L'Chaim

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The Weekly Publication for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תוך ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"Jerusalem has mountains around it, and the L-rd is around His people from now and to eternity" (Psalms 125:2)



The month of Elul was ending. Everyone was getting ready for Yom Tov, and the "scent" of the High Holidays was already in the air. The marketplace was overflowing with all kinds of merchandise and produce, including the special fruits that are traditionally eaten on Rosh Hashana, like pomegranates.

The Jewish section of town was bustling with activity as homes were swept from top to bottom and new clothes were fitted and sewn. At the same time, it was a serious matter, as residents prepared themselves spiritually for the coming year. More attention was paid to praying with a minyan, refraining from gossip, and, in general, improving one's behavior.

Inside the Baal Shem Tov's study hall the final preparations before Rosh Hashana were also underway. Prayers were recited with increased devotion, and all thoughts were focused on returning to G-d in repentance.

One evening, a few days before Rosh Hashana, the Baal Shem Tov's disciples were getting ready to pray the evening service. All that was missing was the Baal Shem Tov himself, who had not arrived yet. At precisely the appointed hour the Baal Shem Tov entered the study hall, but instead of opening his prayer book he remained standing, lost in thought.

Of course, no one dared to mention that it was time to pray. The minutes ticked by and still the Baal Shem Tov seemed distracted, as if he were in another world. His holy face was suffused with intense emotion. However, the Baal Shem Tov's students were already used to such things.

When the Baal Shem Tov suddenly roused himself almost an hour later and opened his prayer book, his countenance seemed to shine with joy. That evening, the Baal Shem Tov prayed with unusual intensity and longing. It was obvious that something of great significance had occurred.

After the service the Baal Shem Tov explained: "Not very far from here," he began, "lives a Jew who grew up in a traditional Jewish home. But as he grew older, he began to associate with the local peasants. Slowly he abandoned the Jewish path until he was virtually indistinguishable from the gentiles and completely estranged from his roots.

"Many years passed. The man left the province where he was born and went to live in a totally non-Jewish environment. As time passed, he forgot everything about the Jewish way of life, its prayers and its customs. Before he knew it, 30 years had elapsed.

"Tonight," the Baal Shem Tov revealed, "this Jew happened to be visiting a Jewish town on business. As soon as he entered the village, he could sense the commotion, and this aroused his curiosity. When he asked a passer-by what was going on, the man answered, 'Everyone is getting ready for a holiday we call Rosh Hashana. According to Jewish tradition, it is the day on which man was created and the whole world is judged.'

"For some reason this explanation struck a chord in the heart of the assimilated Jew. Maybe it was the exclusionary 'we,' that emphasized the huge chasm that separated him from his brethren, or perhaps the mere mention of the Day of Judgment. In any event, the man's soul was inexplicably awakened, and he was flooded with memories of his childhood.

"As he wandered through the marketplace he was suddenly stricken by the horrifying realization that he had exchanged a life rich in meaning for an empty existence. At that moment he looked up and was surprised to find himself standing outside the main synagogue. By then it was almost dark, and people were arriving to pray the evening service.

"The man was seized by an overwhelming desire to join them, but he was also embarrassed by his non-Jewish appearance. In the end the urge to pray won out, and he went into the women's section and hid behind the curtain.

"As the cantor chanted the words 'And He atones for sin...' a shudder passed through the man's body. How he wished to pray, but the words were long forgotten. Tears streamed down his cheeks. When the last congregant had gone home, he couldn't bear it any longer and burst out crying. 'Master of the universe!' he wept. 'I know there is no greater sinner than I, but I also know that You are merciful and full of loving-kindness. Heavenly Father, forgive me my transgressions and I will sin no more. I wish to return to You and live as a Jew. Please accept my prayer and do not turn me away!'

"The man's heartfelt repentance caused a great commotion in the celestial realms," the Baal Shem Tov explained, "and his prayer ascended to the very Throne of Glory. In fact, it was so powerful that it carried with it many other prayers that had been waiting hundreds of years to ascend.

"When I sensed what was going on in the man's heart," the Baal Shem Tov concluded, "I decided to wait for him to pray so I could join him. Tonight's service was delayed so that we might have the merit of praying with a true penitent... "

Dedicated in memory of our dear parents

Rabbi Velvel and Mrs. Naomi Marasow, OBM

לע״נ הרה״ח ר׳ פינחס זאב וואלף ע״ה בן הרה״ח
ר׳ דוד אריה לייב מרזוב ז״ל
ולע״נ זוגתו האשה החשובה מרת נעמי ע״ה ב״ר יהודה דוד ז״ל
והקיצו ורננו שוכני עפר והם בתוכם תיכף ומיד ממש

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THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

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)*

G-d will circumcise your heart... in order that you may live (Deut. 30:6)
When G-d will circumcise your heart, the pleasure and delight that you will take in Torah and mitzvot [commandments] will be as keenly felt as the pleasures of the physical body; you will love the Torah as much as you value your very life. *(Ohel Yaakov)*

If any of you are dispersed at the outermost parts of heaven, from there will the L-rd your G-d gather you (Deut. 30:4)
No matter how far a Jew may be from Torah and Judaism, G-d promises to gather him back into the fold of the Jewish people when Moshiach comes. When a Jew is spiritually brought back from "the outermost parts of heaven," it hastens Moshiach's coming and brings the Redemption closer. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil (Deut. 30:15)
One should not perform good deeds in order to live; one should live in order to perform good deeds.
(Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk)



7:05 PM *Candle Lighting Time*
NY Metro Area
Elul 22 / September 4
Torah Portion *Nitzavim-Vayelech*
Ethics: Chapters 5 & 6
Shabbat ends **8:03 PM**



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

The opening verses of Nitzavim, the first of this week's two Torah portions, begin: "You are standing this day, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d, your heads, your tribes, your elders... all the men of Israel...from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water."

