

L'Chaim

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The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תוד ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"Our help is in the name of the L-rd, 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, Bo, enumerates the details of the Passover offering. The lamb had to be selected, watched for four days, slaughtered, and then eaten roasted with matzot and bitter herbs.

In his Sefer Hamitzvot, Maimonides counts the mitzva of the Passover offering as two separate commandments: 1) slaughtering the lamb at dusk on the 14th of Nisan, and 2) eating it on the night of the 15th.

These two mitzvot are connected to each other and interdependent. Thus, at first glance, it is not clear why Maimonides counts them as two separate commandments.

The exodus from Egypt was a pivotal event for the Jewish people, as it was then that they were born as a nation. No longer were they slaves to Pharaoh; instead, they were transformed into the servants of G-d.

The purpose of the Passover offering was to prepare the Jews for the exodus. Every detail was significant, for each one readied them in a different way for the great event.

Precisely because it is so fundamental, the mitzva of the Passover offering is reckoned as two separate commandments: the sacrifice itself, and the eating of it. Both particulars were required to prepare for the departure from Egypt and the Jews' transformation into servants of G-d.

In ancient Egypt the lamb was worshipped as a deity. By offering it as a sacrifice, the Jewish people shook off their yoke of subjugation. It took a great deal of mesirat nefesh (self-sacrifice) for the Jews to publicly take that lamb and kill it in front of their horrified neighbors. But in order to be a true servant of G-d, self-sacrifice is necessary. This was the mitzva of slaughtering the Pesach offering.

The second mitzva was to actually eat the lamb. When a Jew ate the Passover offering, which had been sacrificed with mesirat nefesh, its flesh was transformed into his own. The substance of the offering was digested and became one with his physical body. Self-sacrifice has to be the central theme in the life of the Jew; it must surround him, permeate his being and fill him completely, spilling over into the physical plane of his existence. In this manner, mesirat nefesh became part and parcel of the Jew's being, preparing him for the exodus from Egypt and enabling him to become a "servant of G-d."

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Vol. 16

Yud Shevat: A Day of Deep Connection

"The sun rises, and the sun sets" (Ecclesiastes 1:5). Our sages teach that this verse hints at the passing of leadership from one generation's Nossi (spiritual leader) to the next. Just as Moshe passed his role to Yehoshua, so in every generation, one Nossi hands over the leadership to the next one—ensuring the Jewish people are never without a "faithful shepherd," even for a moment.

From Moshe Rabbeinu through the Baal Shem Tov—founder of the Chassidic movement in the 1700s—and the seven Chabad Rebbeim, this chain of leadership has remained unbroken. (Before the Baal Shem Tov, while each generation had its leader, they weren't always publicly known. With Chassidism's emergence, these leaders became revealed for all to recognize.)

Each Rebbe embodies the qualities of a Melech (king) and Nossi, serving as the mind and heart of the Jewish people. Like the mind that gives direction and the heart that gives life, the Rebbe channels divine wisdom and warmth to every Jew. His leadership is not limited to his own followers—it extends to every Jew, caring for both their physical and spiritual well-being.

At times, a Rebbe did not immediately accept his role publicly, yet the connection between the Nossi and the Jewish people begins instantly. The moment one Nossi departs,

the next is already spiritually in place.

The day this bond becomes revealed is one of deep joy—both for the Rebbe and for every Jew connected to him. And on this day, every Jew receives new spiritual vitality through the Nossi.

The Rebbe often emphasized that Beis Nissan, the day the Rebbe Rashab—the fifth Chabad Rebbe—passed away, is also the day the Previous Rebbe became Nossi. In our times, Yud Shevat—the tenth of Shevat—marks not only the yearzeit of the Previous Rebbe but also the day our Rebbe assumed leadership.

From that day onward, the Rebbe's influence began transforming world Jewry. The Rebbe's teachings, care, and leadership inspire Jews everywhere, sparking a global blossoming of Yiddishkeit and Chassidus and preparing the world for the coming of Moshiach.

When we reflect on the meaning of Yud Shevat, it fills us with gratitude and joy. How fortunate we are to be guided and uplifted by the Rebbe's love! Yud Shevat is a personal Yom Tov—a day to gather with fellow Jews, to farbreng, to learn the Rebbe's teachings, and to strengthen our connection to his mission.

