda Shurpin

I'm glad you're asking a rabbi about whether he is replaceable! That's like asking an employee about the prospect of being replaced with automation.

I assume your question isn't about replacing the rabbi's role as mentor, given that AI lacks human experiences, emotions, and the ability to empathize. Much of what a rabbi does involves connecting with individuals on a personal and emotional level, understanding their unique circumstances within the greater context, and providing guidance accordingly. AI cannot replicate the depth of human connection required for spiritual counseling and support.

Rather, your question seems to be about asking halachic questions to a chatbot instead of a rabbi.

The truth is that, unlike a typical employee being replaced by an AI, many rabbis would welcome a possible alternative. After all, they would love nothing more than to spend their time learning more Torah on their own. As for their livelihood, they know that G-d can provide everyone with their livelihood regardless of AI. Unfortunately, however, a chatbot does not a rabbi make.

Here's why:

Are Chatbots and AI even accurate?

If one is simply seeking information about what a specific halachic text has to say, an AI can be a valuable tool for information gathering and Torah study. It can provide access to a wide range of sources and help compile comprehensive summaries of various opinions and texts.

Yet, despite AI's significant advancements in various fields, it still has a very long way to go to provide reliable and accurate information, especially in the realm of halachah.

Torah texts often require nuanced interpretation, taking into account historical and contextual factors. AI systems typically operate on data-driven algorithms and lack the ability to grasp the intricacies of religious teachings. A human rabbi (hopefully!) possesses years of training, study and understanding of the text, allowing him to provide guidance within the framework of halachah.

A second issue is that the programming of AI introduces a significant challenge. The values and halachic rulings programmed into AI systems inherently reflect a bias, in-



fluenced by the beliefs and interpretations of those who develop the algorithms. This bias may lead to the exclusion or prioritization of certain opinions, potentially distorting the halachic landscape presented by AI. The acceptance or rejection of controversial topics can greatly impact the AI's conclusions, steering it in specific directions that may not align with halachah.

But let us assume, for argument's sake, that an AI has somehow overcome all of these challenges and has also advanced significantly to the point where it can gather and present unbiased information.

Knowing accurate information and data is merely one component of determining what the correct halachah is.

## 'Shimush' and the Practicing Rabbi

Countless letters and talks from the Rebbe emphasize (and admonish!) that if a question arises in halachah, it is not enough to just ask someone who was ordained and has the title "rabbi"; the rabbi needs to be a practicing rabbi who has shimush, the experience that comes from apprenticing with a veteran rabbi.

The sages of the Talmud discuss "one who read and learned but did not serve Torah scholars (shimush)":

Rabbi Elazar says: This person is an ignoramus.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said: This person is a boor.

Rabbi Yannai says: This person is comparable to a Samaritan (i.e., follows the Written Torah but not the traditions of the sages).

Clearly, shimush is critical.

Shimush involves actively engaging with experienced and knowledgeable authorities, observing their methodologies, and gaining hands-on experience in halachic decision-making. This apprenticeship-like approach is crucial to developing practical skills, judgment, and insights into halachic practice, which can't be gained by reading text and gathering information.

Torah texts often require nuanced interpretation, taking into account historical and contextual factors. AI systems typically operate on data-driven algorithms and lack the ability to grasp the intricacies of religious teachings.

On the same note, Mesorah (tradition) plays a crucial role in halachic decision-making. AI lacks the ability to access anecdotal material or personal experiences passed down through generations of scholars. Mesorah encompasses not only the oral teachings received from one's teacher, but also the observation of how the teacher applied halachic rulings in practical cases. As the Talmud states, "Shimush is even greater than learning."

In other words, AI may have learned a lot and appear more "knowledgeable" in many ways, but it may still be considered "an ignoramus" for our purposes.

### Divine Help

In addition to the reasons outlined above, when a rabbi approaches the halachic decision process with proper preparation (i.e., shimush) and the appropriate humility and fear of heaven, then he receives *siyata dishmaya*, help from Heaven, ensuring that he will rule correctly in that specific situation. This is because the rabbi is following what the Torah itself enjoins us to do.

A story often relayed by the Rebbe illustrates this point:

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, the famed author of Noda B'Yehuda, served as the rabbi of Prague from 1754 to 1793. Once a group of scholars who wished to contest his rabbinic qualifications presented him with a series of questions in Torah law. One of the questions was a fictitious "case" carefully constructed to be as complex and as misleading as possible, so as to ensnare the rabbi in their logical traps and embarrass him with an incorrect ruling.

