

L'Chaim

1891

26 Elul, 5785

September 19, 2025

The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תר"י ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalms 124:8)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

*from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion*

This week's Torah portion, Nitzavim, is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana. There are so many things about this portion that connect to Rosh Hashana.

Nitzavim speaks of our commitment to G-d, His Torah and mitzvot (commandments). It teaches about "teshuvah" and tells of how G-d will gather us from the farthest places. It is clearly talking about us and our time, as we sit on the threshold of Moshiach's coming. Teshuvah means "return [to G-d]." On a basic level this means, to regret your past lapses, ask for forgiveness and get back on G-d's path.

For a person who has broken trust and wants to once again be trusted, being remorseful and saying "I'm sorry" is not enough. He needs to reach higher, find a greater level of character and prove himself worthy. However teshuvah can be so much more. Even the holiest of people can tap into the power of teshuvah. The verse in our Torah portion states, "And you will return until the L-rd your G-d." What does "until" mean? "Return" implies going back to a place or situation you were in before.

We are returning to a place where we are in perfect harmony with G-d.. Each of us has a soul, described in Chabad Chasidic teachings as an actual "part" of G-d. It is our essence. Over time we could become so involved in the world around us that our soul gets forgotten. Teshuvah is connected to our G-dly essence, the soul. It is a journey to your core, every step you take inward, brings clarity. You see how you are one with G-d, and that He loves you because you are part of Him.

When you connect at this level, the lower levels of teshuvah are automatic. How could you remain the same after connecting so deeply? Regret, remorse and contrition over your previous state will overtake you, and you become closer to G-d. Being that our soul is infinite – part of Infinite G-d – there are always deeper levels to connect to.

Through teshuvah even a totally righteous person will access new levels of bonding with G-d. Your core essence is already there; your soul has always been at the highest level. You now have to "return until G-d," return to where your soul is one with G-d. Suffering also brings one closer to G-d. We have suffered enough. Perhaps G-d wants our closeness to come from our own initiative.

Being a father and a husband, I love my family to no end, like any father and husband would. When the love and closeness from my family is from their own initiative, the pleasure is even deeper. In preparation for Rosh Hashana, let us take the initiative to get closer to G-d. May He, with His Parental love, send Moshiach and gather the exiles and bring us home.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

"Clean Up and Carry On!"

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Is living life as a committed Jew difficult?

Let's see what this week's parshah has to say about it.

"For this commandment which I command you this day is not concealed from you, nor is it far away..... rather, this thing is very close to you ... so that you can fulfill it."

These words state clearly that living by the Torah's precepts is not a distant dream. It's in reach, practical, and eminently doable.

The final verse, Ki karov elecha hadavar me'od, "this thing is very close to you," forms the foundation of the Book of Tanya, the creed of Chabad Chassidism.

Tanya's illustrious author, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, wrote the Tanya to demonstrate that living a deeply committed Jewish life is neither impossible nor unattainable. "It is close to you" means that it is realistically achievable and within reach of "the average person," whom the Tanya addresses.

The Tanya explains that we all have a G-dly soul and an animalistic soul, and that there is meant to be an ongoing struggle between these forces inside us as each aspires to reign supreme and be the only one to direct our choices and actions.

He describes the different types of people, each in their own spiritual category. Some may be perfectly righteous, and others less.

In fact, for most of us it will be a lifelong struggle. And that's

OK. Because just as G-d loves the perfect tzaddik who never steps out of line, so does He love those of us who struggle and have repeated spiritual ups and downs.

The wholly righteous person is like sweet food, while the one who has ups and downs resembles spicy food. Some people love a sweet kugel on Shabbat, while others prefer a savory noodle kugel. G-d both values the sweet, righteous person, and He has special appreciation for those who struggle in their service of G-d.

The main thing is that when we do fall, we pick ourselves up and start again without allowing ourselves to wallow in self-pity.

On Erev Yom Kippur there is a long-standing tradition to observe kaparot and, to this day, many still do it in the same old-fashioned way with a real live chicken. From time to time it happens that as the chicken is being passed overhead, it duly soils the poor fellow below.

So what does he do? Well, besides grimacing and bemoaning his fate, the traditional Yiddish answer was, M'visht op, un m'geit veiter, "You clean yourself up, and you carry on."

It's a crass but stark reminder that even if we experience a fall, or a disappointment, we must still carry on and continue to do what we have to do, regardless.

Please G-d, the strugglers and stragglers will be inspired to continue their good work and give you nachas. We may not all be tzaddikim, but we can all give G-d much satisfaction, pleasure, and joy, each in our own way.

