

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

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

This week we begin the Book of Exodus with the Torah reading of Shemos. Our portion opens with a list of the names of the Children of Israel who went down to Egypt, describes the slavery that began after the death of Jacob and his sons, and narrates the birth of Moses, the Redeemer of Israel.

As every Jew is obligated to remember and "re-live" the exodus from Egypt every day in the spiritual sense, it follows that each stage in the Jewish people's historical descent to and liberation from Egypt contains deep significance and meaning that is pertinent to our daily lives.

The primary threat of the entire Egyptian experience was expressed in Pharaoh's decree: "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river." The mighty Nile River, upon which all of Egypt was dependant for its sustenance, is symbolic of the laws of nature. Venerated as a god by the Egyptians, the Nile's waters periodically rose to fertilize their otherwise parched land.

The objective of the Egyptians was for the Jews to reject a G-d Who transcends nature and join them in their devotion to natural phenomenon. While still in their own land, such a possibility was inconceivable to the Jewish people.

In Israel, the direct relationship between man and G-d was open and apparent: Whenever rain was needed, the Jewish people had only to pray to G-d, and He sent His blessing. It was not hard to perceive that all good emanates from G-d alone. It was only after emigrating to Egypt, a land fertilized by the natural, periodic rising of the Nile, that the possibility for error could even arise.

The subjugation of the Jews could not begin while Joseph and his sons still lived, for that generation had personally witnessed Divine Providence and understood that the forces of nature are only G-d's tools. Slavery, in both the physical and spiritual sense, could only take root in a new generation that had not merited to live in the land of Israel.

It was then that the true descent into Egypt began and Pharaoh was able to issue his evil decree -- the aim of which was the immersion of the Jewish people into the idolatrous worship of natural law.

Moses, G-d's "faithful servant," was the one who gave the Children of Israel the strength to break the bonds of servitude and abandon the lure of Egyptian idolatry.

Moses instilled in his brethren a pure and holy faith in G-d, at a time when it was difficult for them to even imagine that such holiness could exist. In the merit of their belief the Jewish people overcame the decree of Pharaoh and were redeemed from Egypt.

This process is experienced by every Jew in his daily life as well. By beginning the day with prayer and Torah learning, a Jew is able to perceive his direct relationship with G-d, and maintain this perception throughout the rest of the day.

The attribute of Moses that exists within every Jew reminds him that everything -- including those things that appear to be perfectly natural phenomena -- comes solely and directly from the One Above.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe, Vol. XVI

The Jay Covered Bridge

By Rabbi Mendel Rubin

As part of our Thanksgiving 2025 getaway we visited the historic Covered Bridge in Jay NY, built in 1857. It's a beautiful spot. On one side of the bridge the cragged rocks and descent create a roaring rapids, and just past the bridge the waters flow briskly but more calmly. And all around there are gorgeous mountains rising in various degrees of distance.

And as Baal Shem Tov taught us to learn meaningful life lessons in our service of G-d from all that we see and hear, we found lessons while visiting this bridge:

THE WINDOWS IN THE COVERED BRIDGE

Like most wooden covered bridges, the Covered Bridge at Jay (which is quite long as far as covered bridges go) is dark inside. There is dark wood everywhere, the floor boards, the walls and support trusses, and the beams and roof -- all dark wood. It has a confined feel.

But there are cut-out windows along both sides of the bridge that open to the expanse of the outdoors, to gorgeous views of the churning river below, and the vistas of the mountains beyond.

It recalls the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov that each "Amen!" is a window out of the confines of our world, it opens up into the infinite beyond. Each mitzvah is a window! It is an opening, an opportunity! There's also the Chassidic story we heard as Yeshiva students of the imprisoned Chassid in the jail over the marketplace, when the warden opened the cell window to let in the light and sounds of the marketplace below...

The windows on the Covered Bridge at Jay demonstrated the juxtaposition of finite and infinite that is at the heart of Chabad Chassidic teaching. We may live in a finite world, and we must reckon with that, but our

hearts are open to opening up to and allowing the infinite into our lives.

WATER BEFORE THE BRIDGE, AND THE WATER AFTER

It so happens that the style of the water of the AuSable River (which winds it way throughout many parts of this area of the Adirondacks) changes drastically at this bridge.