Rabbi Yechezkel succeeded in resolving all the questions correctly - all, that is, but one. Immediately, his detractors pounced on him, showing how his verdict contradicted a certain principle of Torah law.

Said Rabbi Yechezkel: "I am certain that this case is not actually relevant, and that you have invented it in order to embarrass me!"

"How do I know?" the rabbi continued. "Because I know that G-d's Torah is true. You see, whenever a human being is called upon to decide a matter of Torah law, we are faced with a paradox: how can the human mind possibly determine G-d's will? The laws of Torah are the wisdom and will of G-d and the most basic laws of reality, preceding and superceding even the laws of nature. How is it that

the finite and error-prone intellect is authorized to decide such Divine absolutes?

"But the Torah itself instructs that 'the Torah is not in heaven' but has been given to man to study and comprehend, and that whenever a question or issue of Torah law is raised, it is the human being, employing his finite knowledge and judgment, who must render a ruling. In other words, when a person puts aside all considerations of self and totally surrenders his mind to serve the Torah, G-d guarantees that the result will be utterly consistent with His will.

"However," concluded Rabbi Yechezkel, "this 'guarantee' only applies to actual events, when a rabbi is called upon to determine what it is that G-d desires to be done under a given set of circumstances, but not if his personal honor is the only issue at hand. Had you presented me with a relevant question, I know that I would not have erred, since I approached the matter with no interest or motive other than to serve the will of G-d. But since your case was merely a hypothetical question designed to mislead me, my mind was just like every other mind, great and small alike - imperfect and manipulatable."

Now, while rabbis are assured of this assistance, we have no assurance that the same is granted to algorithms.

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## Drowning in Deep Waters

“Great waters cannot extinguish our love.” (Song of Songs 8:7)

It’s easy to say that we shouldn’t care about money, that our worth as humans doesn’t depend on it. But the reality is that most of us don’t have the luxury to not think about money. We think about it every day when we open bills we can’t pay; when we shop for food that has jumped 20% in price in the last month.

The urgency and struggle to earn a living can feel like being submerged in a deep sea, treading desperately just to keep our heads above water.

When G-d was planning to send the Great Flood, he told Noah to build an ark, a *teivah*. *Teivah* in Hebrew also means “word.” Chassidic teachings explain that the refuge for the flood waters of the world are the words of Torah and prayer.

It might seem that the pressure of earning a living is a distraction from proper service of G-d. Chassidus gives a different twist on the role of the floodwaters. As they rose, they lifted the ark until it floated 15 cubits above the ground. In other words, the great sea of worldly cares that seems to be drowning us is actually carrying us and elevating our Torah study and prayer to greater heights. The effort that we put into earning an honest living is in itself an elevation for the soul.

The stormy periods we face in our own lives are an opportunity to pause and reassess what we truly value in life. Where we need to go and what we need to do to earn a living is part of the mystery of our soul’s journey to earth. When we’re able to let go and embrace G-d’s plan for us, money woes no longer invoke a sense of panic. They force us to tap deep inside of ourselves to discover our reserves of infinite strength.

And once these powers are accessed, we are unstoppable. Nothing that the world throws at us can faze us; nothing will rock us off-course. The flood waters push us to actualize all our inner strengths, and thus become transformed into a rain of blessing and tranquility.



# Feeling Financial Pressures

by Chaya Shuchat

The past month was an expensive one as I organized my youngest son’s Bar Mitzvah. This was on top of the usual Holiday expenses. As I watched my bank balance sink, my heart sank even lower. I felt a familiar choking sensation, a sense of overwhelm as I faced the mountain of bills.

Panic was one thing I simply could not afford. I took a deep breath and tried to divert my mind from anxious thoughts to focus on gratitude instead. Gratitude that my youngest son is reaching this milestone. Gratitude that the money was available to cover these expenses. Gratitude that the funds were used for joyous events and not mishaps, G-d forbid. With G-d’s help, money will be there for future expenses as well.

Financial pressure makes up a large portion of our overall life stress, and is a tremendous driver of internal and external conflicts of all sorts. Although we recognize all the problems that money can bring, we are dependent on it and can’t live without it. We fight over money, long for money, yet as Kohelet says, one who loves money can never be satisfied with money.