May our heartfelt efforts on this day hasten the complete redemption, may it be speedily in our days.

SLICE OF LIFE

Start Over



Noble Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel at a visit with the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In his book of memoirs “All the Rivers Run to the Sea,” Noble Prize Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel tells the following episode.

At my first visit to the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s court [at 770 Eastern Parkway, in Brooklyn, NY]... I had informed him at the outset that I was a Chasid of Vishnitz, not Lubavitch, and that I had no intention of switching allegiance. “The important thing is to be a chasid,” he replied. “It matters little whose.”

One year, writes Wiesel, during Simchas Torah, I visited Lubavitch, as was my custom. “Welcome,” he said. “It’s nice of a chasid of Vishnitz to come and greet us in Lubavitch. But is this how they celebrate Simchas Torah in Vishnitz?”

“Rebbe,” I said faintly, “we are not in Vishnitz, but in Lubavitch.”

“Then do as we do in Lubavitch,” he said.

“And what do you do in Lubavitch?”

“In Lubavitch we say L’chayim.”

“In Vishnitz, too.”

“Very well. Then say L’chayim.”

He handed me a glass filled to the brim with

vodka.

“Rebbe,” I said, “in Vishnitz a Chasid does not drink alone.”

“Nor in Lubavitch,” the Rebbe replied.

He emptied his glass in one gulp. I followed suit.

“Is one enough in Vishnitz?” the Rebbe asked.

“In Vishnitz,” I said bravely, “one is but a drop in the sea.”

“In Lubavitch as well.”

He handed me a second glass and refilled his own. He said L’chaim, I replied L’chaim, and we emptied our glasses.

“You deserve a brocha (blessing),” he said, his face beaming with happiness. “Name it.”

I wasn’t sure what to say.

“Let me bless you so you can begin again.”

“Yes, Rebbe,” I said. “Give me your brocha.”

And the Rebbe blessed Eli Wiesel to begin his life anew. The man who was still tormented by the horrors of “Night” (the name of his first book), where he saw the most horrific sights the human eye could endure, the individual who refused to marry and have children feeling that it is unfair to bring Jewish children into such a cruel and brutal world, ultimately rebuilt his life from the ashes, creating a family, and becoming a spokesman for hope and conscience the world over.

On the day of his son’s bris, he writes, friends sent gifts. “But the most moving gift came from an unexpected place.” It was a beautiful bouquet of flowers sent from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I guess it represented his blessings for a life invigorated with a fresh start, blossoming like a beautiful, fresh flower. He named his son, Elisha, after his father who perished in Buchenwald.



How does one measure greatness? I mean, what criteria does one use in evaluating human greatness? In the case of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the answer is easily obtained. I know of no one who has left the Rebbe, even after a moment of yehidut (one-on-one meeting), without being deeply affected, if not changed, by their encounter.

I hope I will always remember what I felt

when I was first introduced into his study, some thirty years ago, and what we said to one another. Time in his presence begins running at a different pace. You feel inspired, you feel self-examined, you are made to wonder about the quest for meaning which ought to be yours. In his presence nothing is superficial, nor is it artificial. In his presence you come closer in touch with your inner center of gravity.

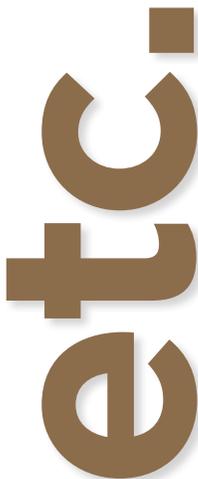
But what is great about the Rebbe is that not only those who have met him are affected, but even those who haven’t. Somehow the presence of the man in our midst sends out an emanation of mystical quality that touches people who have never heard of him, and this, probably more than anything else, is what makes the Rebbe so unique.

It is due to his influence, to his presence, that Jewish awareness and Jewish education have reached unprecedented heights on almost every continent. Is there a place under the sun where the Chabad emissaries have not carried his word of tolerance rooted in Ahavas Yisroel, in the love for Israel, which really, by extension, means love for humanity? Wherever Jews dwell and work, they somehow become exposed to the Rebbe.

