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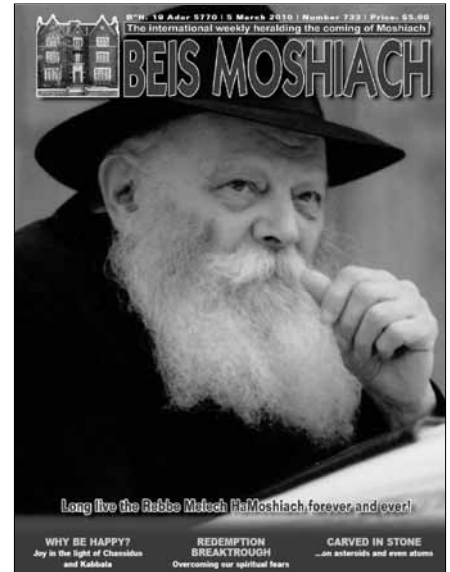
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A PURPOSE BEYOND OUR CONCEPTION

Sichos In English

THE PATH UPWARD

The name of a Torah reading is not a coincidence; on the contrary, it conveys the theme of the reading as a whole.

The name of this week's reading, Ki Sisa, raises a question.

Literally, Ki Sisa means "when you raise up" and refers to, as the verse continues, the elevation of "the heads of the children of Israel." [1]

Since the majority of the Torah reading centers on the sin of the Golden Calf and its consequences, one is prompted to ask:

How can the sin of the Golden Calf serve as a phase in the elevation of the Jewish people?

The sin of the Golden Calf represented an unprecedented descent.

At the Giving of the Torah, the impurity imparted by the sin of the Tree of Knowledge departed from the souls of the Jewish people, but returned after the sin of the Golden Calf. [2]

Thus this sin is the source of all subsequent sins.

Similarly, all the punishments suffered by the Jewish people throughout the centuries are connected to this sin. [3]

What place does it then have in a portion whose name points to the Jews' ascent?

FOR MAN TO BECOME MORE THAN MAN

The resolution of this question depends on the expansion of our conceptual framework.

For the ultimate ascent to which G-d desires to bring mankind is above ordinary human conception.

This is indicated by the very expression: "When you lift up the heads"; "the heads," human intellect, must be elevated and introduced to a new paradigm.

The essence of our souls is "an actual part of G-d from above," [4] and G-d desires that man have an active experience of this divine potential.

Moreover, the intent is not merely to rise above our human intellect, but also to "lift up the heads" themselves, that our minds be shaped by this inner G-dly potential.

Tasting a suprarational connection to G-d is not sufficient; instead, our thoughts, the way we understand the world, must come to a comprehension of G-dly truth which transcends intellect.

A JOURNEY CHARTED BY G-D

Intellect is a crossroads.

On one hand, it is man's most elevated potential, the medium which enables him to grow and expand his

horizons. On the other hand, intellect is by definition limited, and does not appreciate the infinite.

Moreover, intellect is fundamentally rooted in one's conception of self; the more one understands, the stronger one's sense of selfhood becomes.

The latter approach leads to the possibility of seeing our material existence - or at least certain aspects of it - as apart from G-d.

Our minds can understand how certain entities and experiences can serve as mediums for the expression of G-dliness, but reject the possibility of others serving this function, and therefore require that they be shunned.

Taking this approach to the extreme, some modes of divine service endeavor to avoid confronting material existence to the fullest extent possible, staying instead contained within the realm of the spiritual.

Although there are certain virtues to these modes of service, they contain an inherent shortcoming. They encourage the conception that material reality exists outside the realm of holiness. [5]

The ultimate truth - the heights to which the heads of the Jewish people should be lifted - is that every aspect of existence can express "the truth of His Being." [6]

This emphasis is reflected in the Torah's description of Avrohom's efforts to spread the awareness of G-d: [7] "And he proclaimed there the name of G-d, eternal L-rd."

The verse does not state Kel HaOlam - "G-d of the world," [8] which would imply that G-d is an entity unto Himself, the world is a separate entity unto itself, and that G-d governs and rules the world. Instead, it states Kel Olam, implying G-dliness and the world are wholly one.

There exist, however, certain elements of existence that appear separate from Him.

Is there G-dliness in evil? And if yes, how can man cause this G-dliness to be revealed?

Man cannot resolve these questions.

Nevertheless, although mortals cannot conceive of a meeting point between evil and spirituality, G-d does.

And indeed, He charts a path for each individual and the world at large to arrive at such a junction.

With Divine Providence, He creates situations which man would not enter voluntarily, forcing him to become involved in the most basic and coarse material concerns and to elevate them to holiness.

This is the intent of “lift[ing] up the heads of the children of Israel”; that even within the realm which is characterized by limitation, separation, and self, there flourish the awareness of G-d’s unbounded spiritual truth.

G-D’S AWESOME INTRIGUE

In this vein, Chassidic thought describes sin as, [9] “an awesome intrigue devised against man.”

The Jews, by nature, are above any connection with sin. [10]

If a person’s yetzer ha’ra overcomes him and makes him sin, this is because, from Above, the yetzer ha’ra was prompted to bring him to this act.

This is purposeful, “an awesome intrigue” devised by G-d, to bring about a higher and more complete level of unity between G-d and that individual and the world at large.

In his explanation of our Sages’ statement, [11] that “In the place of baalei t’shuva, even the completely righteous cannot stand,” the Rambam states [12] that baalei t’shuva are on a higher level, because “they conquer their [evil] inclination more.”

The righteous do not have to struggle against their evil inclination. To the extent that they are righteous, their evil inclination is nullified. [13]

A baal t’shuva, by contrast, possesses a powerful evil inclination - as evidenced by his sin - and yet, he

desires to cling to G-d.

Moreover, our Sages teach [14] that t’shuva transforms even the sins which a person committed intentionally into merits. This elevates the lowest aspects of existence, entities which derive their nurture from the realm of klipa, and brings them into a bond with G-d.

Why does a baal t’shuva have the potential to elevate the aspects of existence which are by nature distant from G-dliness?

Because to realize the striving for t’shuva, a person must tap his deepest spiritual potentials, the soul which is “an actual part of G-d.”

When he reaches this point in soul, he is able to appreciate that nothing is apart from Him. And in his life, he is able to show how every element of existence expresses His truth.

This process follows the motif “a descent for the purpose of an ascent.” [15]

Our climb to the peaks which our intellect cannot reach on its own involves a descent to levels which our intellect would reject.

THREE PHASES

Based on the above, we can appreciate the sequence of Parshas Ki Sisa.

The purpose - the ascent of the Jewish people - is stated in the opening verse.

Afterwards, the reading continues with the description of the final commands for the construction and dedication of the Sanctuary, the incense offering and the giving of the First Tablets. All of these subjects reflect a connection to G-d above the limits of ordinary worldly experience.

To extend that connection within the worldly realm, and to have it permeate even the lowest aspects of existence, it followed the phase of descent of the Sin of the Golden Calf and the breaking of the Tablets. This in turn motivated the Jewish people to turn to G-d in t’shuva, evoking a third phase, [16] the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, a totally

unbounded level of G-dliness that encompasses even the lowest levels.

This high peak finds expression in the giving of the Second Tablets [17] and the final event mentioned in this week’s Torah reading, the shining of Moshe’s countenance. [18]

The shining of Moshe’s countenance manifested the ultimate fusion of the physical and the spiritual.

G-dly light which by nature transcends mortal comprehension - as evidenced by the awe it evoked among the Jewish people - became one with Moshe’s actual physical person.

AND ULTIMATELY, ASCENTS WITHOUT DESCENT

Similar cycles of descent and ascent have shaped the history of our people.

The ultimate aim of this process is the union between the spiritual and the material that will characterize the Era of the Redemption, when “the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed.” [19]

When seen in that context, all the years of exile appear as merely “a fleeting moment” [20] of Divine distance that will shortly cease.

For exile has no purpose in and of itself, it is merely a means to evoke a deeper bond of connection to G-d and a medium which enables that bond to permeate every aspect of experience.

When this purpose is accomplished, the exile will conclude; to quote the Rambam: [21] “The Torah has promised that ultimately, at the end of her exile, Israel will repent and immediately she will be redeemed.” And then will begin a never-ending pattern of direct ascent, as it is written, [22] “They will proceed from strength to strength and appear before G-d in Zion.”

Adapted from Likkutei Sichos, Vol. XVII, p. 410 ff; Sichos Shabbos Parshas Ki Sisa, 5751, 5752

[Continued on pg. 9]

REDEMPTION: OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL FEARS

By Rabbi Zvi Homnick

They are simply scared. They are afraid to go it alone. They would gladly confront their fears of working too hard, of flying too high or landing too hard, shattering the vessels and cracking up, if they felt that there was a support system behind them.

FEAR OF EXERTION

In my journey from being an outsider looking in to trying to become an insider looking in, I was able to resolve many earlier questions and criticisms that make the world of Lubavitch and Chassidus seem foreign to the rest of observant Jewry. However, there is another set of questions and criticisms that focus not on the differences between Lubavitch and other streams of Jewish practice, but on the differences between modern day Lubavitch and earlier generations. Some raise these issues only to provide another excuse to attack, but then there are those who are genuinely interested in Chassidus

and feel that the latter day mode of Lubavitch practice is anathema to the true spiritual seeker.

