בס"ד

L'Chaim

1896

9 Cheshvan, 5786

October 31, 2025

The Weekly Publication for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תוך 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

The seventh of the Jewish month of Marcheshvan always falls in the week in which the Torah portion of Lech Lecha is read.

On the seventh of Marcheshvan we begin to pray for rain, for it is the day on which the last pilgrims who had come to the Holy Temple for Sukkot returned home. We wait until this date to ask G-d for rain so as not to cause undue hardship for the pilgrims who are still traveling.

The seventh of Marcheshvan is thus symbolic of descent, for it signifies the Jews' departure from the Temple--the epitome of holiness--and their return to their own places.

Lech Lecha, by contrast, is symbolic of ascent. In this Torah portion, Avraham leaves the land of his birth and goes to the land of Israel. It thus signifies the ascent from Charan to the higher level of holiness of the land of Israel.

What exactly did the Jews do during their thrice-yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem? They basked in the Temple's holiness, witnessed the Ten Miracles that occurred there regularly, and in general perceived G-dliness in a revealed manner. The enjoyment that was derived, albeit of a sublime and spiritual nature, was nonetheless a personal enjoyment.

The Jews' return home marked an end to this exclusive preoccupation with G-dliness, Torah and mitzvot, and Divine service. Each person had to resume the more mundane labors of his livelihood, plowing and sowing his individual plot of land. Yet G-d wants the Jew, through his actions, to establish a "dwelling place" for Him in the "lower realms"--the material plane of this physical world.

Thus, in essence, the seventh of Marcheshvan--the "descent" of the Jew from the holiness of Jerusalem to the more ordinary affairs of his daily life--is actually a very great "ascent," for it is only upon his return home that he can begin his task of establishing a "dwelling place" for G-d in earnest.

It wasn't until Avraham arrived in the land of Israel that his work to reveal G-dliness within the world commenced on an unprecedented scale. True, Avraham had strived to foster an awareness of G-d even prior to this time, but his efforts had been more limited in scope.

The seventh of Marcheshvan always coincides with Lech Lecha to teach us that the descent it symbolizes is really a step up, providing us with a lesson we can apply in our lives:

Although the Jewish people are in exile, this should not cause us to be saddened or despair. On the contrary, it is precisely through the "descent" of exile that we may effect the greatest "ascent": fulfilling the will of G-d by serving Him within the context of the physical world, thereby making a suitable "dwelling place for G-d" in the lower realms.

Adapted for Maayan Chai from Likutei Sichot, Volume 20

Anything You Want To Be

By Rabbi Lazer Gurkow

Parents often say to their children, "If you put your mind to it, you can be anything you want to be."

Sometimes children misunderstand and think that they can snap their fingers and become anything they want to be. When they enter the real world and see that it isn't that easy, they think their parents misled them. But they didn't. The children simply misunderstood. The parents were saying that if you are determined and willing to work hard, you can be anything you want to be.

THE FIRST JEW

G-d's first words to Abraham were, "Go forth from your land, your birthplace, and your father's home to the land that I will show you." The message was that if you want to be in a land of G-d's choosing, a holy place where G-d is present, you can.

It is G-d's vote of confidence in each of Abraham's children. Notwithstanding our background, childhood, weaknesses, fears, insecurities, or education, we can be anything we want to be. Our belief that we can't do more, our belief that we can't shatter our ceiling, only that holds us back.

They tell a story about an elephant born in a zoo. The zookeeper chained the elephant's leg to a stake in the ground. The little elephant tried to pull his leg free, but the stake and chain held out. One day the elephant gave up trying and resigned himself to the sad reality that he was unable to break the chain.

Over time the elephant grew larger and stronger and could snap the chain, but he never did because he never tried. He continued to believe that the chain was stronger than him. We are like that elephant. Our beliefs are our ceiling. Break those beliefs, and you will shatter your ceiling.

THE ORDER

G-d told Abraham to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father's home. Seemingly, Abraham would first need to leave his father's home, then his birth region, and finally his land. Shouldn't his orders have been reversed?