Looking out the windows on one side of the bridge the water is crashing down a short falls amidst large rocks, creating a churning rapids. But looking out the other side of the bridge the water flows briskly but much calmer as there are no rocks, the water runs deeper and less noisily.

This recalled for me a dream of the Mittler Rebbe (Rebbe Dovber, the 2nd Rebbe of Chabad). In his dream he saw his father, the Alter Rebbe, flanked by two men. They came to a calm and serene stream and all three men crossed the stream on a plank of wood as a bridge. Next they came to a roaring raging fuming colorful rapids that also had a plank of wood across it. But only his father was able to cross at the rapids.

When he asked his father to explain the dream, the Alter Rebbe explained that the serene stream is the service of the righteous or the simple. No blockages, no challenges. The water is calm. But rapids are rapids because of the rocks which block the water, the obstacles build momentum and intensity as the water rushes round to overcome them. This is the service of the Baal Teshuvah, the Jew who struggles, the Jew who has challenges.

One of the prettiest images you see traveling around the Adirondacks are the many streams and creeks flowing between mountains and alongside roads, filled with jagged rocks, with water churning and pulsating around them. And in life, while it makes things harder, the challenges do add a depth and intensity, they make it richer, so much more alive!

SLICE OF LIFE

A Family's Journey Home



Yitzchak Bloch, determined to complete a circle that had begun decades earlier.

As winter shadows stretched across the cobblestone plaza in Freiburg, Germany, Yitzchak Bloch stood with a small flame dancing in his hand, completing a circle that had begun decades earlier. Beneath his feet lay the outline of a synagogue destroyed on Kristallnacht—the very place where his father had once celebrated his bar mitzvah.

"Sixteen years ago, we embarked on a special roots journey to Germany and France," recalls the 67-year-old resident of Shiloh, who has worked in Israel's Fire and Rescue Service for nearly thirty years. "My late father Yona, his late brother Martin, and—may they live long—my brother Yossi and family members participated in the journey."

During their travels, they uncovered

many details about his father's family history. The heart of their journey brought them to Salzstrasse 62 in Freiburg, southwestern Germany, where his father was born to his parents Julius (Yitzchak) and Lina (Leah). "The next stop on our journey was to a lawn, at the entrance to which a large yellow sign was placed that read: 'Gurs 1027 km.' This was a camp on the Spanish border, to which Jews from the area were deported," Yitzchak explains. The sign detailed the experiences of Jews who were deported there during the dark days of Nazi rule. "My father looked at the sign and told us: 'This is where the synagogue was,

where I was called to the Torah for my bar mitzvah,'" Yitzchak recalls. Sadly, they found no trace of the synagogue at the site. About ten years later, they returned to Germany to complete their visit to family landmarks. This time, his father couldn't join them due to age and health.

"We spent Shabbat with Rabbi Yaakov and his wife Chava Gitler, Chabad emissaries in Freiburg. It was a wonderful experience for us," Yitzchak says. During this visit, he searched again for the lawn and discovered it had been transformed into a paved plaza.

"When I arrived there, I saw a large plaza, and in its center, a memorial site for the ancient synagogue that was burned on Kristallnacht—the same synagogue my father had told us about during our first visit." The memorial was designed according to the outline of the destroyed synagogue. "The sight moved me deeply. It was like closing a historical circle for us." A year later, Yitzchak discovered that Rabbi Gitler was planning to light a giant menorah at the site during Hanukkah.

"I decided I wanted to participate in the event. I coordinated the trip with the Gitler family, and they were happy to host us." On the evening of the lighting, he was moved to see they had added a 'Remember' frame in several languages, placed a model of the synagogue, and installed an interactive sign telling its story. Two large menorahs stood proudly at the site. "It was a historic moment for us," Yitzchak says with emotion. "Residents and guests who came from near and far, Jews and non-Jews alike, participated in the ceremony.

The deputy mayor of Freiburg and the commissioner for culture and religion spoke, and afterward, I was invited to tell the story of my late father and his family and their rescue during the Holocaust." His words were translated into German, and then he was honored with lighting the candles. The entire event was accompanied by singing, dancing, and a performance by a fire juggler. "It was an illuminating moment of lighting the Hanukkah candles and publicizing the miracle. We truly felt the 'in those days' and 'in this time,'" Yitzchak reflects.