A big part of our money problem is that we ask money to do for us what money can’t do. We ascribe power to money that it simply does not have. We equate money with security, success, power, comfort or self-esteem. It follows then that when we lack money, it feels like we lack everything that makes life worthwhile and meaningful.

The word for money in Hebrew, *keseif*, has the same root as *koseif* - longing or desire. In this world, our longing, desire and striving revolves around money. But the soul has yearnings of its own to rise beyond the limitations of this world. G-d also has a yearning and desire. He longs for our work and actions, *l’ma’aseh yadecha tichsof*. His desire is for us to see through the mirage of money and turn to Him as our source of support.

The urgency and struggle to earn a living can feel like being submerged in a deep sea, treading desperately just to keep our heads above water.

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## Dear Rabbi, I Have A Question...

by Rabbi Aron Moss

### *Does My Son Really Need a Traditional Bris?*

Our baby boy was born yesterday and we are deliberating whether to do a traditional bris with a mohel, or have it done by a surgeon in hospital. Now the question I have is, would you accept me and my son into your community if he is not snipped by a mohel?

#### *Answer*

Mazel tov on becoming a father! I hope your wife is doing well and wish you both only happiness and much nachas.

Let me say outright, you and your son will always be welcome, no matter what you choose. I don't put any barriers up for someone to be a part of our community.

As a parent, you need to make many decisions that will impact your child's future. This is one of them. Here are the things you need to know before deciding what to do:

A surgical circumcision is not a bris. Apart from the missing blessings and prayers, the actual cut may be different, which means that one day, when your son realizes that he didn't have a bris, he may require a rather unpleasant procedure to get it fixed. At the very least he will need some blood to be drawn and a blessing said. No big deal when you are a baby, but not quite as easy when you're older.

A mohel is not an amateur. Quite the opposite. The average surgeon might do a few of these every now and then. An experienced mohel does them almost daily, and has performed hundreds, or possibly thousands, over the years.

Many mohels are also medically qualified. Some are surgeons themselves, who will perform a bris in a medical



setting if you prefer.

The risks involved with either procedure are minimal, but surgical circumcision could arguably be riskier than a traditional bris, as more complications can arise from giving a baby an anesthetic than from just a clean cut alone.

The bris is a tradition that stretches back almost 4,000 years. It connects us and our children with all past generations of Jews, who gave their children a bris under all sorts of circumstances. Your son will enter the covenant that started with the first Jew, Abraham, and continues to this very day. The spiritual power of a bris cannot be matched by a surgery that is essentially cosmetic.

Think it through carefully. You don't want your son turning to you years from now and asking, "Why didn't you give me a bris with a mohel? Now I have to go and get it done properly!" On the other hand, if you do it the right way now, he will never turn to you and say, "Why didn't you circumcise me in hospital? Now I have to go and get a local anesthetic to make up for it!"

Give your son a bris, and you give him 4,000 years of Jewish identity that will stay with him forever. Don't leave it for him to fix later. This is one of those things you only want to do once.

### *Does G-d Really Care If I Don't Keep Kosher?*

I love being Jewish and believe in G-d, but find it hard to believe that He really cares if I eat non-kosher food, watch TV on Friday night, or pray every day. Am I really supposed to believe that this is what G-d wants from me?

#### *Answer*

You don't have to believe, you just have to listen. In the Torah G-d expressly told us what He wants. And if they are things you would least expect, that is a sure sign that G-d really asked for them.

It's a bit like your wife. If you keep doing what you think she wants you to do, you are almost guaranteed to upset her. You are thinking like a man. She is a woman. You are thinking like you. She is not you.

Ask her what makes her happy. You may be surprised.

You think she wants expensive jewelry, but maybe she prefers a thoughtful but cheaper gift with a heartfelt handwritten card. You may expect that she will enjoy a night out at a fancy restaurant. Meanwhile, she might actually be happier with a quiet evening at home if you'd just take a break from your phone.

After all you've done for her, you wonder why she is frustrated with you. You can buy her all the jewelry you want; it's not what she wants. And if she's not happy, it's because you didn't listen. Your wife is human like you, and yet she baffles you. What do you expect from G-d? We can't even begin to know what He wants unless He tells us. And He did. That's what a mitzvah is: G-d spelling out what He wants from us.

You can make your wife (and G-d) happy if you stop guessing and just listen.