When a Jew decides to devote him or herself to G-d and to Torah, the first impediment is our earthliness. Our first challenge is to leave our inner land—our earthliness—behind.

The next challenge to overcome is the traits and tendencies encoded into us at the time of our conception. The mystics say that our spiritual orientation is influenced by the thoughts our parents entertained when we were conceived.

Finally, we are the product of our environment. The home of our parents, the place where we grew up.

The order now makes sense. G-d told Abraham to go forth from his land—the pre-birth limitations of nature. His birthplace—the tendencies imposed upon him by his parents' thoughts at conception. Finally, his father's home—the influence of his childhood.

G-d's message to Abraham was you are not confined by any of these limitations. You can find your way to me. You can be anything you want to be.

SLICE OF LIFE

A Bridge Between Worlds

Rabbi Israel Uzan with local dignitaries

In an era when antisemitism surges in many countries, it was in predominantly Muslim Nigeria where locals gathered to celebrate the bar mitzvah of a Chabad emissary's son—an event that would culminate in an extraordinary gift flowing back to the community.

"Our Chabad House is located in the capital city of Abuja, but our activities extend to many other locations," explains Rabbi Israel Uzan, a 39-year-old Paris native who has served as a Chabad emissary in Nigeria, West Africa's largest nation, for over a decade. "We organize five Passover seders throughout Nigeria, conduct Judaism classes for children after school hours, provide personal guidance for bar and bat mitzvah youth, supply kosher food, run a summer camp, make home visits, hold Shabbat gatherings, and much more."

With nearly a quarter of a billion residents, Nigeria presents unique opportunities and challenges. The Chabad House reaches more than a thousand local Jews and Israeli business people throughout the year.

A distinctive aspect of their work involves distributing food and clothing to locals and organizing activities for orphans and children with special needs. "This activity sometimes takes place with the assistance of additional entities, such as the Israeli Embassy," Rabbi Uzan notes.

The Chabad House employs many locals, which inspired their outreach efforts. "We saw that the family members of our employees sometimes suffer from hunger, and we understood that this is another role in our unique mission."

Though half of Nigeria's population is Muslim, and despite tensions between Muslims and Christians, neither group harbors antisemitism. "Most of them don't know what Jews are, and among those who do know, many openly declare their sympathy toward us," Rabbi Uzan explains.

Less than a year ago, the Uzan family celebrated their son Yossi's bar mitzvah—the first such celebration in the nation's history, at least since its independence. "Our son requested that part of the money he would receive at the event be donated to drill a water well in one of the villages," Rabbi Uzan shares with pride. "This gesture earned him a rare certificate of appreciation from the country's president."

The bar mitzvah celebration brought together fellow Chabad emissaries from across Africa, led by Rabbi Shlomo Bentolila, head of Chabad of Central Africa, alongside local guests from all backgrounds. "The locals brought their traditional African dances, which blended with the Hasidic music," Rabbi Uzan recalls with a smile.

After the bar mitzvah celebration, a special event marked the drilling of the well in a Muslim village an hour's drive from the capital. "An entire Muslim village came to celebrate with our son, both his bar mitzvah and the village's addition to the list of places with living water."

After the drill reached groundwater, locals lined up to collect this precious resource. "Our son asked us to buy them jerry cans so they could fill them with water. The residents were seen holding a yellow jerry can in one hand and a sign in the other that read in English, 'Mazal Tov Yossi Uzan.'"

The war in Israel affects the Uzans in Nigeria as well. "At the bar mitzvah celebration, we recited Psalms for the Holy Land. However, Nigerians have troubles of their own. Not long before the bar mitzvah, several hundred children were again kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist organization."

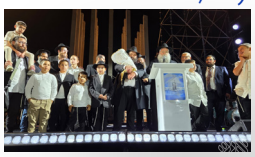
Although antisemitism is not felt in their community, they face difficulties organizing community activities. "Many people are afraid to come to public gatherings. Nevertheless, we try to gather the community and work with them in other ways, including 'one-on-one' or very small events."

A few years ago, they inaugurated Nigeria's first mikvah (ritual bath). "It was a real celebration. In the past year, unfortunately, this mikvah was destroyed, and this pains us greatly. We are confident that, as with all our activities, the Rebbe's blessings will continue to accompany us."