These questions and criticisms focus primarily on what is seen as a trend away from spirituality in general, and those avenues of spiritual labor and growth unique to Chabad Chassidus. Areas such as the pursuit of love and fear of G-d, contemplating and meditating at length upon G-dly ideas and concepts, prayer at length and with great inner exertion, character refinement as well as true love for another Jew, are only some of those seen as being neglected and relegated to the annals of history.

I have encountered many people who despite not having satisfactorily

resolved these matters, felt drawn to the truth of Chassidus and the greatness of the Rebbe, and yet, even many years after joining the club, still remain disappointed and long for the days of yore. Even amongst the born and bred, there are many who feel somehow cheated by history, despite the knowledge that we are in the most amazing time in history and have been granted the peerless privilege of playing a pivotal role in the transition from exile to redemption.

It is necessary to point out that there are many who argue that this trend is due to a premeditated shift of focus from the spiritual to the realm of action, and as such, is actually a progressive state of affairs reflecting the Chassidic concept that those on the lowest level of spirituality are actually closer to the Divine Essence that manifests specifically in the physical. Being that the Divine Essence is infinitely removed from even the loftiest spiritual manifestation of G-d, and that the purpose of Creation is to reveal the Divine Essence in this physical world through the physical actions of Mitzvos, one must be prepared to forgo all spiritual ambitions to achieve this. Thus, the

call of shlichus in our generation demands of us that we sacrifice those labor intensive and time consuming spiritual pursuits in favor of fulfilling the ultimate “Divine Intent.”

Although, there are many teachings of the Rebbe that can be seen as supporting this view, there is only one itty-bitty teensy-weensy problem – the Rebbe himself says that this is absolutely false. When asked if it was true that the Rebbe did not emphasize “exertion in prayer” because it no longer held a place of prominence in our generation, the Rebbe at the next farbrengen (Ki Sisa 5740, Parashas

Para) rejected that notion outright and cited the verse in which Pharaoh scolds the Jews, “Loafers, you are loafers” and that is why the people are trying to get out of doing the work. This response of the Rebbe would seem to indicate that the determinative issue influencing ideological inertia is indolence, or in just plain English, folks is just plain lazy.

FEAR OF HEIGHTS

As part of our preparations for the upcoming Pesach holiday, we read Parshas Para (the Torah portion of the “red heifer”), which describes the ritual whereby one could be

cleansed from the impurity of contact with the dead, the week prior to blessing the new month of Adar. When the Holy Temple stood in Yerushalayim, those who were ritually impure needed to begin purifying themselves for the Pesach offering. In our times, the preparations are purely spiritual.

The Alter Rebbe in Likkutei Torah explains the spiritual aspect of the commandment of the red heifer as the ability to synthesize “ratzo” and “shuv.” In this context, “ratzo” (to run) is the spiritual inspiration to “go out” of the trappings of the physical body and physical world and connect to G-d and G-dliness. “Shuv” (to return) is the recognition of the soul that it was sent down here for a purpose and that being the case, “going out” is not an option, and the soul must return to the moorings of the physical body and physical world to fulfill G-d’s Will through Torah and Mitzvos.

Certain commandments such as those of love and fear, faith and prayer, require that we try to shed that which anchors us to the physical and aim for the spiritual heights, whereas most other commandments are about actualizing the Divine Will in the tangible and material world. Each one alone represents a danger associated with death. Over-involvement in the physical world, even if begun with good intentions, can lead to promoting the physical over the spiritual, which is exactly what death is – when physicality reigns supreme. Chasing after spiritual heights beyond one’s capacity to “bring it down” presents the danger of the soul exiting the body, as the Ohr HaChayim explains regarding the deaths of Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, we have the Mitzva of the red heifer to empower us to strike a working balance.

The above is an oversimplified condensation of many lengthy and detailed discourses on a range of



Painting by Eliyah Succot

We have the powers and the means to scale and reach unbelievable spiritual heights and we are told how each area of spiritual growth is an essential ingredient in preparing ourselves and the world for redemption.

deep and complex issues, but for the purposes of our discussion the message is that you must seek to scale spiritual heights, you can succeed in scaling those spiritual heights, and oh, by the way, it can be pretty dangerous up there so you better make sure that you have struck the perfect balance and have a valid return ticket back to terra firma and corpus vitalis.

In addition to the story of Nadav and Avihu, we have the classic tale in the Talmud (Chagiga 14b) of the “four who entered the Pardes.” Of the four, one died, one went crazy, one became an apostate, and only Rabi Akiva “entered in peace and exited in peace.” Along those lines, there are horror stories and warnings from the early Kabbalists, as well as many cautionary tales and admonitions from Chassidic tradition. In fact, Chabad Chassidus has its own rich tradition of berating and humiliating those who tried to reach for the “heights” as this was seen as showing a lack of self-nullification.

Only when someone had truly demonstrated that his drive for spiritual growth was genuinely motivated by subservience to the Divine Will rather than personal ambition, was he accorded any degree of acceptance (with the occasional verbal “cold shower” just to keep him in his place). For the true seeker, all of this information is extremely useful in guiding him so that he avoids any pitfalls or minefields along the way. But what

about the “not so sure” seeker? Some of this stuff can scare anybody, if not to death, at least to paralysis.

FEAR OF FAILURE

Laziness, or at least situational laziness, can have many different underlying causes. For example, in Tanya ch. 26, the Alter Rebbe speaks of laziness and lethargy caused by depression and/or emotional desensitization or worry and sadness. Shlomo HaMelech in Mishlei addresses different aspects of the indolent slacker, including his proclivity for making excuses. Some of the excuses he suggests seem quite silly, such as, “There is a lion outside, I will be killed in the streets.” Clearly, there is no real cause for fear, since everybody else seems to be managing just fine. But what if everyone was really convinced that there was a lion out there? Could you blame the fellow who just wants to roll over in bed and skip a day’s work, when the workaholic is just as paralyzed into inaction as he?

And that is where (part one of) my theory comes in. I am convinced that there are hundreds, probably thousands of Lubavitcher Chassidim and “friends” of Lubavitch (plus untold millions not yet aware), men and women, young and old, who would love to know how to navigate the pathways of spiritual service and would be prepared to exert themselves prodigiously in that

service. However, they are simply scared. They are afraid to go it alone. They would gladly confront their fears of working too hard, of flying too high or landing too hard, shattering the vessels and cracking up, if they felt that there was a support system behind them.

Fear, more than any other emotion, can be completely paralyzing and debilitating. It is also one of the hardest emotions for some to admit to. So, we make up all kinds of philosophical rationalizations for why it is not for us.

Repeatedly, throughout a vast number of sichos and maamarim, the Rebbe prods, urges, exhorts and even at times tries to browbeat us into stretching beyond our spiritual fears and inhibitions, promising us that we have been given the tools and the necessary soul powers to “enter in peace and exit in peace.” For example, there is the well-known sicha regarding the Purim story brought in the Talmud about how Rabba and Reb Zeira became extremely intoxicated and “Rabba stood and sheched Reb Zeira.” The next day, when he saw that Reb Zeira was no longer among the living, “he asked for [Divine] mercy and resurrected him.” The Rebbe explains this in terms of Rabba exposing Reb Zeira to such a lofty level of the secrets of the Torah [alluded to by wine] that he experienced *Klos HaNefesh* (lit. expiry of the soul – i.e. due to great spiritual longing).

The Rebbe concludes that sicha (Likkutei Sichos vol. 31, 2nd sicha Purim) by saying that the lesson from the obligation cited in the Code of Jewish Law to become inebriated to the point of not knowing, is “to study the secrets of the Torah in a way of obsessive love until he reaches a state of ‘drunkenness’ and the nullification of his own existence. This is because on Purim, the power is given to each and every

Jew, each with his own ‘*b’chol me’odecha*’ (ability to love G-d beyond the personal limits of one’s individual spiritual makeup) according to his measure, to carry out such an ‘imbibing’ and attain such an attachment (*d’veikus*) to the secrets of the Torah that negate his very being. [This] without any worry that from such an avoda, he will come to conduct himself in a manner of seclusion and reclusiveness from the world...but on the contrary...it will increase his chayus in the service of Hashem throughout the entire year...’he will enter in peace and exit in peace.” (See also conclusion of earlier edited, longer version of this sicha – Likkutei Sichos vol. 27 – appendices

p. 267-276.)

The point is that we have the powers and the means to scale and reach unbelievable spiritual heights and we are told how each area of spiritual growth is an essential ingredient in preparing ourselves and the world for redemption. So, after all the excuses and explanations, we still need to do it. We need to take those powers that we have from Purim and from the Para Aduma to experience and integrate the highest spiritual attainments to prepare for the ultimate revelations of redemption in the month of Nisan. And in the spirit of Ahavas Yisroel expressed on Purim by sharing with friends and looking out for the poor, and

expressed in the administering of the ashes of the red heifer by the Kohen becoming ritually impure even as he cleanses his spiritually inferior fellow Jew, we should join together in helping and supporting each other in overcoming our fears and attendant laziness as relates to spiritual growth.

In the merit of even the smallest effort on the part of any individual Jew to “go out” of him/herself and in turn, “bring G-d down to earth,” may we all “exit in peace” this final interminable exile and “enter in peace” into the True and Complete Redemption, immediately, NOW!