### Why The Need For a Jewish Burial?

My Israeli cousin is terminally ill and does not have much time left. He is completely secular and has instructed that he doesn't need a Jewish burial. He says he is not religious anyway, so it doesn't matter what is done to his body after his death. What rational argument can I offer him, without mentioning the soul and the afterlife, which he doesn't believe in?

#### Answer

Think about what Israel is doing for the hostages. Our nation has risked lives to bring home the bodies of our fallen and our kidnapped. Even now, Israel continues every effort, military and diplomatic, to bring the few remaining bodies back to their families.

Why? They are no longer alive. Is it really so important to bring them back?

Yes, it is. We can debate how high the price should be to retrieve those bodies, but not whether it matters. It does. It matters deeply. Because it's about who they belong to. Those fallen heroes are ours. When a Jew is buried among their people, they have come home.

The body is not a disposable shell. It carried a lifetime of moments: giving, love, struggle, kindness. A Jewish burial is a way of showing gratitude to the body, returning it with dignity to its people and to the earth.

This transcends religion, politics, and belief. Those fallen hostages may or may not have been believers. It makes no difference. They were Jews, they died as Jews, and they deserve to be buried as Jews. So does your cousin. A Jewish burial is the final gesture of connection to the story he was born into, the same story that has bound our people together for thousands of years.

So let's be rational. You may or may not believe in an af-



terlife. Either way, there is no downside to a Jewish burial.

If death is the end and there is nothing on the other side, you will not care how you are buried. But your loved ones will find comfort knowing you were brought home and honored as one of your people.

And if death is not the end, you will be eternally grateful to have been buried as a Jew. Because in the end, every Jew deserves to come home.



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## *Should We Forgive the Nazis?*

### *The Jewish Response to The Sunflower's Moral Dilemma*

by Mendel Kalmenson

A marked Jew, an accommodating nun, and a dying Nazi.

These characters take center stage in the moral drama presented by Simon Wiesenthal in his world-famous book, "The Sunflower," mandatory reading in many schools the world over due to the profound and stimulating discussion of ethics it generates.

The author – an Auschwitz Jew facing probable death at the hands of his cruel Nazi handlers – is brought before a fatally wounded S.S. soldier about to breathe his last. Before dying, the Nazi requests forgiveness from our Jew for participating in atrocities against the Jewish people.

An excerpt from his confession:

"Behind the windows of the second floor, I saw a man with a small child in his arms. His clothes were alight. By his side stood a woman, doubtless the mother of the child. With his free hand, the man covered the child's eyes...then he jumped into the street. Seconds later, the mother followed. Then from the other windows fell burning bodies...We shot..."

Viewing Simon as a representative of his people, he seeks to absolve himself and ease his unrelenting conscience through confessing and expressing his regret to him. He asks – no, begs – for a response, for confirmation that his remorse is accepted; in vain, he desperately awaits the comforting words that might provide him a peaceful death. Young Simon, torn and confused, himself still captive in a living hell manned by this man's comrades, holds his silence.

That silence will forever haunt him, tugging at his conscience till his last day.

The author concludes his book with:

"You, who have just read this sad and tragic episode in my life, can mentally change places with me and ask yourself the crucial question, 'What would I have done?'"

This question was later addressed to fifty-three noted religious and world thinkers (thirty-two in the first edition) and their responses make up a symposium presented

as book two.

But what might the Torah's perspective be on this delicate issue? What does the book that communicates G-d's wisdom, speaking on behalf of the Creator of morals and ethics, have to say about this? If G-d were confronted, so to speak, with this complex moral query, how would He respond?

#### *An Ethical Check*

Interestingly, it has been pointed out that without exception, every Christian respondent (as well as some representatives of other faiths) felt that Simon was wrong in not forgiving the Nazi murderer, while those who were Jewish believed he was right.

It has been suggested that this astonishing fact stems not from man's frail nature, the tendency to side with his own – in this case Jews with their coreligionists and Christians with theirs – but from the fundamentally different teachings of these respective religions.

On this issue, Judaism departs radically from other world religions, offering a unique viewpoint and a most necessary contribution to ethical thought.

#### *The Unforgivable Sin*

The single most evil generation chronicled in the Bible is undoubtedly the one that earned itself complete annihilation, having been entirely wiped out through the Great Flood.

Never before and never since has the world seen such complete destruction, as the old model was deemed irredeemable. The generation of the Flood was seen to possess no redeemable merit, hence the need for their utter demise.

How inconceivable is that?

Isn't the G-d we worship a forgiving G-d, always ready to accept penitence, turning nobody away? Isn't G-d the very source of forgiveness?