Adapted from Sichat Shavua Magazine

etc.

Two Years Later, Joyous Hakafos at Site of Sderot Attack



In a moving scene marking two years since the horrific attack in Sderot, Hakafos Shniyos were held Motzei Shemini Atzeres at the city's police station, the very site of a massacre on Simchas Torah.

Leading the celebration were the city's head shliach, Rabbi Moshe Ze'ev Pizem, his son Rabbi Asher Pizem, and his son-in-law, journalist R' Mendy Rizel.

With music, dancing, and tears of gratitude, participants transformed a place once marked by tragedy into one filled with light, faith, and renewed joy. With an unwavering commitment and declaration of Am Yisroel Chai, the city which had endured so much, is enthusiastically returning with greater strength and commitment.

CUSTOMS

WHAT IS A KETUBA?

The ketuba - marriage contract, contains the mutual obligations between husband and wife prerequisite to marriage. It is written in Hebrew-Aramaic. After it is read at the wedding ceremony under the chupa it is given to the bride and she must keep it amongst her possessions.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

JEWISH EDUCATION: NOT JUST AN INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE

18th of Cheshvan, 5724 [1963]

I received your letter of the 14th of Cheshvan with the enclosure. You are, of course, quite right in writing that the purpose of education is not merely the increase of knowledge but the actual training and upbringing to live the Jewish way of life.

This is especially true in our day and age, in view of the adverse influence of the environment, etc., which makes it all the more imperative to instill a goodly measure of Yirat Hashem [fear of G-d] into the children. Indeed, this is the purpose of the Torah and mitzvot, as it is written, "G-d commanded us to do all these decrees--to fear the L-rd, our G-d, to return all the days," etc.

There can be no difference of opinion as far as the purpose of Jewish education is concerned, which applies everywhere. There can only be a difference of approach and method as to how to attain this goal, and this may vary from generation to generation, from city to city and sometimes even from classroom to classroom.

Another point to remember is that inasmuch as parents are not always permeated with the idea that true Jewish education is truly vital for their children, it is necessary to follow the approach suggested by our Sages, of blessed memory, "A person should always say, metoch shelo lishma bo lishma [from doing something not for its own sake one comes to do the thing for its own sake]." This is why it is often useful to emphasize the good side effects of Jewish education, until they will eventually understand also the essential aspects involved.

With regard to the question which you write towards the end of your letter, namely, about your present job and your difficulty with parnasa [livelihood], etc., an improvement would depend on those who must be approached and who have the final say. Therefore, it would be well for you to consult fully with such persons that know them personally, and who can judge their reaction to any particular approach.

May G-d, who feeds and sustains the whole world out of His generous and ample Hand, also give you your parnasa with kashrut [in a permissible manner] and peace of mind, so that you should be able to concentrate on your efforts to strengthen and spread true Yiddishkeit to the utmost of your capacity.

20th of Cheshvan, 5732 [1971]

I was pleased to be informed of the forthcoming Dedication Dinner of the Lubavitch House--the Merkos Center of the Twin Cities [S. Paul and Minneapolis] and surrounding region.

Jewish education in the spirit of our Torah and Tradition has always been the lifeline of our people, and it is more than ever so in the present day of confusion, drifting and alienation. It is therefore surely unnecessary to emphasize at length the vital importance of the educational work of the Merkos Center.

I am particularly gratified to note that this most essential and indispensable work is recognized and appreciated by prominent businessmen and industrialists in the community.

Indeed, it is to be expected that good businessmen would recognize a good "investment," and there is none better and more profitable than investing in our children and adolescents. For this is the kind of investment where the original capital not only yields the highest dividends, but the dividends themselves become investment capital of the highest yield. Thus the children and youths who benefit from the Merkos Center today, will later become active investors in Torah-true education, in a cumulative and continuous process, yielding "fruits and the fruit of fruits" for the community and for our people at large.