Positive comments and constructive criticism welcome: rabbizvi@aol.com

[Continued from pg. 5]

Notes:

1. Exodus 30:12. Within the context of the Torah reading, the verse should be rendered: “When you take a census of the children of Israel.”
2. Shabbos 146a; Zohar I, 52b, II, 193b; Likkutei Sichos, Vol. IX, p. 9.
3. Sanhedrin 102b; Rashi, Exodus 32:35.
4. Tanya, ch. 2.
5. In an ultimate sense, such an approach can be equated with the worship of false gods. For the conception of an entity as separate from G-d and independent from Him, is the source of idol worship. See the maamer VeYadaata, 5657 [English translation: To Know G-d (Kehot, N.Y., 1993)].
6. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:1.
7. B’Reishis 13:4.
8. See Likkutei Torah, conclusion of Parshas Ki Savo; conclusion of maamer beginning Anochi Havaya Elokecha, 5673
9. Cf. Psalms 66:5.
10. See Avoda Zara 4b-5a and Rashi’s commentary.
11. Brachos 34b.
12. Mishneh Torah, Hilchos T’shuva 7:4.

13. See Tanya, ch. 10.

14. Yoma 86b.

15. Cf. Makos 7b.

16. Based on the above, we can also draw a connection to the three pilgrimage festivals which are mentioned in this Torah reading. These three festivals also follow a similar pattern of three: Pesach represents a G-dly revelation beyond the limits of worldly experience. Afterwards, comes Shavuot, a holiday which is associated with the wheat harvest which reflects an emphasis on man’s service. And then Sukkos, the harvest festival which is an allusion to the ultimate ingathering that is connected with the Era of the Redemption.

17. Although the First Tablets were the “work of G-d,” while the Second Tablets were hewn by Moshe, the Second Tablets reflect a more encompassing union between G-dliness and our world. This is reflected in the fact that the First Tablets were broken (for their holiness could not coexist with the crass realities of worldly existence), while the Second Tablets, by contrast, are eternal (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Beis HaBechira 4:1), representing the fusion of holiness with material existence.

Not only are the Second Tablets associated with a deeper bond with material existence, they also represent a more complete treasury of Torah

knowledge.

Our Sages relate (Nedarim 22b) that if Moshe had not destroyed the Tablets, we would have received only the Five Books of the Chumash and the Book of Yehoshua. In contrast, the Second Tablets are associated with the Oral Law, the aspect of Torah which is truly boundless.

18. In this context, we can appreciate why Parshas Ki Sisa follows the parshiyos, Truma and Tetzaveh which describe G-d’s commands to Moshe regarding the construction of the Sanctuary although chronologically, the events described in Parshas Ki Sisa took place first.

The construction of the Sanctuary represents the transformation of the world into a dwelling for G-d, the ultimate purpose of the world’s creation.

Therefore, after the commandment to create such a dwelling is given, before Moshe communicates it to the Jewish people, the Torah relates the three-phased pattern through which the Divine intent for this world can be fulfilled.

19. Isaiah 11:9, quoted by the Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim 12:5) at the conclusion of his discussion of the Era of the Redemption.

20. Isaiah 54:7.

21. Mishneh Torah, Hilchos T’shuva 7:5.

22. Psalms 84:8.

BESSER AND EVEN BESSER

By Menachem Ziegelboim

Pictures from the archives of the Algemeiner Journal

*Sixteen years ago I visited Rabbi Chatzkel Besser a”h in his Manhattan office, where he shared some of his memories of the hours he spent with the Rebbe. A talmid chacham, Chassid, and askan of the previous generation, he was one of the most fascinating men I’ve met in the course of the interviews I’ve conducted. * Part 1 of 2*

“IT PAYS TO GET TO KNOW HIM”

Rabbi Chatzkel (Yechezkel) Besser, member of the Presidium of Agudath Israel of America, member of the Vaad Hapoel Haolami of Agudath Israel World Organization, founding chairman of the Daf Yomi commission and longtime askan, passed away at the age of 87 with his children at his bedside. In recent years he was very weak and was confined to his bed but his mind remained sharp till the end. Even after he resigned from his public roles, he was still involved and interested in what was going on in the lives of world Jewry.

“He was informed about everything going on in Israel and everywhere else,” said members of

Agudath Israel.

I met R’ Chatzkel Besser sixteen years ago when I was sent to interview him about his ties to the Rebbe. After making an appointment, I headed for his office in Manhattan. I remember that meeting very well. The sun was setting and the lights in the skyscrapers were beginning to twinkle outside the large window on the 42nd floor of the General Motors building on Fifth Avenue.

I remember the impressive office. I was seated in the waiting room until R’ Besser came out to greet me and usher me into his office. There was the protocol of a Manhattan business with an old world Chassidic flavor. The snarled rush hour traffic below melted away as we sat in his

office and traveled back in time.

“My ties to Beis Rebbe began in 5707/1947. I traveled a lot on business between the US, Europe, and Israel. One of the times I brought back a package for Rebbetzin Chana, the Rebbe’s mother, with pictures of her granddaughter, the daughter of her son, R’ Yisroel Aryeh Leib who lived in Israel with his family. She was very happy to receive it and thanked me warmly.

“That was the beginning of my connection with the Rebbetzin and consequently, with Beis Rebbe and the Rebbe himself. At first, I would visit Rebbetzin Chana at her house. When she needed to send something to Eretz Yisroel, she would ask me when someone could come and bring me a package for her son. I remember her as a special woman, very smart, royal.

“In one conversation she asked me, ‘You know my son, the Rebbe’s son-in-law?’

“I said I didn’t but added that I had heard a lot about him.

“‘It’s worthwhile getting to know him ...’ she said.

Sometime after that, I moved from Manhattan to Crown Heights and I got to know the Rebbe himself. I would daven in one of the neighborhood shtiblach throughout the week, but Friday night I would daven in Lubavitch. One Friday night, I took my five year old son along. When we walked in, he looked for a Siddur but did not find one. Although the Rebbe was not yet the Nasi, he sat alone at a table. My son, who didn’t know who the Rebbe was, saw him sitting there with a Siddur and nobody sitting next to him. He went over to the Rebbe, sat down next to him, and looked inside the Siddur along with the Rebbe. The Chassidim motioned to him to go away but the Rebbe smiled and said, “The davening goes very well together with him.” This son ended up becoming a

Lubavitcher.

For the next two years my relationship with the Rebbe did not go beyond seeing him daven and the occasional exchange of greetings.

LIKE A FATHER TOWARDS A SON

R' Chatzkel Besser was a Radomsker Chassid, a great talmid chacham, a man of action and many achievements. He was born in Katowice in 1923, and lived there until World War II began in 1939. He was saved from death by a Catholic priest who helped him sneak across the border to Romania. He resolved to dedicate his life to reestablishing the world he had left behind that had been destroyed. After the war he settled in the United States, where he was devoted to establishing and developing religious organizations. He greatly encouraged the study of Daf Yomi and some called him "king of the askanim."

Shortly after he arrived in New York, he started the Kehillas Beis Yisroel Chaim beis midrash on 84th Street in Manhattan. There he devoted himself to his true love, being mekarev Yidden and teaching Torah. The shul had a varied congregation of young and old and from differing backgrounds, and R' Chatzkel was mekarev and loved them all. He welcomed anybody who, at that difficult time following the war, wanted to join the shul.

As we sat in his office, R' Chatzkel took care of important communal matters via phone. In a conversation or two he was able to settle matters that others would take weeks to work out.

He is a superb storyteller and as I listened to him I was transported to other worlds. Even today, so many years later, as I review that interview, I can hear his voice in every word:

"One day in 1952, I got a



My five year old son, who didn't know who the Rebbe was, saw him sitting there with a Siddur and nobody sitting next to him. He went over to the Rebbe, sat down next to him, and looked inside the Siddur along with the Rebbe. The Chassidim motioned to him to go away but the Rebbe smiled and said, "The davening goes very well together with him."

message from the Rebbe that a certain baalas t'shuva wanted to leave her parents' house so she could live a religious life, but she needed a job so she could support

herself and not be dependent on them. I hired her as a secretary in my business.

"Two or three months later, my business partner requested, 'I want



Rabbi Chatzkel Besser with his son, Asher

The Chassidus of the Alter Rebbe is the same Torah as the Chassidus of the other talmidim of the Maggid, except with him there is more penicillin and less water. If we don't learn the teachings of other Chassidic groups, said the Rebbe, it's because we need to get 100% of the medication.

to ask you a favor. Our secretary arranged for me to meet with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, but I don't know how to conduct myself there. Would you be willing to go along with me?' We planned for him to come to my house in Crown Heights after ten and we would go together to the yechidus which was scheduled for eleven.

"At 10:30 he showed up and said that he wouldn't be going to the

Rebbe after all. I asked him what happened and he explained, 'I have a relative here in Crown Heights that is sick and I haven't seen her in a long time. She recently had an operation to remove a malignant tumor and it came back and the doctors are divided over what to do next. One doctor says she should not be operated on and another one says she has to have an operation. Since I'm here already, I want to

take the opportunity to visit her.'

"My partner simply didn't know what yechidus with the Rebbe is about. I told him, 'Now you have even more of a reason to see the Rebbe so you can consult with him about this.' He agreed and we went to 770.

"We entered the Rebbe's room at 2:30 in the morning. The Rebbe welcomed us warmly. He invited my partner to sit, which he did, and then asked me to sit. I said, 'I don't sit. I'm a Chassid.'

"My partner took out a note with the name and gave it to the Rebbe. The Rebbe's face changed instantly and he looked at the note with great seriousness. I noticed the change and that is when I saw, for the first time, that he's a Rebbe!

"My partner told him the patient's history and the Rebbe asked a few questions. Then the Rebbe asked in Yiddish, 'She's religious?' 'No,' he answered.