#### *Man to Man Combat*

The Mishnah states:

For sins against G-d, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kip-



pur) brings forgiveness. For sins against one's neighbor, the Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness until one has become reconciled with one's neighbor.

Isn't that ironic? This awesome Day of Pardon holds the power to absolve one of all of one's sins towards G-d, but proves utterly useless in the face of crimes committed against one's fellow!6

If we were measuring the harshness of sin, wouldn't the opposite be true? Wouldn't the offense against lowly man, a mere creation and subject of G-d, rank lower than the affront to G-d, his creator and master?

But the point here is simple. On this unique day of clemency, in a show of unrestrained compassion, G-d forgives any sin He can, but He does not forgive those he "cannot."

He remains unforgiving when it comes to an offense committed against man not due to a lack of will, which would be quite unG-dly, but rather, as He Himself willed it to be, due to a lack of "right" or "power" to forgive sins committed unto others.

He gave the injured party a power He withheld from Himself.

Only those who were wronged can right.

Only he who has suffered, against whom a crime has been committed, is entitled to forgive, if he so desires. He alone can exercise that right.

*NO in Capital Letters*

To come back, then, to our inquiry of how Torah would respond to the question raised by Wiesenthal.

The question is not a moral one, pertaining to right or wrong, although it is loosely related; it is, rather, a question of fact, concerning ability: Has one the power to forgive for another?

Thus, the real question, overlooked by many of the re-

spondents, is not whether or not Simon should have forgiven the Nazi, but whether or not he could have forgiven him.

Perhaps his response could have been: "I may want to (especially given the circumstances) but I simply am not able to."

This is Torah's answer and attitude: an unequivocal no. The victim alone owns the copyright to forgive the criminals who committed crimes against him and no one can speak on his behalf without permission.

*What's in It for Me?*

This simple yet novel idea underscores the power entrusted to man by G-d. He alone, from all of creation, can both commit and absolve an act that falls outside of G-d's jurisdiction, so to speak. The one do-

main that G-d handed over to us, providing us with total autonomy, is the sphere of forgiveness - for those acts committed against us personally.

Undeniably, this is a huge honor, coupled with an even greater responsibility.

One which He, in his infinite wisdom and kindness, saw fit to bestow upon mankind alone.

Let us make Him proud.

But the point here is simple.  
On this unique day of clemency, in a  
show of unrestrained compassion,  
G-d forgives any sin He can, but He does  
not forgive those he "cannot."



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# Who Controls the Weather?

by Chaya Shuchat

It seems that we have come full circle.

There was a time when people believed they could control the weather. In every society were rituals to bring forth rain - from sacrifices to special prayers to rain dances.

Later, people became enlightened and learned that rain depended on outside forces beyond our control. Singing and dancing have no effect.

Now the pendulum has swung in the other direction. Scientists have come to realize that human behavior such as industrial activity has a great deal of influence on weather patterns. Every extreme weather event - from hurricanes to ice storms - is greeted by a media hoopla reminding us that climate change is responsible. Long ago, society may have attributed a freak storm or a devastating hurricane to divine retribution, and even in the not-so-distant past, natural disasters were referred to as "acts of G-d." Today, however, we are ready to accept a much more direct responsibility for catastrophic events.

What does the Torah have to say on the matter? Can we control the weather? What is our responsibility toward the environment? To what lengths must we go to protect open spaces or endangered species? And are we at fault for natural disasters?

The beginning of the Torah in Genesis is fundamental in establishing the role of humankind within the order of creation and sheds light on some of the thorniest environmental issues of today.

Let's examine several verses in order:

1. In the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth  
The very first verse of the Torah establishes the incon-

vertible truth: The world belongs to G-d, full stop. Our approach to environmental issues needs to be built on this foundation. How does G-d want us to treat His world? Are we using it in the way He intended?

2. G-d said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and they shall rule over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, the animals, all the earth and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth."

In this verse, G-d is contemplating the creation of mankind and envisioning the role we would play. We find two themes in this verse: We are created in the image of G-d, and we are given the responsibility of ruling over all other creatures. These two facts go hand in hand. Our right to use natural resources or to modify the environment is predicated on our recognition that we are here as G-d's representatives on earth, responsible for safeguarding all of creation.

3. G-d blessed them, and G-d said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the sky and the beasts that tread upon the earth."