"Who would have believed that in Germany, eighty years after the Holocaust, Jews would stand and light Hanukkah candles in a central city square, on a street once named after the tyrant, and maintain a dignified memorial display in memory of the synagogue destroyed on Kristallnacht." As he stood before the Hanukkah lights, he thought about how in this exact place, where firefighters arrived on Kristallnacht but were not allowed to extinguish the synagogue fire, Jews stood proudly eighty years later, lighting the Hanukkah candles. "For me, this symbolized the victory of the Jewish people, that 'Am Yisrael Chai'—the people of Israel live!"

Adapted from Sichat Shavua Magazine

Hundreds of Irish Jews Light Menorah at Dublin's Herzog Park



Some 350 people gathered at Herzog Park on the second night of Chanukah.

Hundreds gathered in Dublin's Herzog Park on the second night of Chanukah, in a defiant show of Jewish pride. The park honors Chaim Herzog, a devoted son of Ireland who became the sixth president of Israel.

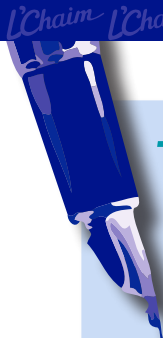
The cross-communal event, directed by Chabad's Rabbi Zalman Lent and his wife, Rifky, came weeks after Dublin City Council voted to strip the park of its historic name—a decision that sparked international outcry and became a flashpoint for Ireland's Jewish community.

The Chanukah menorah-lighting at Herzog Park was an important event, says Rabbi Lent, "We gathered in a place that highlights the challenges our community has been facing for two years" he observes. "Just as we were able to light the candles in the dark, we know that good will ultimately prevail."

A CALL TO ACTION

STUDY TANYA

Tanya is the basic work of Chabad Chasidic philosophy. As it is divided into 54 chapters, corresponding to the 54 Torah portions, Chasidim of old customarily studied one chapter each week. The Previous Rebbe divided the Tanya into daily portions and instituted its daily study and the Rebbe has repeatedly encouraged this study. The Long Shorter Way by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Lessons in Tanya by Rabbi Yosef Wineberg, and Themes in Tanya by Rabbi Yekutiel Green are works in English that expound on Tanya. There are also Tanya Tapes by Rabbi Manis Friedman and Rabbi Yosef Goldstein. Pick up the original, a book that teaches Tanya, some tapes or attend a class at your local Chabad-Lubavitch Center. The Daily portion of Tanya is also available on www.chabad.org



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

FOOLS' PARADISE

24 Tevet, 5722 (1962)

The annual event, taking place in such close proximity to Yud Shevat, the yahrtzeit of my father-in-law, of saintly memory, will, I trust, bear the imprint of his influence and inspiration.

In the course of his allotted life span on this earth, my father-in-law saw and contended with many different worlds. But whether it was under Czarist Russia or under Soviet Russia, during the two World Wars or during their aftermaths, in the Old World or in the New -- he was always the indefatigable leader of the Jewish people, dedicated heart and soul to the spiritual and material well-being of our people.

Exemplifying a pattern of leadership which is the heritage of his illustrious ancestor, the Old Rebbe, author of the Tanya and Shulchan Aruch (on whose yahrtzeit this letter is written), my father-in-law was as vitally concerned with the child learning alef-beit as with the advanced yeshiva student, and his love for his disciples and followers to whom he expounded the inner secrets of the Torah was only matched by his love for his fellow Jew in a distant country, deprived of the most elementary educational facilities.

Jewish education was his primary concern, and the same spirit of dedication permeated his emissaries who pioneered in many an educational field under his inspiring initiative and guidance. This work truly expressed the unity of our people through Torah which, on every level from alef-beit to razin d'razin (innermost secrets), is the unifying force, uniting the one people by means of the one Torah to the One G-d.

20 Kislev, 5745 (1984)

I am in receipt of your letter, which came as somewhat of a surprise to me since it is well known that the various Chabad institutions are completely financially independent of our central office. This is also an obvious necessity, in view of the fact that there are hundreds of such institutions the world over, and it would be impossible to direct them all from headquarters.

In light of the above, you will surely understand that I cannot do anything in the said situation.

I must make special reference to your remark about your personal feeling that there is "no further use for me," etc.

Needless to say, there is no room or justification for such a feeling, G-d forbid, for this would be counter to one of the basics of Judaism in general, and of Chabad in particular, which declares that every Jew is like a complete world, as the founder of Chabad emphasizes in chapter 32 (the numerical equivalent of which is "lev" -- "heart") of Tanya.