I am confident that all friends and supporters of the Lubavitch House will continue to give it their unstinting support, not only financially, but also with personal dedication, and in a growing measure. Thus, the Dedication Dinner will indeed be a fitting occasion to celebrate not only the dedication of the Stillman Building, but also the dedication of its sponsors, supporters, and friends.

With prayerful wishes of the utmost success of the event and for the growing expansion of the activities of the Merkos Center, and may G-d bestow His generous blessings upon all participants and their families, materially and spiritually,

MOSHIACH MATTERS

In time to come, Divinity will be revealed in this world at a level more sublime than the level at which it is revealed in the Higher Garden of Eden. This is why even the loftiest tzadikim [righteous people] such as Avraham and Moshe, whose abode is at the zenith of the Higher Garden of Eden, will become vested in corporeal bodies and will arise at the Resurrection of the Dead.

(Likutei Torah)

"A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'chaim Publication.

From the Archives

In this week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, we read of G-d's promise to Avraham that he would inherit the lands of the ten nations--the seven Canaanite nations as well as three other lands, the lands of the Keini, Kenizi and Kadmoni.

Avraham and his descendants took possession of all seven Canaanite lands. However, they never took possession of the lands of the other three nations. The triumph over these nations and the possession of their lands will take place when Moshiach comes in the Era of the Redemption.

Chasidic philosophy explains that a person's powers and abilities are divided into ten categories, seven of them being in the realm of emotion and three being in the realm of intellect. In spiritual terms, the ten lands described above refer to the refinement of our 10 personal powers. The seven emotive powers are the seven Canaanite nations and the three intellectual powers are the lands of the Keini, Kenizi and Kadmoni.

In the pre-Messianic Era, we have "possession" of our seven emotive powers. And, though we obviously use our intellectual powers, it is not to our fullest ability, for we have not conquered, nor do we totally possess them. This will take place only in the Messianic Era. It is then that our intellects will find their true expression and fulfillment. The Messianic Era is described by the Prophet Isaiah as a time when "the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed."

Thus, when Moshaich comes our intellectual potential will reach its fulfillment. May that happen NOW!"

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA

לזכרון חי"ה י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.

Published by
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In the city of Vitebsk lived two tea merchants, both named Hoshia. One was known as "Big Hoshia and the other, "Little Hoshia." Big Hoshia was a wealthy man, with a large, respectable establishment. Little Hoshia was a small-time operator, forever scrambling for loans to keep his business afloat.

One day a message arrived that one of Little Hoshia's tea shipments had been confiscated at the border by customs officials. For the poor man, this spelled utter ruin. Not only would he lose everything, he would be left with crushing debts which he would never be able to repay.

"I was there," Rebbetzin Devorah Leah, daughter of Rabbi Menachem Mendel, third Rebbe of Lubavitch told, "when they broke the news to Reb Hoshia, who was in Lubavitch at the time. The unfortunate man collapsed in a dead faint; time and again they revived him, but as soon as he remembered what had occurred, he would pass out once more.

"We ran to my father and told him of Reb Hoshia's state. Father instructed that when Reb Hoshia is again revived, we should tell him that the messenger is mistaken. Shortly thereafter, the matter was indeed clarified. It turned out that the confiscated shipment belonged to the other Hoshia, the tea merchant, Big Hoshia, who would hardly feel the loss.

"Father always maintained that he never performed miracles. Now, the Chasidim who had witnessed the incident claimed that they had caught him red-handed with a supernatural feat. 'You are mistaken,' replied Father. 'There was nothing miraculous about my prediction.

You see, our Sages tell us that whenever the AlmIghty causes a person to undergo a challenge or trial in his life, He always provides him with the capacity and fortitude to bear it and to learn from the experience. So, when I saw a calamity which Reb Hoshia was not equipped to deal with, I understood that it was not meant for him. Obviously, there must have been some misunderstanding...'"

From the diary of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok, the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe

It is an hour since I returned from visiting the abandoned old park and its ancient trees. The walks between the rows of trees are overgrown with thorns and nettles, and wherever you turn in the park and square -- desolation and ruin.