SLICE OF LIFE

The Defiant Kippah

In the gray landscape of 1970s Leningrad, where religious expression could mean imprisonment or exile, Shimon Ash made a decision that would reshape not only his own destiny but that of countless Soviet Jews who would follow. He began wearing a kippah—not initially as a declaration of faith, but as an act of rebellion against a system that sought to erase Jewish identity entirely.

“My name is Shimon Ash,” he begins, speaking from his current home base of Kazakhstan, where he serves as a Chabad emissary. “I was born in Leningrad in 1957 into a family that maintained only the faintest whisper of Jewish connection. Beyond knowing we were Jewish, I understood virtually nothing about our heritage. My single childhood memory of Jewish practice was matzah that appeared mysteriously on our kitchen table each Passover.”

The seeds of Ash’s transformation were planted during his university years in Leningrad, though they sprouted from an unexpected source. “I started wearing a kippah after discovering something remarkable—it absolutely infuriated both the secret police and regular officers,” he recalls with evident satisfaction. “What began as a small act of defiance carried profound meaning I didn’t yet fully understand.”

This simple piece of cloth became Ash’s gateway into clandestine Jewish learning. “I found myself drawn to Torah classes held in private apartments—secret gatherings that provided spiritual nourishment to souls starved of any connection to their heritage.” These dangerous meetings operated under constant threat of discovery, yet they became the foundation of Ash’s

Jewish awakening.

Through these underground classes, Ash encountered Rabbi Yitzchak Kogan, a figure whose influence would prove pivotal. “Rabbi Kogan was known as ‘the Tzaddik of Leningrad’—a righteous man who somehow maintained authentic Jewish practice under impossible circumstances,” Ash explains. “Under his guidance, we began observing kosher laws, which meant I could no longer eat at my parents’ home. Eventually, they joined us in keeping kosher.”

More importantly, Rabbi Kogan introduced Ash to teachings about the Lubavitcher Rebbe—conversations that would later prove prophetic.

The risks of underground Jewish activity became brutally clear one evening when Ash hosted a Torah class in his apartment. “Dozens of people had gathered when urgent knocking shattered our discussion,” he remembers. “A KGB agent entered, surveyed our group, and immediately arrested me.” The interrogation was harsh, the investigator screaming about illegal “mass gatherings” before sentencing Ash to two weeks in prison.

Yet even imprisonment couldn’t diminish Ash’s growing determination to leave the Soviet Union. For eight years, he and his wife applied repeatedly for exit visas, facing rejection after rejection. Desperate, they devised a creative solution through friends who located someone in Israel with the surname Ash willing to claim family relationship.

The immigration office response was cruel in its bureaucratic precision: “He’s not your relative, but your father’s. When your father receives approval and arrives in Israel, then he can send you an invitation.” The clerk added with obvious satisfaction, “You’ve waited eight years already—you can wait longer.”

Ash decided on a dangerous gambit that could have resulted in severe punishment: he sent an official letter threatening to stage a public demonstration with his wife and two children. “The authorities began summoning me to various offices, but I refused to appear,” he explains. “Finally, a KGB investigator came to our apartment demanding I report the next day.”

Paradoxically, this escalation brought hope. “In my heart, I was celebrating because I knew this meant they were finally taking our case seriously.” Ash prepared his wife for the possibility that if he didn’t return by a certain time, she should proceed with the threatened demonstration.

The pivotal moment arrived with perfect timing.

“Just seconds before my ‘ultimatum’ expired, I walked out of that office holding the exit visa we had dreamed about for nearly a decade.”

Israel brought both freedom and new challenges. Family members met them at the airport, immediately offering job opportunities. “I thanked them but explained that my first priority was traveling to Jerusalem to complete my Jewish education,” Ash recalls. This decision led him to work with Yad L’Achim and eventually into Russian-language radio broadcasting about Judaism.

Within his first year in Israel, Ash made a pilgrimage that would profoundly impact his family’s future. “I traveled to New York to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe, carrying a letter from my father about my grandmother’s serious illness. She was 91 and suffering from a malignant disease.” The Rebbe’s blessing proved remarkably efficacious—Ash’s grandmother lived three additional years.

Today, Ash has come full circle geographically, serving as community rabbi in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan—back in former Soviet territory, but under dramatically different circumstances. “It’s remarkable to witness how friendly the Kazakhs are toward Jews,” he observes. “The fact that we can now openly spread Judaism in countries once dominated by Communist oppression never ceases to amaze me.”