"The Rebbe asked, 'Does she herself know her condition?'

"I don't know.'

"She should commit to doing something that will be for her good,' the Rebbe said. 'Of course, if it's not too hard,' my partner agreed. 'For example, she should light Shabbos candles,' suggested the Rebbe.

"My partner said, 'I'm sure she lights candles.'

"Then the Rebbe exclaimed, 'If so, how could you say about such a Jewess that she is not religious? Perhaps she could be convinced to give a few coins to tz'daka before lighting Shabbos candles,' the Rebbe suggested. Then he assured him, 'Don't worry. Everything will be all right.'

"The yechidus was over two hours long. The Rebbe asked whether he had children and what kind of education they were getting. This matter was discussed extensively.

"My partner had a little boy and the Rebbe urged him to send him to



R' Chatzkel Besser with a delegation from Agudath Israel
From right to left: R' Yechiel Ben Zion Fishoff, R' Chatzkel Besser,
R' Yaakov Rieder, R' Moshe Sherer, R' Chaim Hertz, R' Mendel Berg.

yeshiva when he got older. My partner said he wanted to send him to college so his son would be educated. The Rebbe said, 'Tell me, isn't it true that you don't want him marrying a non-Jew?' My partner nodded and the Rebbe said, 'He'll go to college and find a girl he likes, and why shouldn't he marry her?'

"He nodded his agreement and the Rebbe said, 'You really need to think about that.' The Rebbe continued to speak about this at length.

"When the Rebbe finished speaking to him, he said to me, 'Nu, what's new with you?'

"I was already vice president of Agudath Israel World Organization but the Rebbe only spoke about personal matters with me. He spoke about several topics and, since the atmosphere was relatively open I dared to say, 'Can I ask a question?'

"By all means,' said the Rebbe.

"I've been davening here for

over a year and I see Lubavitcher Chassidim. I also come from a Chassidic home – my father and grandfather were Radomsker Chassidim. At home, we learn the s'farim of the Tiferes Shlomo (of Radomsk) but also other s'farim like the Noam Elimelech, the K'dushas Levi and the other s'farim of the talmidim of the Maggid, while here, I see Chassidim learning only Chabad s'farim.'

"The Rebbe gave me a long explanation. I don't remember every detail but the gist of it and the example the Rebbe gave, I remember well. The Rebbe said that years earlier, two doctors – Dr. Fleming and Dr. Chein – had discovered penicillin and developed it as a medication to destroy bacteria.

"At first, said the Rebbe, they didn't give the medication at a high dosage so it shouldn't be dangerous, but three months later the bacteria got used to it and the doctors had to

increase the dosage. Over the years, they doubled the quantity and each time the bacteria got stronger, they added still more. A war was waged between the doctors and the bacteria.

"The same applies with Chassidus. There was Toras HaNistar even before the Baal Shem Tov, but it was only for extraordinary people. The Arizal publicized more of it and the Baal Shem Tov publicized even more, and it did indeed purify the atmosphere, but the bacteria also increased.

"Then came the Alter Rebbe and he said it's not enough. A shot of penicillin doesn't help anymore. Why? Because the old dosage of 90% water and 10% penicillin has become inadequate. The Chassidus of the Alter Rebbe is the same Torah as the Chassidus of the other talmidim of the Maggid, except with him there is more penicillin and less water.

At one yechidus, my father-in-law told the Rebbe, 'Ah, if the Rebbe would only come to Eretz Yisroel, it would be a great benefit to the entire land.' The Rebbe replied, 'I know. It's easy to go there but how could I leave?'

"If we don't learn the teachings of other Chassidic groups, said the Rebbe, it's because we need to get 100% of the medication.

"I was amazed. When my father passed away, he was only 52. He had been sick for five days and the doctors said there was nothing to do. By the time they brought a top doctor who said to give him penicillin, it was already too late. I thought, if they had given him a more potent dose perhaps they would have saved him. But at that time, the medication was still new and they weren't familiar with it. The allegory the Rebbe had chosen about penicillin affected me personally.

"When we left the Rebbe's room, I asked my partner, 'Nu, what do you say?'

"He replied, 'He's a wise man. I don't agree 100% with his views but I will send my son to yeshiva. And he did.

"The next day, my partner came into the office and said, 'Today, one of the doctors called and informed me that last night the doctors had a meeting and decided to operate. When they opened her up they saw that there was no tumor there. In the previous operation they had forgotten some gauze and that is what had caused the infection.

"Two or three months later, I got a phone call from the Rebbe's secretaries. The Rebbe wanted to know how the woman was doing. I said that she was fine. I was very impressed that months after the

yeichidus, the Rebbe remembered to ask about her. Needless to say, our Lubavitcher secretary was thrilled."

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SHVER

R' Chatzkel often had yechidus with his father-in-law, R' Berel Ludmir, an outstanding talmid chacham and a Boyaner Chassid who was a descendent of the Alter Rebbe and learned in the Chabad yeshiva in Chevron.

"The Rebbe greatly cherished my father-in-law. Each yechidus he had was over an hour. Each time we entered the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe stood up for him and welcomed him graciously.

"The first time we entered together was after my father-in-law arrived from Eretz Yisroel in Tishrei, 5713/1952, and went to 770 to daven. Before he returned to Eretz Yisroel he had yechidus and I joined him. He came to the United States every year and from then on, he would always have a yechidus before leaving for Eretz Yisroel and I would always join him. We entered for yechidus together more than twenty times! I spent hours upon hours in yechidus but it's hard for me to think of something in particular to tell you now. We spoke about a vast array of subjects.

"At one yechidus, my father-in-law told the Rebbe, 'Ah, if the Rebbe would only come to Eretz Yisroel, it would be a great benefit to the entire land.'

"The Rebbe replied, 'I know. It's easy to go there but how could I leave?'

"When my father-in-law was at his last yechidus, more than twenty years later, he repeated, 'We long for the Rebbe to come to Eretz Yisroel.'

"The Rebbe said, 'R' Berel, you already asked me and I already answered you ...'

"My father-in-law had a son named Mordechai who did not have children. At the end of one yechidus, when my father-in-law was about to leave, he said to the Rebbe, 'I want to mention my daughter-in-law who is married for five years and does not have children.'

"The Rebbe responded, 'It's an *iber yahr* (lit. a leap year, but is also a pun for pregnancy).'

"When my father-in-law came the following year, we went to give the Rebbe a pidyon nefesh and on Erev Yom Kippur to get lekach. On the latter occasion, the Rebbe asked my father-in-law, 'Is there any news with your daughter-in-law?'

"He said there wasn't. A week later we got a phone call from Israel that she was expecting a baby. Though they hadn't yet been ready to share the news, she had already been expecting before Rosh HaShana, in the 'iber yahr.'

"My father-in-law has a grandchild named Binyamin. When this grandson was four years old, we took him with us to the Rebbe on Erev Yom Kippur, to get lekach. My father-in-law told him to ask for lekach. The child put out his left hand and my shver told him, 'Not your left hand, put out your right hand.'

"I was standing with them and joked, 'Especially when your name is Binyamin,' i.e. Ben-Yamin. The Rebbe smiled and said, 'But he has another name.'

"We walked away puzzled. Why did the Rebbe say he has another name – we only call him Binyamin?

"When we got home, we asked

the boy's mother and found out that his full name was Binyamin Beinish.

"The Rebbe would ask my father-in-law a lot about Chassidim from earlier generations and inquire about his business and his health. At a certain point my father-in-law was very sick and the doctors wanted to amputate his leg. He was in Shaarei Tzedek hospital and the Rebbe often asked after his health.

"In 5713/1953, the director of the hospital came to America and when we spoke about my father-in-law I had an idea. I told him that the Lubavitcher Rebbe always asked about my father-in-law and could we go together to the Rebbe and tell him about the situation? He agreed. I made an appointment for yechidus the following Sunday.

"At first I thought he would just give a dry report and that would be all, but after three minutes in which he described the medical situation,

the Rebbe said, 'Wait, I want you to tell me a little about your hospital.'

The Rebbe was particularly interested in the nursing school that was connected to the hospital. He asked what they studied and how they were taught. Before the conclusion of the yechidus (which lasted forty minutes), he spoke to someone on the phone and two minutes later, R' Groner came in with a check for \$300 which the Rebbe gave to the head of the hospital. The man refused to take the money but the Rebbe said, 'You cannot turn down my donation, especially when you have a nursing school.'

"Among his businesses, my father-in-law had an esrog business. Every year the Rebbe would ask him, 'Nu, how was the season? How did they grow this year?'

"After my father-in-law answered, the Rebbe would proffer

various suggestions.

"Needless to say, my father-in-law brought the Rebbe choice esrogim whenever he visited. At one yechidus, my father-in-law asked the Rebbe what he said the bracha on, and the Rebbe did not want to tell him for obvious reasons (since the Rebbe used a Yanover esrog). My father-in-law said, 'I know that the Rebbe has a tradition to use Yanover esrogim,' and the Rebbe smiled.

"My father-in-law said it was possible to take an esrog from Italy and to plant it in Eretz Yisroel and the resulting esrogim would have all the advantages. The Rebbe encouraged him to do this and added guidance about how to go about it, when to plant, and what to do so that it would be one less year of *orla*. Afterwards I found out that they followed up on this idea and planted Yanover esrogim in Kfar Chabad."