Thanks to him, a Jew, anywhere and everywhere, cannot but feel that he or she belongs to an ancient people whose tradition emphasizes the greatness of its task more than the prerogatives of its condition. Thanks to the Rebbe, a Jew becomes a better Jew, thus a better human being, thus making his fellow human beings more human, more hospitable, open to a greater sense of generosity. So this is where the Rebbe’s greatness also lies.

Now some of us were lucky and we heard his lessons; we joined him in study, in song. We have seen him with his disciples, we have witnessed his accomplishments. Therefore, I feel, with a deep sense of devotion, affection and admiration, that we should lift our glasses to say ‘L’Chaim’ to this generation’s Admor (master, teacher and rabbi), whose life and work have been a blessing to so many of us, indeed to all of Israel and the world.

Excerpts from an address given by Nobel-laureate Elie Wiesel on April 7, 1992, at a congressional dinner held in Washington on the occasion of the Rebbe’s 90th birthday.



Chabad of the Netherlands Shluchim Gather in Utrecht for Annual Kinus

The annual Kinus gathering for the Chabad rabbis and rebbetzins took place in Utrecht this year, hosted by Rabbi Aryeh Leib and Mrs. Bracha Heintz. With representatives in 13 cities, the 22 Chabad couples are in contact with thousands of Jews on an annual basis.

Rabbi Shmuel Katzman, head shliach to the Netherlands, spoke about the responsibility that we need to feel for each other. The shluchos participated in a roundtable discussion led by Mrs. Taiby Camissar, where they discussed various ideas and challenges that may arise on shlichus.

An emotional moment was when everyone walked together to the monument of the 1600 Utrecht Jews who perished in the Holocaust. It was a powerful reminder to the shared mission to continue rebuilding Jewish life in the country.

A Call To Action

The first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman, inserted into the text of the prayerbook the words: “I hereby take upon myself the commandment of ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” This pledge precedes the commencement of the main part of the prayers. Start your prayers (whether personal or standard) with the mindset that you will be caring toward others.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

12th of Shevat, 5734 [1984]
Mr. Mordechai Shoel Landow
Greeting and Blessing:

I just received your letter of January 30th, which arrived in close proximity to Yud Shevat [the tenth of Shevat], the Yahrzeit of my father-in-law of saintly memory.

Everything is, of course, by Divine Providence. However, sometimes this is not on the surface, and requires deep introspection, but at other times it may be right on the surface and ever conspicuous. Such is the case in regard to your letter and its timely arrival around Yud Shevat.

The immediate connection is, of course, the subject matter of your letter, which is chinuch [Jewish education], and which, as you know, was the object of my father-in-law's greatest interest, to which he had dedicated all his life, to the point of actual mesirat nefesh [utter self-sacrifice].

And, as my father-in-law often pointed out, the matter of chinuch, education, does not refer merely to children, but also to those who are "children" in regard to knowledge and experience of Torah and mitzvot. In other words, chinuch must be directed to Jews of all ages, to bring them closer to their Father in Heaven. I emphasize the word closer, because basically every Jew is really close to G-d, by virtue of his Divine soul which is part of G-dliness Above, and as the Alter Rebbe [Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad

Chasidism] underscored it "Mamash" ["actually"].

And even if by reason of external circumstances, the soul may be in a state of sleep, or suspended animation, it is written, "Though I am asleep, my heart is awake." There is no need for me to elaborate this to you, since this is some thing which you have personally experienced in your own life long ago and in helping awaken others, and have shown that you could do this with real mesirat nefesh.

I might add, however, that in evaluating the mesirat nefesh of my father-in-law of saintly memory, we can appreciate it better if we realize, that it meant for a person like him to tear himself away from his own profound studies of Torah and spiritual matters, in order to give of his time, energy and attention so that one more Jew should be able to learn aleph beit, in the plain sense, as well as aleph beit of Yiddishkeit [Judaism] which many an adult Jew had to begin.

I dare say that this kind of mesirat nefesh was perhaps even harder than placing his physical life in jeopardy for the sake of Yiddishkeit. For, surely, in the case of the Baal HaHilulo [the one whose yahrzeit is being commemorated], his soul -life and constant striving for spiritual perfection was uppermost. Herein too we can find something which is of practical instruction to each, and everyone of us. For, as has been mentioned on previous occasions, although none of us can compare to his stature and spiritual qualities and powers, we have the advantage that he has already trodden the path for us, and made it so much easier to follow in his footsteps.