Here, G-d is not convening with the angels, but addressing Adam and Eve directly, laying out their role on earth. In addition to "ruling" over the creatures of the earth, G-d

What does the Torah have to say on the matter? Can we control the weather? What is our responsibility toward the environment? To what lengths must we go to protect open spaces or endangered species? And are we at fault for natural disasters?




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adds two more directives: to be fruitful and multiply, and to “subdue” the earth. Chassidic teachings explain that the word “subdue” refers to our work of transforming the world into a place that reflects its creator.

This verse does not give us license to exploit the world’s resources and harm the environment. On the other hand, it is not meant as an indictment of all human industrial activity. In an ideal world, all human endeavor is a means to an end. G-d created a world that is “subduable,” one that can be manipulated and reshaped by man, but only to serve a higher purpose - to reveal the G-dly unity within all of creation.

When we take a beautiful landscape and replace it with a cityscape, is this an abomination of G-d’s earth? If the creation of the city will help more people live, work and function in order to better serve G-d, then it is not an abomination but an enhancement of the earth. We must ask ourselves: Does our industry contribute to greater unity and cooperation between people? Do we use our inventions to help each other or to exploit one another? And - have we built the city in the most eco-friendly and sustainable way, giving back to the earth rather than depleting it? We were given a G-dly power to shape our environment. How we apply that power is up to us.

4. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, on the day that the L-rd G-d made earth and heaven. Now no tree of the field was yet on the earth, neither did any herb of the field yet grow, because the L-rd G-d had not brought rain upon the earth, and



there was no man to work the soil. And a mist ascended from the earth and watered the entire surface of the ground.

These verses encapsulate the symbiotic relationship between humankind and the environment. G-d had created the world completely, yet had not brought rain to irrigate

the earth and actualize the earth’s potential. For this, He awaited the creation of Adam, who would recognize the need for rain and pray for it.

It may sound strange, but in Chassidic thought, the rain that falls from above is a symbol of our work below. There is an intimate relationship between human activity and rainfall - which we have always understood in a spiritual sense, but are now just beginning to unravel in a physical sense as well. The “mist” referred to in this verse is our activity, our efforts to work with the world, elevate it and make it more spiritual. In return, G-d reciprocates and “waters the entire surface of the ground,” saturating the world with His goodness.

When we pray for rain, we ask not only for precipitation but that G-d send *gishmei brachah*, rains of blessing. We ask that G-d send us rain in the right time and in the right amount. We ask that G-d bless our endeavors. We ask for the wisdom and strength to use the resources that G-d has given us in the proper way - in a way that respects every element of creation and reveals its G-dly source. Then we will enjoy G-d’s blessings and dwell peacefully on earth, sustained by G-d’s full, open and holy hand.

THE CHANUKAH FLAMES THAT OUTBURNED THE FLU

*Continued from page 36*

had lifted me to my feet. It was time to light the Chanukah candles. My mother sat beside me without moving, having not slept for more than twenty-four hours already. But when I sat up in bed, she opened her eyes. I gathered all my strength and whispered a few words from my dry lips: “Mother, I want water ... to wash my hands ... I want to make the blessings and light the menorah.”

The prepared menorah stood on a small table by my bed. Every movement was painful, but I slowly made the blessings, after which Mother helped me light the candles. A deep inner joy enveloped me as I watched the small flame flicker and then catch hold of the wick, burning steadily. I cast a grateful look at Mother. She forced herself to smile.

A great weariness came over me, and I immediately fell into a deep sleep. How long I lay unconscious, I don’t

know. Even the injections given to me by a merciful nurse, I didn’t feel. My illness reached its peak that first night of Chanukah, and my life hung in the balance. When I opened my eyes again, my gaze fell on the small table where the menorah still stood. The crisis had passed, and I remained alive. The merit of lighting the Chanukah candles had stood by me, saving me from certain death.



# The Chanukah Flames That Outburned The Spanish Flu

**A childhood memory of faith, illness, and love**

by Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Aizik Hodakov o.b.m., the Rebbe's Chief of Staff

There is one Chanukah that is deeply etched in my memory. It took place during the final months of World War I when I was just a young boy, around bar mitzvah age, living in Riga, Latvia. I had lost my father, Rabbi Shalom Yisrael, of blessed memory, during the war, and my mother worked hard to support us.