[To be continued be"H]



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BRINGING THE SH'CHINA DOWN TO RISHIKESH

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

Rabbi Zohar David, himself a veteran backpacker who conducted his own search throughout India, is once again wandering the streets of Rishikesh. This time, though, he's there with his wife as the shliach to this city, where he sees how the Rebbe touches the soul of even the most distant and remote Jew. * Part 2 of 2

[Continued from last week]

“Despite all these signs that illuminated the Jewish spark within me, the flame was still not strong enough to disrupt the routine of my life. Not long afterwards, I made my way to Los Angeles, where I hoped to earn enough money to go back to Rishikesh. In the United States, I felt that I was losing the last shreds of spirituality left to me – until I had a serious automobile accident that I

only survived by a miracle.

“I begin to tell myself, ‘Zohar, the time has come for action - how many more hints do you need to receive in order to take a turn for the better?’

“My friends took me to synagogue to make the blessing of ‘*Birchas HaGomel*’ after the accident. The shul’s gabbai blessed me, expressing the hope that next time he will be privileged to make a

haircut for me and that I should be without the large earrings that adorned my ears. I felt a great sense of inner shame. As I left the shul, I promised myself that I would take the earrings off forever. This was the first stage when I decided to do something in practical terms that would begin to move me closer in the direction of the ways of Torah.

“I was living at the time with one of my friends, as I still hadn’t found a job to make a living. One night, my friends went out to play soccer, while I preferred to join them later. However, when I eventually did set out on my way, I soon realized that I was lost. During my efforts to try to find the soccer field, I saw a building bearing a Hebrew sign. Initially, I thought that it was a Judaica store, and decided to go in and buy a siddur for my friend. Yet, when I tried to open the doors, I discovered that they were locked. I was about to turn around and leave, when two Jews wearing yarmulkes arrived and invited me to come in. They told me that the place serves as a synagogue, and asked me to stay and be part of the minyan. Other Jews came in the meantime, and one of them started to teach Parshas Shmos to the rest of the group. I felt an uplifting of the soul, a sense of spiritual elation that is impossible to explain in words. At the end of the class, I asked the rabbi the same question that I had asked the Tibetan monk about the principle of ‘If someone rises to slay you, slay him first’. He responded with an answer that simply amazed me. Instead of giving a standard reply, he quoted the commentary on the Zohar that referred to the yetzer ha’ra and how we slay it through an increase in Torah and mitzvos.

“The following week, I had already decided to purchase books of Judaism, and the first two that I bought were “Chovat HaLevovos” and “The Paths of the Righteous.” At a certain stage, I asked my mother to send me my t’fillin.

Looking back now, I realize that it wasn't me who was conducting this process of return to Judaism. I felt the hidden Hand of G-d leading me along the path of truth, while something within me kept trying to push forward again and again. I left the Tibetan monastery with the understanding that no matter what path I chose, I must have a serious spiritual leader to follow. I prayed incessantly to G-d that He should provide me with an ideal leader."

FOLLOW THE LEADER

As his connection to his Jewish roots began to bloom, Zohar found himself sharing a dwelling with two Gentiles: an African-American who constantly blamed the Jews for the suffering of blacks in the United States, and a German filled with anti-Semitic hatred. "One night, I woke up frightened, trembling, and confused from a strange dream. In my dream, I saw a dignified looking Jew with a beard approaching me with quick and sure steps, with a brilliant light illuminating from him. He looked at me with serious eyes filled with endless love and concern, and then he began to disappear. I cried bitterly and begged him to come back, but to no avail."

When Zohar woke up from his dream, his whole body was shaking. He took a sheet of paper and wrote down everything that he had seen, and he didn't have an easy time getting back to sleep. "A couple of days later, I got a hold of a copy of the 'Yisroel HaK'tana' newspaper, geared for the Israeli community in Los Angeles. The paper was filled with articles on the Lubavitcher Rebbe. It was shortly after Gimmel Tammuz 5754, and the front page prominently displayed a picture of the Rebbe from the day he accepted the leadership. As I looked carefully at the picture, I was stirred to the depths of my soul. This was the same Jew that I had seen in my dream. I went over to the drawer,



The Chabad House courtyard. Torah classes in a different atmosphere.



At the Lag B'Omer parade in Rishikesh

took out the t'fillin that my mother had sent me, and for the first time in ages, I put them on in a sense of awe and fear.

"It was only with some difficulty that I finished saying the 'Shma', as I was crying uncontrollably. I have put on t'fillin every weekday ever since. The *pintele Yid* began to awaken within me with full force. Shortly thereafter, I moved to a more Jewish neighborhood, where I also found a job in a store owned by a local Jew. As Divine Providence would have it, the business was located just a few yards from the Chabad House run by Rabbi Amitai Yemini. Once when a policeman stopped me on a traffic violation and I was sentenced to a period of community service, I asked if I could do it in a synagogue. The judge asked me which synagogue, and I replied that I wanted to serve in

Rabbi Yemini's shul. Thus, I found myself coming each night to help them make a minyan for Maariv.

"When I finished my community service, I stopped coming to the Chabad House, but Divine Providence has a variety of methods. I was again caught on a traffic violation, and again I was sentenced to a period of community service, which I did at the Chabad House. This time, I already made a much better connection, and I reached the decision that there had been enough fun and games. The Rebbe's picture hanging over the Chabad House entrance served as a constant reminder of my incredible dream, and I decided that the Rebbe would be my spiritual leader. At a farbrengen that took place in the Chabad House during Chanukah, I told the story of that dream.

"The farbrengen that night was conducted by a young mashpia. He and many other chassidim in attendance were amazed by the story. I naively asked how I can possibly be connected to the Lubavitcher Rebbe today after Gimmel Tammuz. One of the chassidim there, Rabbi Rami Duek, told me that it's possible to write to the Rebbe through 'Igros Kodesh.' He invited me to his house where he would explain how it is done. In

response to my numerous questions, the Rebbe replied that the beginning and the foundation of the path to Yiddishkait is through reading stories of the tzaddikim and learning halachos relevant to a Jew's day-to-day life. At the end of the letter, the Rebbe wrote that he would mention all those noted in the original correspondence at the Tzion of the Rebbe Rayatz. I left his house elated and thrilled."

Time passed, and Zohar's knowledge of Chabad chassidus continued to grow deeper. He fervently wanted to return to Eretz HaKodesh, but the musical recording project that he had worked on for so long would still keep him in Los Angeles for quite a while. "In the meantime, I bought s'farim on stories of the tzaddikim, took part in Torah classes, and started davening three times a day. One day, my brother Noam (today the Rebbe MH" M's shliach in Kfar HaNagid) came to visit and to help me in the recording studio. He met with me during other critical stages in my process of returning to traditional Judaism.

"Shortly before going back to Eretz Yisroel, we went on a trip to Yosemite National Park, where we met some Chabad chassidim who were excited to discover people from Rechovot. They asked if we knew Rabbi Gluckowsky and Rabbi Shachar, and eventually they gave us a dollar for a shlichus mitzvah, which they had received from the holy hand of the Rebbe himself. Written on the dollar was the name 'Yosef Yitzchak Levin', and my brother naively thought that when he came back to Rechovot, he would have to find a chassid by that name and return the dollar to him. Thus, when he returned to Eretz Yisroel, he made inquiries and heard that there was a mashpia in the Chabad community named Rabbi Aryeh Levin, who had a son learning in the yeshiva named Yosef Yitzchak Levin.

My brother handed the dollar to the father in order that he should give it to his son.

"This was an incredible case of Divine Providence, as the Tamim (who himself became a mashpia and mashgiach in the yeshiva) decided to find out who had given him the dollar. He searched for him in every David family that appeared in the Rechovot phone book, until he finally found us. This began a very good connection between him and my brother. In the merit of this young Tamim, my brother started to keep Shabbos and eventually got close to Chabad. Together we formed a band that performed each Thursday night before dozens of young people. We would bring R' Yair Calev and R' Avi Piamenta, and many baalei t'shuva were produced as a result."

THE FIRST SHLICHUS IN INDIA

As time passed, Rabbi Zohar's soul longed more and more for the path of Torah and chassidus, and he went to learn in the yeshiva in Tzfas. He even studied for some time in Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh's yeshiva in Sh'chem, and it was at this stage that he got married.

Not long afterwards, he received a proposal from his close friend, Rabbi Dror Shaul, who was already out on shlichus in the Indian city of Dharamsala, to replace him temporarily while he went back to Eretz Yisroel with his wife before she gave birth. "At first, I didn't understand what possible connection I could have to being a shliach – and in India, no less. But he convinced me, and I accepted the offer. Friends provided me with some funds, and I went out with my wife on shlichus."

The shlichus experience was very powerful. "The month and a half that I was there remains emblazoned in my memory. While I still wasn't sufficiently well-versed in all the

halachos and in the challenges confronted on shlichus, I still felt extremely privileged to be counted among the king's legion of emissaries. The communal prayer services with young people who may not remember the last time they entered a synagogue, the miracles and instances of Divine Providence that we witnessed every step of the way, conversations well into the night – all these were powerful experiences. I particularly remember one tourist who came to say goodbye before we left: He told us that in the past whenever he saw an ultra-Orthodox Jew in the street, he would cross to the other side. Now, his way of thinking had totally changed, and he warmly embraced me..."