11 Kislev, 5735 (1974)

Your letter of the 12th of Cheshvan reached me with some delay. In reply to your question:

It is written, "Increasing knowledge increases pain." One of the explanations of this is as follows: A fool may be altogether unaware that he lacks anything, and may therefore be satisfied with himself, or, as the saying goes, he may live in a Fools' Paradise. But the person who strives to increase his or her knowledge of Judaism and increasingly appreciates the great good and preciousness of Torah and mitzvot finds that, with the increase of this knowledge, comes an increased longing and thirst for more and more; hence the impatience and dissatisfaction with oneself, etc.

These are the natural "growing pains" of spiritual advancement...

now to alleviate the birth-pangs of Moshiach, and to merit the complete Redemption which will come through our righteous Moshiach?"

(Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the Previous Rebbe)

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

On the 24th day of Tevet, 5573, Rabbi Schneur Zalman ben Baruch of Liadi -- the founder of Chabad-Lubavitch Chasidism, passed away in the village of Piena.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, known also as "The Alter (Elder) Rebbe" was renowned not only for expounding on the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and the Magid of Mezritch, but also for his brilliance in Talmudic studies and Jewish law. As has been pointed out, this dual-faceted genius is alluded to in the Alter Rebbe's first name, "Schneur."

For Schneur is a combination of two words -- "shnei" meaning "two," and "ohr" meaning "light."

The Alter Rebbe is the author of both the Tanya, the basic book of Chabad Chasidic philosophy, and the Rav's Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law.

Concerning Rabbi Schneur Zalman's passing, his son and successor, Rabbi Dov Ber, wrote: "Until the day of his rest, 'his mouth did not cease from the study of Torah.' With a clear and tranquil mind, and cleaving wondrously to his Maker, he prayed the evening service; he recited Havdala...and then after Shabbat he was united in a perfect bond with the Holy One, Blessed Be He."

In one of his discourses, Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber, the fifth Chabad Rebbe, discusses a Chasid's conduct on the anniversary of the passing of one of the Rebbes: "It is certain that on the day of their yahrtzeit, the Rebbes of past generations arouse Divine compassion for all Chasidim, as well as for their wives and children. However, this is only an arousal of a general nature; those Chasidim who, on that day, set aside a time for study and for a Chasidic farbrengen, may be considered to have handed a pidyon nefesh to the Rebbe whose yahrtzeit is then being observed."

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה'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.



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1408 President St, Brooklyn, NY, 11213
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Chairman
Director
Publishing Director
Program Director
Secretary
Administrator
Layout
Associate Editor
Chairman Editorial Comm.
Rebbe photo

Rabbi David Raskin ז"ל
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Rabbi Yosef Y. Butman
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MOSHIACH MATTERS



One must always think to himself:

"What have I done and what am I doing



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Anticipating Napoleon's evil designs to attack and conquer Russia, the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman (the first Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch), instructed his family to be ready to flee at a moment's notice.

The famous spiritual mentor, Rav Shmuel Gronem, noted: "The Alter Rebbe said, 'Napoleon is a very powerful evil force, and I fear that I will have to have mesirat nefesh (self-sacrifice) in order to humble him.'"

Secretly the Alter Rebbe instructed his Chasidim to spy against Napoleon's army. The Alter Rebbe wanted nothing less than a total collapse of Napoleon's power.

In his eyes, the French leader was the greatest threat to the heart and soul of Judaism. Behind his abolishing the restrictions that existed was a veil hiding his true intentions. What Napoleon wanted to accomplish with his revolution was a refusal to accept any authority, which in turn would weaken religious adherence.

For this reason, the Alter Rebbe refused to live in Napoleon's conquered domain for even a short period of time. When he heard of the approach of the French army he fled with his entire family, assisted by the Russian forces.

The Alter Rebbe insisted that every possession of his be removed from his house, no matter how insignificant; he then gave instructions that it be burned down. Some say that the Alter Rebbe had reason to believe that Napoleon engaged in sorcery, and took stringent precautions that none of his things would fall into Napoleon's hands.

The rapid advance of Napoleon's army made it impossible for the Alter Rebbe to rest, and he was forced to constantly be on the run. His hope was to reach the Jewish community of Poltava before Rosh Hashana.