Little wonder that the hamlet of Serebrinka, and its park in particular, are extremely precious to me, for many are the pleasant memories from the summer of 5660 when we lived in Serebrinka, as recounted in my journals of that year. How pleasant it is to stroll along the walks and trails which we then walked, to sit on the benches on which we then sat, for only they can evoke many details of the talks that I heard at the time from father--the nuances of the heart cannot be captured in writing.

So, immediately upon our arrival here today at six-thirty in the evening, I yearned to visit the park.

For an hour and a half I luxuriated in strolling through the park, sitting on its benches, gazing at the sky, and drowning in memories--until I heard the voice of my three-year-old daughter Chana, may she live, calling to me: "Father, Father, where are you...? Father, Father, answer me...," repeating her call twice and three times.

Her call interjected most aptly into my thoughts: At that very moment I had been thinking about my father's discourse of the past Sabbath, entitled "G-d Descended Upon Mt. Sinai." In it, Father [Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber, fifth Rebbe of Chabad] cites a metaphor to explain the difference between the Divine flow which comes in response to one's Torah study and observance of mitzvot, and G-d's response to one's 'service of the heart,' one's prayer.

The service of Torah and mitzvot draws a Divine response comparable to a father's pleasure in a son who toils in his father's business to increase his father's wealth. But the response evoked by prayer is like a father's response to his small child who yearns for him and cries: "Father, Father, answer me..."

Hearing my own daughter's cries, I sensed in myself how a child's call of "Father, Father" awakens an inner delight that is incomparably greater than the pleasure accorded by the older son's most impressive accomplishments.

The calling continued: "Father, Father, where are you? Father, Father answer me, hug me." I followed her voice and she hugged me and told me that grandfather, grandmother and mother were all waiting for me for the evening meal. She, too, will eat with us, she said with pride, but her younger sister, Chaya Mushka, (may she live) is already asleep -- in fact, she slept through the entire trip from Lubavitch and doesn't even know that we have arrived in the country! --and she laughed in delight.

Reprinted with permission from Once Upon A Chasid, by Yanki Tauber

In memory of
R' REFOEL MOSHE A"H SPERLIN
On the occasion of his Yahrtzeit
on the 11th of Mar-Cheshvan

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THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

"And I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you, I will curse." (Gen. 12:3)

Why doesn't the Torah write both in the same order, i.e., "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you?" The Talmud (Kiddushin 40a) says that G-d gives credit to one who plans to perform a mitzva, even if circumstances prevent the realization of the plan. However, for a transgression, one is punished for plans only when they are carried out.

When a person blesses or curses, he first thinks about it and then expresses verbally what he has in mind. Therefore, G-d is saying to Avraham, "I will bless those who bless you as soon as they plan to bless you, even if they have not yet blessed you. However, those who curse you will be cursed only after they actually curse you, but not merely for thinking."

"And I will make your children as the dust of the earth." (Gen. 13:16)

A Rabbi who intensely fought the missionaries in his town was visited by the bishop and asked, "Rabbi, why do you oppose us so strongly?" The Rabbi replied, "When you convert someone to your religion, you sprinkle him with your 'ritual water.' Jews are compared to the dust of the earth. When one mixes water with earth, mud results. I cannot sit idly and see someone trying to make mud of my people."

"If so much as a thread or a shoestrap; or if I shall take anything of yours." (Gen. 14:23)

The Talmud (Sota 17a) says, that because Avraham refused to take from the king of Sodom even a thread or a shoestrap, his children (the Jewish people) merited to receive from G-d two mitzvot: the mitzva of putting a thread of techelet [a special blue dye] in the tzitzit and the mitzva of putting retzuot (straps) in the tefilin.

According to the Talmud, Avraham originated the concept of praying to G-d each morning (Shacharit). Therefore, during his prayer we wear the talit and tefilin. When Avraham spoke to the king of Sodom, he first mentioned the thread and afterwards the shoestrap, thus, we first don the talit, which has in it the thread of techelet, and afterwards the tefilin, which have the leather straps.

Reprinted from V'Dibarta Bam complied by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky

5:35 *Candle Lighting Time*
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9 Cheshvan / October 31
Torah Portion *Lech Lecha*
Shabbat ends 6:34 PM