Concerning these verses, the Midrash states that the Jewish people is likened to a bundle of straw. Each one individually is weak and can be easily broken, but once the straw is gathered into a bundle it is impossible to make it bend. So too is it with the Jewish people. When we are bound together and stand united we are powerful in the face of our enemies. Indeed, Jewish unity is the vessel for containing G-d's blessing, as we say in our prayers, "Bless us, our Father, together as one."

In truth, there is no power in the world that can dominate the Jewish people. But if such is the case, how is it possible for anything bad to befall them? This only occurs if the individual Jew causes a tiny rift in his bond with G-d that allows external factors to enter. It is this self-induced damage in the relationship between G-d and His people which brings about a lack of unity and makes the Jews vulnerable to harm. When peace and unity reign, the Jews are impervious to attack.

How does the tiny breach first emerge? When a Jew's attention to mitzvos is gradually allowed to fall by the wayside

Thus the first step in fortifying our spiritual defenses is to make sure that this initial fissure is never allowed to form. How? Through Jewish unity.

Human nature is such that a person is often unaware of his own shortcomings. "All sins are concealed by love." Indeed, our self-love prevents us from being objective. We cannot perceive even great flaws, how much more so the smaller ones. However, when Jews come together, each one can see the shortcomings of his neighbor. A good friend's gentle admonition can cause us to correct our ways, thereby strengthening our fortifications against the Evil Inclination.

This is one of the reasons the Mitteler Rebbe (Rabbi Dov Ber, the second Chabad Rebbe) encouraged his followers to acquire a friend for this specific purpose: to encourage and inspire each other along the path of Torah and mitzvot. He explained that when two Jews unite to improve themselves and their relationship with G-d, their two G-dly souls are fighting only one Evil Inclination, and it is far easier to emerge victorious.

If this was true generations ago, how much more so does it apply in our own times, when the darkness of exile has intensified.

By maintaining our Jewish unity we will remain invincible, as it states, "You are standing this day, all of you."

Adapted for Maayan Chai from Likutei Sichot, Volume 2

Seashore Musings

By Chaya Rochel Zimmerman

The conclusion of summer and the approach of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur intensified my regret for having wasted warm summer days working indoors. So, I was glad to venture off to the Illinois Beach State Park an hour north of Chicago, with my husband in tow, for one last chance at the sun's waning warmth.

As I exited the car, I immediately locked eyes upon Lake Michigan and was under its spell. I waded into the cool, crystal-clear waters surrounded by colorful rocks in varying shades of pink, orange, brown, white, and black on the sandy lake floor. I gazed at the palette of soothing aquamarines and deep blues that stretched out to the horizon.

My heartrate slowed. The refreshing waters slapped gently against my knees and thighs, releasing the tensions my body harbored. The waves swirled around me, to and fro, drawing out the judgmental thoughts I had held onto from a difficult conversation earlier in the week. The undercurrent pulled my sentiments out to sea. The salty smell, the gentle breeze, and the expansiveness of Hashem's deep, vast creation, transported me to a place of tranquility, a comfortable place, a place from which I felt I could make amends for the New Year.

Mah rabu maasecha Hashem. How awesome are your works G-d!

The greenish-blue waves rolled in softly, in choreographed sequence. Suddenly they swelled up, curled into menacing, foamy, crashing, breakers and lunged towards the shore. I moved backwards, but amazingly, they unfurled and flattened out within inches of approaching the land, as if submitting themselves to the will of the sand.

In the beginning of Creation, mountains and huge land masses were completely submerged under water, precluding the survival of man. Hashem gathered the waters into seas, rivers, lakes, and oceans, allowing dry land to appear, and set the sand as the boundary they should not cross.

In Tehillim 136:6 we read. "Give praise to Him who spreads the earth out over the waters making dry land, for his kindness endures forever." Without this kindness, there would be no civilization.

In the short time span at the seashore, my thoughts had moved from regret, to release, to awe, to gratitude for G-d's kindness; a mini version of the preparation necessary for the approaching high Holy Days.

A seagull squawked overhead as we stepped back through the sand carrying our heavy gear. My steps lighter from the inspiration I'd found in Hashem's glorious works; an experience available to everyone.

What remained for me to do before Yom Tov was to make a conscious effort to prevent my wrongdoings from continuing into the New Year. It would be my contribution to mankind and would bring civilization closer to becoming what it was meant to be: A peaceful world basking in the kindness of Hashem.

L'Chaim L'Chaim L'Chaim