The Mittler Rebbe wrote: "On Erev Rosh Hashana my father, the Alter Rebbe, confided to me, 'I am extremely pained and worried about the battle of Mazaik [known as the battle of Borodino], since the enemy is becoming stronger, and I believe he [Napoleon] is also going to conquer Moscow.' He then wept bitterly, with tears streaming down his face.

"On Rosh Hashana, my father again called me to him and happily told me the sweet and comforting news: 'Today, during my prayers, I had a vision that the tide has changed for the better and our side will win. Although Napoleon will capture Moscow, he will eventually lose the war. This is what was written today in Heaven.'"

With the rout of Napoleon's army, the Alter Rebbe could proceed toward Poltava. On Friday, the eighth of Tevet, the entourage arrived in the city of Piena. As soon as he arrived there the Alter Rebbe changed his plans. He began organizing a relief campaign to aid all Jews who had been affected by the war, sending out emissaries to raise funds and organize and coordinate efforts.

No one could foresee the rapid deterioration of the Alter Rebbe's health. As the Rebbe for many thousands of Chasidim, the Alter Rebbe finally paid the heavy price of worrying about the sufferings of the Jewish community, the difficult traveling conditions (especially for someone of advanced years) in an unusually cold winter and his anguish in general about Napoleon's influence and effect on the Jewish nation. On Monday, the 18th of Tevet, he became bedridden with a gall condition.

Five days later, on the 24th of Tevet, after Havdala, he wrote a note stating that one of the main purposes of a soul's descent into this world (in addition to Torah study) is to do a favor for another Jew in whatever way possible. A short while after writing this he passed away.

The Mittler Rebbe noted that in one of the greatest acts of mesirat nefesh, the Alter Rebbe put his own life in mortal danger against the evil ways of Napoleon.

Indeed, the Alter Rebbe's ill-fated prophecy about Napoleon came to be, for the humbled last remnants of Napoleon's army retreated from Russia the exact time of the Alter Rebbe's passing.

Shortly before his passing, the Alter Rebbe said: "Anyone who will hold on to my door handle, I will do him a favor in this world and the world to come."

The Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, explained that "my door handle" does not merely mean learning Chasidut, for the Alter Rebbe, through his self-sacrifice, instilled in Chasidim the practice of ahavat Yisrael (love of a fellow Jew) -- and we must follow in his ways.

Excerpted from "Dates in Lubavitch" by Rabbi Sholom D. Avtzon

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the Weekly Torah Portion

And he returned to the land of Egypt; and Moses took the staff of G-d in his hand (Ex. 4:20)

While Moses certainly demonstrated to Pharaoh the proper honor due a king, he nonetheless "took the staff of G-d in his hand" in all his dealings with him -- prideful in his Jewish heritage, imbued with an attitude of G-dly assurance, and without any feelings of inferiority. (*Likutei Sichot*)

G-d heard their groaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob (Ex. 2:24)

When the Israelites were unable to endure the harsh exile in Egypt, they cried out to G-d. Indeed, G-d heard their cry and sent Moses to redeem them. So it is with us in our present exile.

When we cry out, "Take us out of galut and bring Moshiach!" G-d will certainly hear our cry and send the Redeemer. Moreover, our mere being in a state of readiness to call upon G-d is already enough for Him to respond, as it states in Isaiah, "Before they call, I will answer, and while yet they speak I will hear." (*The Rebbe, Parshat Tavo, 5751*)

And she put it among the reeds by the banks of the river (Exodus 2:3)

According to our Sages, Moses was born on the seventh of Adar; three months later, on the seventh of Sivan, when he could no longer be hidden from the prying Egyptians, his mother placed him among the reeds. It was on that day -- the seventh of Sivan -- that Moses received the Torah at Sinai; this future merit was what allowed his life to be saved. (*Talmud, Sotah*)

Moses returned to G-d and said, L-rd! Why have You mistreated this people? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he made things worse... You have not saved this people at all (Exodus 5:22-23)

We are not allowed to resign ourselves to our present situation of exile with the excuse that "such is the will of G-d." The harshness of the galut is a sign that the Redemption is near, yet it is still bitter and painful. Therefore, even while reaffirming our absolute faith in the principle that "The ways of G-d are just," we are also to express our anguish with the prayerful outcry "Ad Masai?" -- "How much longer?" and ask for the immediate coming of Moshiach. (*The Rebbe, Parshat Va'eira, 5743*)

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of the Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Rubin Margules

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