The whole concept of shlichus had fascinated the Davids. As they made their way back to Eretz Yisroel, they began to look for their own place on shlichus in India. Rabbi Dror Shaul suggested Rishikesh, where many tourists come in search of a remedy for their thirsty souls. He thought that this location would be most appropriate for Rabbi David and his character. "There were others who also suggested Rishikesh as a fitting place for my shlichus, and after making brief preparations, we headed for the Indian city together with Rabbis Amit Atedgi and Alon Chakashur. We experienced numerous miracles and wonders on that shlichus. I especially remember on Simchas Torah when Rabbi Chakashur gave me a small flask of mashke. Initially, I tried to give it back to him. 'What am I, an alcoholic?' I protested. But Rabbi Chakashur wouldn't relent. 'A chassid must go beyond his limitations,' he explained. We made a proper 'L'chaim' and proceeded to go out into the streets – leaping, dancing, and jumping in honor of the Torah. Suddenly, I saw a bull approaching me, but I wasn't frightened since this was a common

occurrence in India. Then, before I had a chance to turn around, I suddenly felt a powerful blow to my chest. I almost lost consciousness from the force of it. When I got back to my feet, I wondered how the bull hadn't skewered me with its horns. I felt the area where the bull had struck me, and I was stunned! Its horns had struck the metal flask that was in my pocket, absorbing the full thrust of the goring..."

A LETTER OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE REBBE

As with every Chabad House in its formative stages, the Davids endured some initial difficulties on their shlichus, e.g., purchasing all the necessary groceries, kashering a staggering quantity of dishes and utensils, stocking the Chabad House library, and many other procedural arrangements. One of the more gripping and meaningful stories of their shlichus concerned their third trip to India. This was at a very difficult time for them, after one of their children *r"l* passed away during a complicated operation. "People asked me if I would be going back for another season or if our shlichus there had come to an end. To be perfectly honest, I struggled a great deal over this decision, and naturally I wrote to the Rebbe on the matter.

The Rebbe's most encouraging answer appears in Vol. 4, pg. 251:

...I look upon his involvement in many matters that my revered teacher and father-in-law, the Rebbe, placed upon his shoulders, and I am pleased to see that even now he continues in these fine activities, and he will surely increase additional efforts in them, and G-d will undoubtedly give him the necessary strengths for this, for G-d does not come with a grievance upon His creations.

It is further known that the health of the Jewish body depends



Rabbi Zohar David
by the mikva's immersion pit

upon Torah and mitzvos, the involvement in which not only does not damage health *ch"v*, it even strengthens the state of health of the person involved and the members of his household, *sh'yichyu*.

There is the well-known saying of our Rabbis, of blessed memory (Bava Kama 92b), "Though the wine belongs to the owner, the thanks [are given] to the butler", and the *baal ha'hilula*, the Tzemach Tzedek, explains that for those who do not have free choice and are nothing more than "the ax in the hand of the cutter", the concept of "thanks to the butler" has no relevance, and therefore, idol worship is also forbidden to them, since they are nothing more than "the ax in the hand of the cutter" – whereas the Jew, who has free choice, deserves the "thanks to the butler", because even if without [the owner's] intervention, he would also do the mitzvah (see at length in the seifer *Derech Mitzvosecha*, Mitzvas Mila, end of Chapter 3).

...and G-d Alm-ghty will bless him and his wife, *tichyeh*, with proper health and livelihood out of a sense of tranquility with much Yiddishe and chassidishe nachas



The progressing mikveh construction
near the Chabad House

from all their offspring, *sh'yichyu*.

"I read the words again and again, and I was beside myself with excitement. The Rebbe had blessed me with very instructive brachos, mentioning the great privilege that I had to be counted among his shluchim. He had also mentioned the words of the Tzemach Tzedek about the difference between the Jew and the idol worshiper who serves an intermediary.

"I showed this answer to Rabbi Yitzchak Arad, head of the 'Daat' yeshiva in Rechovot, and he gave me the push necessary to overcome all the difficulties and set out on my journey. He reinforced the point by telling me that I have already seen miracles in my life on more than one occasion, so what do I have to be concerned about? It was by no means easy to reassemble all the broken pieces, but encouraged by the Rebbe's answer, we packed our belongings and made our way to the city of our shlichus."

The tone of Rabbi David's voice became charged with emotion when he spoke about that trip en route to their shlichus. Clearly there was a different intensity than the previous occasions and those that followed. "During that season, I saw miracles and cases of Divine Providence

above and beyond all natural limitations, which showed me how vital my shlichus in the city really was. On just my second day back, as I was casually walking towards the local marketplace, I heard a young woman of our acquaintance screaming and crying. I calmed her down from her state of frenzy, and she eventually came to the Chabad House. It turned out that she had been taken to a local cult, and she was fearful that she might be harmed by the powers of impurity.

“She was positively hysterical, and she told us that after spending the High Holiday season with us, she had switched tracks and begun to learn yoga in a most serious and fundamental manner. Two weeks earlier, she felt that the guru who was teaching her idol worship was starting to control and direct her thoughts, essentially causing her to do things that she didn’t want to do. She cried incessantly and warned us that we too could be harmed by him, since we were trying to get her out of his control. Naturally, I explained to her that we are the Chosen People and we are in the exclusive control of G-d Himself. As a result, if we internalize this fact and remain firm in this belief, no one can harm us.

“She continued to tell me that she had been wandering around for days already with a feeling of despondency and gloom, and she had decided that day to pray to G-d that He should help her get away from this guru. She prayed and sobbed and prayed some more, and then suddenly she felt a need to go to the marketplace, where she met me. She added that she realized at that moment that everything would be properly resolved, and if there’s anyone who can save her from the powers of spiritual impurity, it must be one of the shluchim of the Rebbe. And so it was. She left that place of idol worship and got closer to her Jewish traditions.

“On that journey into shlichus,

instilled with supreme motivation from the Rebbe’s clear answer, I arrived in Rishikesh with the plates for printing a Tanya. On the previous occasions when I wanted to print the Tanya, I couldn’t find a printing press that was capable of doing the job. Several days after we arrived in the city, one of my local Indian acquaintances told me that he knows a modern print shop that can handle the assignment. He led me to a street where there were numerous printing presses, and he took me inside one of them. I was astonished to see an array of brand new highly sophisticated machines, and it was there that we printed the newest edition of the Tanya.

“While serving on my new shlichus, I felt that I had been imbued with greater strengths than ever before. Shortly before leaving, a young Israeli who would frequently give me a ride on his motorcycle mentioned that he had a non-Jewish girlfriend from Italy. I felt that he was waiting for me to tell him something. I lent him a seifer in English written by the mekubal, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, on the secrets of marriage. A couple of days later, he told me that they had read the seifer together, and had decided to break up. When he arrived back in Eretz Yisroel, I sent him to Rabbi Nechemia Schmerling, the Rebbe’s shliach in Kfar Yona, where he became stronger in his Torah observance and eventually built a proper Jewish home.

“These activities and many more have come in the merit of the Rebbe’s encouragement to harness renewed strengths and to go out on shlichus despite the great emotional difficulties.”

MAGICAL MOMENTS ON A SHABBOS NIGHT

As in all Chabad Houses throughout the Far East, the Shabbos meals that Chabad of Rishikesh hosts are among the

place’s most magical moments. Numerous backpackers of all types and backgrounds come in and sit together in an amazing display of unity, and each one relates a personal experience of Divine Providence, requests a niggun, or asks a question in Judaism that has been bothering them for some time. “The stories that come to our Shabbos table are simply marvelous and most inspiring,” said Rabbi David with much enthusiasm. “You encounter here the inner depth of a Jew, without the disguises or external appearances.

“One Shabbos, a young man got up and said that he had made a firm decision to keep Shabbos. No matter where he would be, he would not desecrate the holy day of rest. The first test was not long in coming. In the midst of a tour of the city of Bangalore, he met an Indian advertising agent who was very excited by his physical appearance, and asked him if he would be willing to pose in his ad campaign. The young man considered the offer, and then said he would accept on the condition that the agent gives him hotel accommodations for three days, from that day (Thursday) until Shabbos. Realizing what he meant, the agent looked at him with puzzlement and then told the young man that he was mistaken – today was Friday, not Thursday... G-d had seen the great effort that he was making to observe Shabbos, and thus He arranged for this Indian to correct his error. If he hadn’t met him, he might have unknowingly desecrated Shabbos...

“Such stories of Divine Providence are quite commonplace. There was once a young woman who stayed at the Chabad House for several days, even spending the Pesach holiday with us. She actually met us as we were hanging posters in the city streets, inviting backpackers to celebrate the Holiday of Freedom with us. She was

debating whether she should stay in town or continue on her journey. She mentioned her uncertainty to us, and we suggested that she write to the Rebbe.

“The Rebbe replied that she should continue getting closer to the world of Chabad. She was very excited by the answer and stayed with us. A few weeks later, she came to us for Shabbos and told us an incredible story. It turns out that after the Pesach holiday, she went out on a trek through the nearby mountain ranges together with a local Indian guide, who promised to direct her through the winding roads. She placed her confidence in him, but was soon betrayed. She quickly realized that he planned to abduct her! When he understood that she was trying to escape him, he blocked her way and all her cries were useless. She then closed her eyes and began to scream ‘*Shma Yisroel*’ from the depths of her heart. When she opened her eyes, he was no longer there...”

PUBLICIZING MOSHIACH

In Rishikesh, they neither hesitate nor waver before publicizing Moshiach. In a city where hundreds of courses in all types of idol worship take place on a daily basis, the shluchim must provide the eternal Jewish truth to a large number of people. “We speak about the Redemption, Moshiach, the fact that the Rebbe is Melech HaMoshiach, and the longing and anticipation for his imminent revelation. In many places throughout the city, there hang pictures of the Rebbe over the words ‘Melech HaMoshiach’. Writing to the Rebbe via Igros Kodesh is one of the most regular phenomena in the Chabad House. Dozens of backpackers write every day about their plans, their uncertainties, and their choices in life. They ask the Rebbe for his advice and receive astounding replies.