With blessing,

now stand at an especially propitious time, for we have recently witnessed many miracles and great wonders around the world, and the tzadikim of our generation have given testimony that we are on the threshold of the Redemption.

(Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz)

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 a renowned letter, the Baal Shem Tov describes an elevation of his soul to the chamber of Moshiach at which time he asked Moshiach when he would come. "When your teachings will become widely known in the world, and your wellsprings will be disseminated outward," Moshiach answered.

Thus, from its very beginning, bringing Moshiach has been an integral goal of the Chasidic movement.

From his earliest childhood, Moshiach and the Redemption were uppermost in the Rebbe's mind, as he once wrote: "From the day I went to cheder and even before that, there began to form in my mind a picture of the future Redemption, the Redemption of the Jewish people from their final exile..." Even before the age of three the Rebbe's young mind was already occupied with the Redemption. And this has been the Rebbe's focus ever since.

Preparing the world for Moshiach is thus integral to the entire Chasidic movement, particularly to Chabad-Lubavitch. Thus, once the Rebbe accepted the enormous responsibility of the leadership of Chabad-Lubavitch, he stated in no uncertain terms the ultimate purpose of his leadership:

"This is what is demanded of each and every one of us of the seventh generation -- and 'All those who are seventh are cherished': Although the fact that we are in the seventh generation is not the result of our own choosing and our own service, and indeed in certain ways perhaps contrary to our will, nevertheless 'All those who are seventh are cherished.' We are now very near the approaching footsteps of Moshiach, indeed, we are at the conclusion of this period, and our spiritual task is to complete the process of drawing down G-d's presence -- moreover, the essence of G-d's presence -- within specifically our lowly world."

These words were spoken in the Rebbe's first public discourse on the tenth of Shevat, 5711 (1951). The Rebbe completed the discourse by saying, "May we merit to see and be together with the Rebbe, down here in a physical body and within our reach, and he will redeem us."

So it should be with us.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקה

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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MOSHIACH MATTERS

A person who can find good in everyone is in the category of Moshiach...
Moshiach will come to the defense of all of Israel, even the wicked. We



IT HAPPENED ONCE

A prominent Jewish merchant, Reb Yaakov from Vilna, known to be an accomplished Torah scholar, once passed through Mezritch. Having heard of the greatness of the Mezritcher Maggid, Rabbi Dov Ber, Reb Yaakov decided to visit him, although he was not an adherent of the Chasidic movement. Reb Yaakov was eager to engage the Maggid in a learned discussion, and he was not disappointed. But, as Reb Yaakov had no interest in Chasidic philosophy, the subject was not broached.

As Reb Yaakov was about to leave, the Maggid suddenly said: "Remember Yaakov, what our Sages of blessed memory said, that G-d sends His cure to a patient through a particular doctor and a particular medicine. Sometimes the One Above sends His cure not through the medication which the doctor prescribes, but through the doctor himself. As you know, a doctor receives his healing powers by authority of the Divine Torah, as it is written, 'And he shall surely cure him.' Therefore, the doctor has a healing angel at his side, and a very great doctor is accompanied by the chief healing angel, Rafael, himself."

As he traveled back to Vilna, Reb Yaakov thought about this strange parting remark, which seemed to come out of the blue. Reb Yaakov was, thank G-d, in very good health. He had never needed a doctor before, and he hoped he would not have to consult one in the future. He hadn't asked the Maggid for medical advice, so why had the Maggid mentioned doctors? Unable to solve this puzzle, he soon dismissed the entire episode from his mind.

Several weeks later Reb Yaakov returned home and soon fell into his normal routine. After a few days, he awoke feeling quite ill. His condition worsened rapidly and although all the best doctors were called in, each offering a different medication, nothing helped.

Word of his condition spread quickly. His friends and acquaintances were devastated, for Reb Yaakov was a kind and charitable man. Then a ray of hope appeared. The Jews of Vilna heard that the king would be arriving in town, and his personal physician, who was a wayward Jew, would be accompanying him. If only they could persuade the king's doctor to pay a call on their beloved friend, maybe this great doctor could save his life.