His work represents more than personal achievement—it embodies the fulfillment of promises made during those dark Leningrad years. “I witnessed firsthand the tremendous spiritual force of Chassidim operating behind the Iron Curtain. Today, I have the privilege of bringing that same strength to a new generation in Kazakhstan.”

The generational impact of Ash’s courage continues through his children. His son Rabbi Daniel serves as a Chabad emissary in St. Petersburg—ironically, the same city where his father once wore a defiant kippah. His daughter works as an emissary in Moscow.

“I left Russia when I was five and don’t remember much,” Rabbi Daniel reflects, “but I clearly remember being born into an uncompromising Jewish family. Our parents fought to observe mitzvot and sacrificed enormously for their commitment. After immigrating to Israel, they insisted on speaking Russian with us, explaining that we needed to know the language to help Soviet Jews discover their heritage.”

Adapted from Sichat Shavua

Richmond Chabad Invigorates Jewish Life at VCU



At Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), in the heart of urban Richmond, Rabbi Menachem and Daniela Lessoff are dedicated to building a welcoming Jewish community for students and staff alike.

Chabad at VCU offers a wide range of programs to enrich Jewish student life: engaging Torah classes, Shabbat dinners, lively social events and meaningful holiday celebrations. Beyond campus, they also lead the Richmond chapter of the Chabad Young Professionals (CYP), helping young adults in the wider community foster Jewish connections.

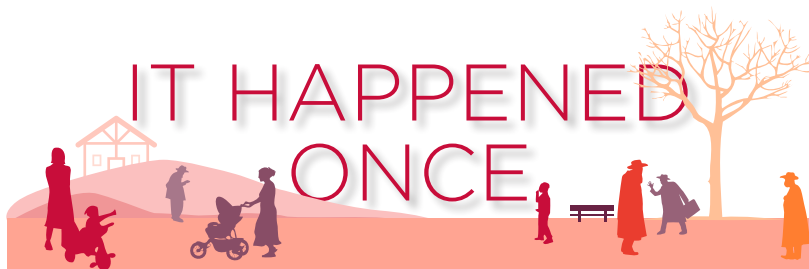
The Lessoffs provide personal support and guidance to students navigating the challenges of college life as a Jew. They are passionate about nurturing each individual’s Jewish identity, helping them explore and connect to Jewish life and traditions with pride and confidence.

Ethics of the Fathers

Do not seek greatness for yourself, and do not lust for honor. More than you study, do. Desire not the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs, and faithful is your Employer to pay you the rewards of your work.

Everything that G-d created in His world, He did not create but for His glory. As is stated (Isaiah 43:7): “All that is called by My name and for My glory, I created it, formed it, also I made it.” And it says (Exodus 15:1): “G-d shall reign forever and ever.”

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Many years ago in Poland there lived a wealthy Jewish merchant who bought flax from the nobility and then resold it abroad. At the same time, he pursued the holy mitzva of “pidyun shevuim,” ransoming prisoners. (In those days it was not unusual for Jews to languish in debtors’ prisons when they failed to pay on time for leasing inns or other properties.)

One day the merchant was on his way to the estate of one of the Polish landowners, when he fell asleep at the reins of his carriage. As he dozed, the horses wandered off the path. When the merchant awakened he found himself on an unknown road. In front of him was a carriage driver fixing a broken wheel. Inside the carriage, a Polish gentleman sat looking angry and impatient.

The merchant asked the nobleman if he could be of any assistance. “Yes, you certainly can,” he replied. “I would be most grateful if you would drive me to the inn just fifteen minutes ride from here. I could use a bit of whiskey, and I will be happy to treat you to some also in return for the favor.” “I will be happy to take you to the inn,” the merchant replied. On the way they spoke amiably, and the nobleman discovered that the merchant dealt in flax, which was one of his primary crops. “What a happy coincidence,” he thought, and they agreed to meet again to conduct some business. When they arrived at the inn the Jewish innkeeper rushed to offer the Pole, who was his landlord, hospitality. The merchant went into the other room to say his afternoon prayers. He couldn’t help but overhear snippets of conversation.

“Moshke, you had better pay up the rent, now!” the landlord barked. The Jew responded meekly about the terrible snows which had kept customers away. The merchant finished praying, and was about to leave, but the innkeeper begged him to partake of some refreshments. “No, I’d better be on my way,” the merchant replied. “But tell me, are you having problems with the landlord?” “He’s drunk now. I hope when he sobers up he’ll extend me credit a bit longer.”