Those were days of chaos and confusion. The front line passed through Riga, with Germans on one side and Russians on the other. Bullets whistled through the air, explosions thundered, and airplanes flew overhead. The city changed hands several times. The Germans would capture it, then the Russians would take control, and meanwhile, the Latvians were preparing for independence. No one was sure they would live to see the next day.

Adding to all these troubles, the Spanish flu was raging through the city. In the harsh wartime conditions, it was nearly impossible to find a doctor or medicine, leaving patients so severely weakened that they often never rose from their sickbeds.

With war and sickness dominating our lives, what could a child my age do? Educational institutions were closed; no cheder, no yeshivah. But Jews still continue, so I went to the synagogue three times a day despite the danger.

I returned home from synagogue late one evening, shivering. My throat was dry and my head spun. I felt hot and then cold and then hot again. I tried to hide my condition but my mother immediately noticed that something was wrong. She placed her hand on my forehead and I could see the terror in her eyes.

"Let me go get the doctor," she said. I begged her to wait for morning, as going out late in the evening was very dangerous. She insisted, however, placing a small kerosene lamp by my bed before heading out into the city streets.

I awoke to Mother's warm touch as she stood by my bed saying, "Mordechai, my little son, the doctor will come right away. Would you like to eat something in the meantime?" I shook my head, closed my eyes and tried to sleep.

When the doctor arrived, he checked my pulse, measured my temperature, and put a spoon in my mouth, asking me to say "ah," but only a strange sound came out. It was evident that the doctor was not pleased. Mother stood to the side, watching anxiously. Finally, the doctor stood up, gathered his things, and prepared to leave. I didn't fully understand what he told my mother, but the fragments I managed to catch were, "... too late ... nothing to be done



A childhood photo of Rabbi Hodakov

... G-d's will ... "

"I'll go get the medicine the doctor prescribed," Mother said.

"Don't worry, I'll be fine, G-d willing. You'll see for yourself," I tried in vain to convince her. She couldn't contain herself anymore, fell upon my bed, hugged me, and cried bitterly. Only now did I understand how serious my condition was.

But then I remembered that the following evening would be the first night of

Chanukah. Mother had promised me several days ago that she would try to get some oil for the Chanukah lights. Mother could be counted on to remember, but how would she be able to procure any oil when there was none available, even for large sums of money? And even if she did, would I have enough strength to get up and light the Chanukah candles? With all my heart, I wanted to live, at least long enough to light the first candle.

These thoughts tormented me as I tried to rest. I could hardly breathe, and the pain in my throat grew worse moment by moment. It seemed to me that at any moment I would suffocate. Each time I dozed off for a few minutes, I saw the Chanukah lights before my eyes, their flames raging into a fire that threatened to consume me.

All that night, Mother stayed by my bedside, but when morning came, she put on her old coat, wrapped a scarf around herself, and rushed to the synagogue. "Fellow Jews, have mercy!" she cried tearfully. "Mordechai is deathly ill. Jews, Have mercy on him, say Psalms!" Immediately after prayers, they began reciting Psalms for me, adding an extra name to mine—"Chaim" (meaning "life"). If, G-d forbid, a heavenly decree had been made against Mordechai Aizik, now I was a different child—Chaim Mordechai Aizik—and the decree would no longer apply.

Mother shed many tears, pleading with G-d not to take her only child. On her way home, she remembered that she needed to get oil for the Chanukah lights. She went into one shop, then a second, then a third, until finally fortune smiled upon her. She purchased a small bottle and immediately set out for home.

"Mordechai, I managed to get some oil! Tonight you'll be able to light the Chanukah lights!" she called out excitedly. But I could hardly see or hear her. My condition was worsening from moment to moment, and everything was a hazy blur.