AND I SHALL SWEETEN SONGS FOR YOU



Rabbi David has recently closed another circle and put out the season’s new disc, entitled “Shamayim”, a selection of his creative works which brings his musical ability into tangible expression. “This disc was directly influenced by the process that brought me to the teachings of chassidus and my involvement in shlichus. The selection is comprised of songs that I wrote and new melodies composed to texts derived

from Torah sources – all in a pleasant arrangement of original and inherently Jewish music. The disc was produced by Nadav Becher, with considerable assistance provided by my brother, the shliach R’ Noam David.”



“The stories are endless. One year, a Jewish couple came and told us that a close friend of theirs had recently been feeling sharp pains in his heart. The local doctors recommended an injection, but he was very apprehensive. I suggested that they write to the Rebbe and ask for his bracha, which they did. I opened the seifer and began to read an answer that appeared to discuss an unrelated matter. The Rebbe’s letter was sent to a couple that wanted to get married, but without the foundation of commitment to Torah. The Rebbe wrote that the woman must speak with her future husband and decide that their home must be established in accordance with Jewish law, based on the observance of kashrus, family purity,

and Shabbos. The woman heard this and was utterly speechless.

“It turns out that she came from a very traditional home, and her family included descendants of great tzaddikim. Her companion was a Jew of Russian origin, very far from matters of Jewish tradition, and they had recently discussed the possibility of getting married. She gave him a look and said, ‘You see, if you want to marry me, you have to accept upon yourself the fulfillment of these three mitzvos.’ Even he was amazed by this clear answer.

“Every day, we meet backpackers who are privileged to receive answers from the Rebbe that are so incredibly precise, they turn these people inside out.

“Once there was a religious tourist who was ‘upset’ with G-d. He grew up in an observant home, knew how to learn, and knew what Torah and mitzvos are. Yet, his views on his religion had changed, and he chose to follow a different course. He merited to receive answers from the Rebbe that were so clear that he would tell me every time, ‘Just know that the Rebbe knows me quite well.’ During the time that he spent with us, a young woman arrived who participated in all the activities, however, she steadfastly refused to



Young people learning and gaining spiritual strength in the Chabad House

write to the Rebbe. The day before Rosh Hashanah, I learned that they were traveling to Dharamsala. I told them that I had heard that there is no one in Almora to lead the Rosh Hashanah services there, and I proposed that he ‘pick up the gauntlet’ and accept the challenge of organizing the holiday, since he knows the order of all the relevant mitzvos and customs.

“As I thought about what I had just told him, I said to myself: ‘Who am I to decide whether he can accept such a burden.’ I suggested that he write to the Rebbe, but he stubbornly said that the woman should be the one to compose the letter. Thus, for the very first time, she wrote to the Rebbe, mentioning the proposal that I had made to them. Even I was stunned by the answer they received. The Rebbe wrote a letter to a Jewish couple who wanted to lead Jewish activities in their place of residence. Gently but firmly, the Rebbe said that such a venture could cause considerable damage, because they still don’t observe Torah and mitzvos in their own personal lives. The Rebbe added that when other Jews see that they don’t conduct themselves in accordance with these activities, this can create a tremendous *chillul Hashem*...

“I asked him if he was planning on wearing a yarmulke during the activities. When he replied in the negative, I explained to him that the Rebbe prefers that under such circumstances, he should not represent Judaism.

“We receive guidance from the Rebbe at the Chabad House every step of the way. I remember another story about a young man of Yemenite origin who actively joined our activities, studying Torah and davening with us, but he had a hard time with the whole subject of Moshiach. Once he wanted a bracha to find a buyer for his motorcycle, and we suggested that he write to the Rebbe. One of the bachurim, Yoel Rosen, helped him compose the letter, and he received an answer from the Rebbe on the subject of mikveh.

“I explained to him that the Rebbe always answers, and he apparently has to strengthen his observance of immersing in a mikveh, and if he is resolute about it, only good will come as a result. He took my suggestion seriously, and he joined us every morning in going to the mikveh. On the third day after receiving the answer, we were a bit too busy, but he would not break his commitment and he went on his own. That’s how

important he considered the Rebbe’s answer. That same day, by Divine Providence, a group of tourists came into the Chabad House, among them a young man who had never put on t’fillin before in his life, and we made a belated ‘bar-mitzvah’ celebration with them. Before they left, they asked if we knew of anyone selling a motorcycle?”

*

As elsewhere in India, the shlichus in Rishikesh operates according to the tourist season. There are certain months when there are no tourists whatsoever, and the shluchim spend this time in Eretz Yisroel recharging their batteries. So it is now, just before another journey back to the city of his shlichus.

In Rishikesh, they don’t sit on their laurels, and as this article goes to print, the construction of the Chabad mikveh is reaching its conclusion. Last Yud-Alef Nissan, after numerous delays and obstacles, the bulldozer arrived to dig the immersion pit. Half a year later, on Chai Elul, after mikveh expert Rabbi Lerner visited the location and made the necessary measurements and computations, the pit was filled with rainwater. Despite the incomplete state of the mikva’s external appearance, several tourists were already given the privilege of immersing in its spiritually pure waters. “On Sunday, someone asked if he could immerse in the mikveh, but there was still no rainwater. Just a few minutes later, rain suddenly began to fall in great quantity, and he was able to go to the mikveh...”

And so it goes in Rishikesh. The capital of impurity and idol worship has become a destination for Jewish travelers to immerse in the true and pure wellsprings of Torah and Chassidus, coming face to face with their Father in heaven and the nasi ha’dor, the Rebbe Melech HaMoshiach who leads the way.

CARVED IN STONE

By Dr. Aryeh Gotfryd, PhD

In Parshas Ki Sisa, the luchos are praised. Here we take a closer look and find that what's written into the sapphire can be read out of asteroids and atoms as well.

In order to truly understand something's essence or composition, scientists research the material sources and causes. But through Torah, one can discern the spiritual source, and also know the purpose of this object's creation.

--The Rebbe, Mind Over Matter, p.171.

When mass media pioneer, Marshall McLuhan, coined the phrase "The medium is the message," he probably wasn't thinking about Torah.

Nonetheless, by shifting our focus from *what* we are trying to say to *what means* we are using to say it, he opened us up to a deeper appreciation of our own tradition.

Take for example, the delivery of the most powerful and transformational message ever to have graced the planet: The Ten Commandments. Consummate educator that He is, the One Above composed a multi-media extravaganza that puts Cecile B. DeMille's cheap knock-off to shame.

Aside from all the special effects

(lightning, thunder, earth tremors and shofar blasts), the Torah message itself arrived through a diversity of media: The Voice, the Scroll, and the Stone. Of the three, there's a greater sense of stability and permanence when the message is "carved in stone," especially in a beautiful gemstone, such as sapphire.

Our sages tell us that sapphire's special statement is its color, reminiscent of the sky and the heavenly throne whence G-d's Will emerges. But perhaps there's even more to it than that.

Sapphire may be very hard but it is also brittle, making it a good choice if you need to smash a couple of tablets in a hurry. Also, gemologists tell us that sapphire (technically an aluminum oxide called corundum), has a specific gravity of about 4.0, which means it is exactly four times heavier than water. The hidden poetry of this geological detail lies in the fact that Torah, which is compared to water, comes in four dimensions called the

PaRDeS, an acronym of *p'shat*, *remez*, *drush* and *sod*, referring to straightforward, allegoric, homiletic, and mystic meanings. The four-fold waters of Torah's soul permeates a water-colored rock with a quadruple density to suit.

Peering deeper into the soul of sapphire, there's another surprise - its crystalline structure on close inspection projects a familiar geometric image to the eye - a Star of David, that ancient emblem of the very people who stood at Sinai to receive an eternal message carved into their souls as well as the rock.

There's much speculation about the Magen David - Some claim it's not really Jewish in origin, citing the fact that Talmudic sources don't mention it and that an eastern religion has used it for thousands of years. On the other hand, kabbala sources refer to it (the six lower *s'firos* with the implicit center of *malchus*), and even the Lubavitcher Rebbe's kiddush cup is decorated with the symbol that most people simply refer to as "The Jewish Star."

As the Days of Moshiach unfold before us, one of the "signs of the times" is that it is also "a time of the signs."

Last Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av (July 23, 2009), the Star of David made a surprise appearance during an unusually long, total solar eclipse visible over much of Asia. One can see it about 2'20" into the video documentary of the event on the BBC news website. An eclipse of this length is not expected again until June 13, 2132.

Another celestial manifestation of the holy hexagram seems to have occurred more recently. On the 10th of Shvat 5770 (January 25, 2010), NASA's Hubble Space Telescope photographed glowing debris from a high-speed asteroid collision, shooting through space in a formation resembling a Star of David, as reported by a NASA

investigator by the name of ... I'm not kidding here... David Jewitt.

Ray Villard, a contributing writer to Discovery News said, "I've seen thousands of astronomical images over my career, but this is one of the few absolute jaw-droppers... Whatever it is, nothing quite like it has ever before been seen in the heavens."