The two Jews bade each other farewell, and the merchant departed. When the flax harvest arrived, the Jewish merchant remembered the Polish landlord. He went to the estate, and the Pole was glad to make a deal with him. They settled on a price and drew up a contract. The conversation was friendly, and the merchant mentioned Moshke. “How is our friend, the innkeeper?” “Oh, I had to put him in prison. Imagine, after all the chances I gave him, he still didn’t pay me! Now, it’s his wife’s problem to come up with the money!” “What! I can’t believe you actually imprisoned the poor fellow! How much does he owe you?” asked the merchant. The landlord mentioned a figure, exactly the sum agreed upon for the deposit.

The merchant placed the money in the Pole’s hand, and said, “There is the money he owes you. Now, set him free!” “Fine. Now give me the money for the deposit and we’ll conclude our deal.” “I’m sorry, Sir. I have no more money with me.” “I have never seen such a thing,” exclaimed the Pole. “You have just given all your money to an utter stranger, and in the bargain, you have lost out on a wonderful deal which could have made you a tidy profit!” “What you say is true, Sir, except for one thing – that Jew is not a stranger to me, he is my brother, and it is my duty to redeem him.” The Pole was stunned.

“You are a fine fellow. I will sign the contract without a deposit. I will also write a letter of recommendation to my brother-in-law, who is also a flax merchant. He will be anxious to do business with you.” The Jewish innkeeper was returned to his joyful family, and the gratitude they felt toward the merchant was inexpressible. But how on earth would they ever be able to repay him for his kindness? “I wouldn’t sell my mitzva for any amount of money!” the merchant declared, and they parted in happiness and with a deep feeling of brotherhood. The merchant proceeded to the other landlord with the letter of recommendation. Just as the first Pole promised, his relative was happy to sell his flax to the Jew. They were about to conclude the deal when the merchant heard a child crying in Yiddish, “Daddy, Mommy, I want to go

home!” “Why is a Jewish child here, away from his parents?” “I had to take him so his parents would pay what they owe me!” The merchant suddenly rose from his seat. “I can’t do business with a man who would take a child as hostage!” The Pole was anxious not to lose the sale.

“Fine. I’ll have the child returned, just let’s finish our business.” Just as his brother-in-law had done, this man also concluded the deal without a deposit, and the merchant made a very nice profit on the sale of the flax. In addition, he accrued yet another precious mitzva to his account when the child was returned to his grieving parents. The Jewish merchant was rewarded in this world as well as the next. And he was blessed with yet another great reward, the birth of two sons who lit up the world with their holiness, the illustrious tzadikim, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk and Reb Zusia of Anipoli.



The anger of G-d burned against this land... and G-d rooted them out of the land in anger... and cast them into another land (Deut. 29:26-27)

The curses and punishments enumerated in this section of the Torah are merely warnings, not promises that G-d must fulfill. Their purpose is to arouse the heart of man to choose good over evil so that they will never come to pass. (Peninei HaGeula)

And it shall come to pass (“vehaya”), when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse (Deut. 30:1)

Our Rabbis explain that the word “vehaya” is an expression of joy. A Jew must always strive to serve G-d joyfully, regardless of whether he encounters blessing in life or (G-d forbid) the opposite. As our Sages declared, “A person is obligated to bless G-d for [apparent] evil in the same way he blesses Him for good.” (Ohr HaChaim)

It is obvious that punishment and suffering can arouse the heart to teshuva (repentance). But how can blessing do the same?

The Baal Shem Tov offered an analogy of a subject who rebels against his king. What does the king do? Instead of punishing him he appoints him minister, allows him into the royal palace and gradually increases his rank until he is second in command. The greater the king’s beneficence, the more the recipient is ashamed of having rebelled against such a merciful ruler. The king’s loving kindness thus leads him to a higher level of repentance than had he been punished. Then the L-rd your G-d will turn your captivity (Deut. 30:3) Rashi notes this means that “[G-d] will literally take hold with His hand every person... as it states, ‘You shall be gathered one by one, Children of Israel.’” As we know that the Redemption will come about through repentance, the Torah clearly promises that every single Jew will ultimately return to G-d in repentance, as it states, “For not even one will be banished.” (Tanya)



6:39 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
26 Elul / September 19
Torah Portion Nitzavim
Ethics Ch 5 & 6
Shabbat ends **7:36 pm**

Dedicated in Honor of dear friends
of the Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Michael and Fiona Scharf

Wishing you a Kesivah V’Chasimah Tovah, Shana Tova U’mesuka
A good and sweet year