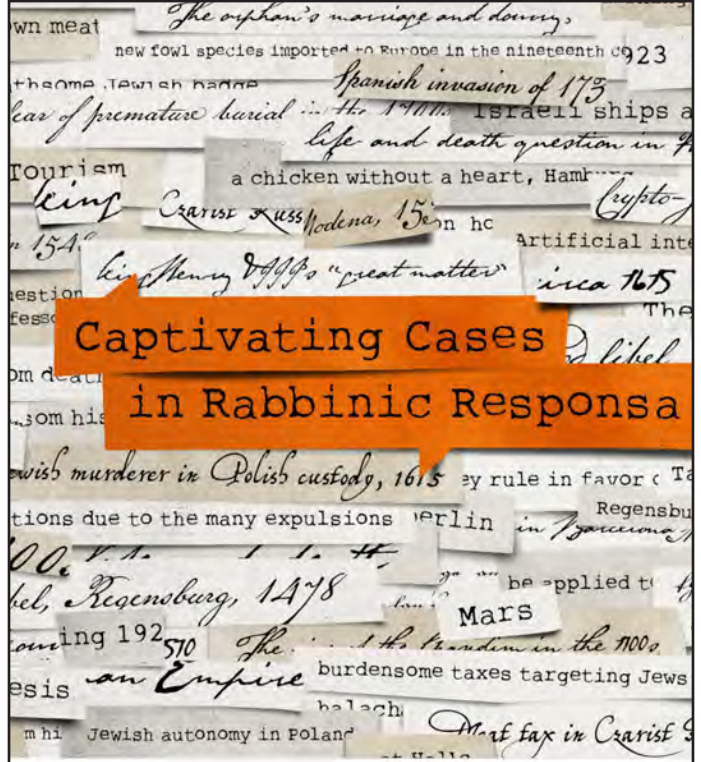
Toward evening, I suddenly rose, as if an invisible hand  
*Continued on page 35*



Sunday <b>DEC 14</b> 4:00 PM	<b>CHANUKAH PARTY &amp; MENORAH LIGHTING</b> 4 PM @ the Wintergarden. Chanukah Party with the Rochester Boys choir & a Puppet show, Latkes, Donuts & Chanukah Gelt drop. 5:15 PM Giant Menorah Lighting @ Washington Square Park.
Monday <b>DEC 15</b> 6:00 PM	<b>PITTSFORD MENORAH LIGHTING</b> Fire & Ice outdoor Ice Menorah Sculpture Lighting. Followed by Community Chanukah Party
Tuesday <b>DEC 16</b> 6:00 PM	<b>VICTOR MENORAH LIGHTING</b> Victor Town Hall 85 E Main St. Latkes, Donuts.
Tuesday <b>DEC 16</b> 6:00 PM	<b>HENRIETTA MENORAH LIGHTING</b> Lawn of the Recreation Center, 605 Calkins Rd, Indoor reception/refreshments with Donuts and Latkes.
Wednesday <b>DEC 17</b> 5:30 PM	<b>PENFIELD MENORAH LIGHTING</b> Menorah Lighting @ Four Corners (Rt. 441 & Five Mile Line Rd.) Latkes, Donuts
Wednesday <b>DEC 17</b> 6:00 PM	<b>HONEOYE FALLS LIGHTING</b> Mendon Town Hall, 16 W. Main St. Honeoye Falls. Latkes, Donuts.
Wednesday <b>DEC 17</b> 7:00 PM	<b>ROCHESTER AMERICANS HOCKEY GAME</b> Celebrate Chanukah with the Rochester Americans and a special Menorah lighting ceremony featuring a Menorah made of hockey sticks. Tickets: <a href="http://chabadrochester.com/amerks">chabadrochester.com/amerks</a>
Thursday <b>DEC 18</b> 5:00 PM	<b>FAIRPORT MENORAH LIGHTING</b> Fairport Village Hall, 31 S. Main St. Fairport Latkes, Donuts.
Saturday <b>DEC 20</b> 7:00 PM	<b>12 CORNERS L.E.D. MENORAH</b> Twelve Corners Triangle. Glow Menoras. Latkes, Donuts, Chanukah Gelt Cannon



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<p> <b>2 REFRAMING RAGE</b>                  Dousing Anger and Deflecting Upset                  SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2025                  11:00AM</p>	<p> <b>6 LIVING G-D</b>                  Logic and Faith in Our Divine Relationship                  SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2026                  11:00 AM</p>
<p> <b>3 ART OF EAT</b>                  Managing Food and Munching for Meaning                  SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2026                  11:00 AM</p>	<p> <b>7 DIVINE IMAGE PROJECTION</b>                  Freeing and Implementing Our Potential                  SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2026                  11:00 AM</p>
<p> <b>4 ELATED LIVING</b>                  Reaching and Reaping Genuine Joy                  SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2026                  11:00 AM</p>	 A women's program of the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute

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Services: 4:20 pm

Dinner: 5:15 pm

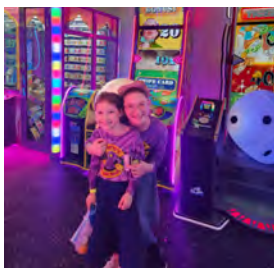
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