The community leaders dispatched a delegation to the king and petitioned him to allow his royal physician to visit Reb Yaakov. The king received them graciously and agreed to their request. The hopes of his family and friends soared when the famous doctor entered the sickroom, but were soon dashed. When the doctor looked at Reb Yaakov he said disdainfully, "Am I G-d that you have brought me here to revive a dead man?"

To everyone's horror, the doctor turned to leave. The distraught family begged him to prescribe some medication. "Nothing can help this man," he replied brusquely, casting a parting glance at the dying patient. But something caught his eye and he turned to look again. A slight bit of color could be seen on the patient's pale face. The doctor quickly took his notepad and scribbled a prescription. "Run to the pharmacy and bring this medication at once!"

Hope sprang again into the hearts of the man's family and friends. The royal physician remained at the man's bedside, his eyes fixed on the sick man. He was amazed to see further signs of improvement. He pulled out his pad and prescribed another medication. But no sooner had he written it out than the patient's eyes began to flicker. The doctor had never seen such a thing in all his experience. Suddenly, the erstwhile dying man sat up in bed and addressed the physician, "I beg you, dear doctor, don't go yet. Stay a while longer, and I'll feel much better. The Angel Rafael must be at your side."

The physician was completely overwhelmed. He stared at the patient in utter disbelief, and although he didn't believe in angels, he could almost believe the patient's words. As if reading the doctor's thoughts, Reb Yaakov began to relate

his visit to the Maggid of Mezritch and especially the Maggid's puzzling remark at the end of the visit.

"I can see now, that his remark was completely prophetic and true," Reb Yaakov remarked.

The king's doctor, who had listened intently to the whole episode, sat engrossed in thought. It occurred to him that, great healer though he was, he needed a lot of healing himself -- healing of a spiritual nature.

"I would like to meet this saintly man," he finally said. "When you are fully recovered, I would like you to take me to meet him." Not very long after, the two of them, Reb Yaakov and the king's physician, traveled to Mezritch -- Reb Yaakov to become a Chasid and the physician to return to his faith.

Adapted from Talks and Tales

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah Portion

And there was a thick darkness in all of Egypt for three days (Exod. 10:22)
 The plague of darkness lasted for six days, three days of darkness when no one was able to see anyone else, and "a thick darkness... for three days" which was so dense that the Egyptians were unable to move. All of the other plagues (aside from the death of the first-born which lasted only one day) were seven days long. G-d saved the last day of darkness for when the Egyptians chased after the Jews in the desert. When the Jews travelled at night they were guided by a pillar of fire, but when the Egyptians chased them, G-d punished the Egyptians by causing them to travel in darkness. (*Midrash Raba*)

And G-d said to Moses and Aaron... "This month shall be for you the head of the months." (Exod. 12:1-2)
 The Jewish calendar follows the lunar system. The solar calendar is 365 days, and the lunar calendar is approximately 354 days. To make up for the deficiency, seven years in every 19 year cycle are leap years. Thus, in some years, the lunar year is actually a few days ahead of the solar year. The leap year serves as a reminder that everyone has an opportunity to make up for what he has failed to accomplish in the past. Furthermore, just as the leap year not only makes up for the deficiency, but provides an "advance" on the future, a Jew must also intensify his efforts in his service of G-d and store up additional merits. (*Likutei Sichot*)

And he called for Moses and Aaron at night and he said, "Rise up, go out from among my people." (Exod. 12:31)
 When Moses approached Pharaoh after the plague of darkness, Pharaoh angrily said to him, "I am warning you not to see my face anymore, because on the day when you will see my face you will die." Thereafter Moses didn't return to Pharaoh. After the plague of the firstborn Pharaoh summoned Moses but Moses refused to come because Pharaoh had said Moses would die if he saw his face again. Pharaoh, knowing that he needed to see Moses, began to plead, "Now it is night. Since it is dark and hard to see my face, please come speak to me and take the Jewish people out of my country." (*Or Hachaim*)

Adapted from Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky

Dedicated to the Rebbe on 76 Years of Leadership
 whose teachings and example are a never-ending source of life for all mankind.
 May we continue in his path and complete the mission with which he has
 charged us: to make the world conscious of the imminent Redemption and to
 prepare the environment where this ideal can be realized.

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