It may not have been seen, but it sounds remarkably familiar to students of Torah, nonetheless. The first mention of a Jewish shooting star is in the Chumash itself, in Parshas Balak, "*Darach kochav miYakov* - a star shall travel forth from Jacob." One interpretation is that this refers to Moshiach. A second interpretation is that it refers to every Jew. The Lubavitcher Rebbe combines these views and tells us that every Jew has a spark of Moshiach in his soul.

What a remarkable nexus of coincidences that someone ironically named David Jewitt discovers a six-pointed Jewish Star, aka Star of David, shooting through the sky on none other than Yud Shvat, the 60th anniversary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's ascent to leadership of

Chabad and world Jewry, and that he should be the one to unite the concept of Moshiach with every Jew regarding a verse about a Jewish shooting star.

Of course, some will say "Aha!" but others will say "Bah!" i.e., that it's just some meaningless coincidence. But even if you are cold to confluence of countless details like this, you could still remember this: That when the waters in the heavens freeze, they fall as snow, and as separate as each flake is, it still typically falls in the shape of, yes, you guessed it, a Jewish Star, as you can see from this photo courtesy of the California Institute of Technology.

Now for those who think that looking for Jewish Stars in everything is a little too much, there are those who take it further than most of us could imagine: For what could be more inclusive, more universal, more astoundingly monumental than to discover that the ultimate quest of all science, the search for the Theory of Everything, would culminate in a geometric model that features as its core none other than that self-same star shape.

That's exactly what physicist Garrett Lisi has stumbled across with his E8 Theory, reported widely in science media as being the best concept yet for uniting all the forces of nature in one geometric solution. Imagine - millions of people reading about and watching how the one organizing principle of the entire cosmos, accounting for the most miniscule to the most grandiose of phenomena, is represented by a singular image that has represented Ultimate Unity since time immemorial.

It's time that the time of the signs resigned, giving way to the time when the medium and the message will be One, with the coming of Moshiach NOW!

Dr. Aryeh (Arnie) Gotfryd, PhD is a chassid, environmental scientist, author and educator living near Toronto, Canada. To contact, read more or to book him for a talk, contact him at 416-658-9868 or info@arniegotfryd.com.

Do you have any unpublished letters from the Rebbe on the subjects of Science, Technology or Medicine? Dr. Gotfryd is offering cash for the privilege of publishing them.

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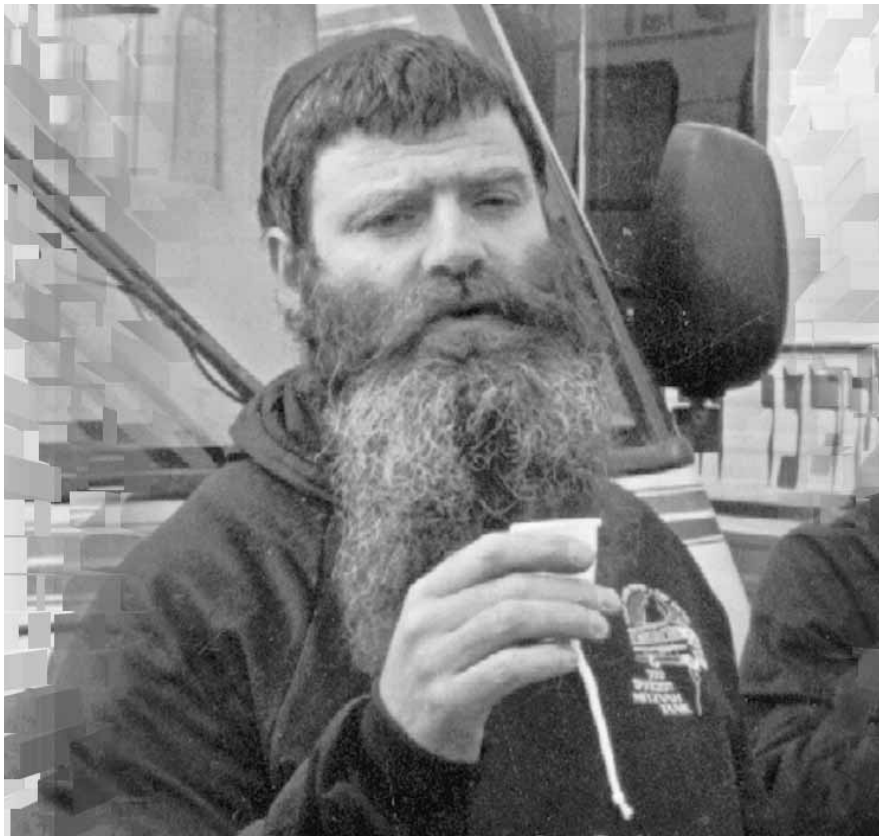
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COMBAT LEADER

By Menachem Ziegelboim

*From a children's home on a kibbutz to hair-raising adventures in the elite special forces to commander of the Mitzva Tanks, R' Shmaryah Harel candidly describes his challenges, successes and failures as he was drawn into Judaism and Chabad. * Part 1 of 2*



I was born on kibbutz Na'an near Rechovot, a kibbutz of the communist movement. My parents were part of a training program and planned on starting a new kibbutz in the Negev. The Zionist pioneering spirit of the 50's was at its height. The men went to establish the kibbutz while the women and children remained in Na'an. It was a year later, with the end of the ground laying work, that the families settled on the new kibbutz called Kisufim.

I spent my childhood at the children's home on the kibbutz. We kids spent most of our time there and had permission to spend only three hours with our parents before returning to the children's home to sleep. The situation was such that for months and years our parents didn't really know what was going on with us. I didn't feel that it interested my parents at all. We spent from 4:00-7:00 with our parents and that was that.

At the kibbutz there was no religion. Worse, the kibbutz was anti-religious. The atmosphere on the kibbutz in those days was such that you couldn't even consider that there is a Creator of the world.

Today the kibbutz is much more open and is more receptive to religious matters, although if someone wanted to build a shul there, they would not allow it. An idea like that would be shot down even before it got to public discussion or up for a vote among the kibbutz members.

What about Yom Kippur?

The concept of Yom Kippur did not exist. The only holidays they celebrated were those with an agricultural theme.

There was a man on kibbutz Beit HaShita by the name of Aryeh Ben-Gurion, who took it upon himself to rescript the holidays, bringing out the agricultural angle, and that is what they celebrated at the kibbutzim.

So we celebrated Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, for they are connected to the harvest, but since Yom Kippur has no agricultural connection, it had nothing to do with us.

So you had no Yom Kippur throughout your childhood and young adulthood?

That's right. I remember that one year, the literature teacher in the school I attended at kibbutz Mishmar HaNegev tried to convey the idea that Yom Kippur is a day of spiritual accounting and you are supposed to think about what you did right and wrong. At our kibbutz there was nothing like that, and absolutely no indication that it was a special day.

What was the ideology of the kibbutz?

Communism. The kibbutzim were founded on the communist ideal, that we all have to be equal and nobody can exploit another.

Do you remember any incidents from that era?

There were a couple of times in my childhood where it was only by an open miracle that I emerged alive.

The first time was when I was less than a year old. We were living at kibbutz Na'an at the time, and polio was rampant. I caught it and my legs were paralyzed. The disease is highly contagious so patients were put in isolation and nobody could go near, including the parents. Only the medical personnel could approach.

I was put in quarantine and my parents came once a day to see me through the window. At a certain point, the doctors wanted to transfer me to a department where there were other polio victims and where the treatment and care were on a lower standard. One of my caregivers vehemently opposed my transfer and insisted I remain where I was. She treated me very devotedly. After about two weeks,



During Sayeret training in the South



Training in the snow on the Chermom

when my parents came to see me, they saw to their surprise that I was able to slowly stand up. The polio had disappeared and left me unharmed, which is unusual in an illness where paralysis is usually for life.

Today, when I think about this, I realize that it was Hashem Who got me out of there. The Rebbe assigned me a mission in life, so I had to recover.

Another time that my life was saved was when I was 17. It was after the Six Day War and a friend and I were walking around the fields that surrounded the kibbutz. There

were many pits of deep water in the area that were dug long ago.

One day, a rumor went around that one of these pits had ammunition taken from the Gaza Strip in it. My friend and I decided to check it out. In the storage room of the Youth Movement we found a long rope that was used for climbing and we went looking for the ammunition. We took the kibbutz tractor to help us.

We got to the pit which was rumored to be full of ammunition. We tied the rope to a wheel of the tractor and threw the rope in. Later on we realized that the rope was

extended to its full 50 meters, making it harder to use to climb down inside the pit. Usually one would get down by winding the rope around his leg and making a kind of step but when the weight of the rope is heavy, it's hard to do that.

I began descending the rope and realized that I could descend just using my hands without my feet, something which is hard even for someone who is physically strong.

After I descended four or five meters, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I looked down and became frightened. The pit consisted of an endless number of round sections that became increasingly narrow. I thought – I can get down, but how will I get back up? I wanted to leave. I looked upward and wondered whether I could possibly have the strength to climb back up the five meters to the top.

I had almost made it to the top when I felt my strength giving out. I called to my waiting friend to help me but the pit trapped the sound and he didn't hear me. I thought it was all over for me. I was suspended in the air above an abyss dozens of meters deep.

At the last minute, when I feared I could hold on no longer, my friend glanced into the pit and noticed that I was close to the top and pulled me out.

Today, when I think about it, I know it was a miracle. Human strength could not have gotten me out of there.

Every so often I think about it and ponder the fact that our existence in this world is not a given. It's all directed from Above. People call these incidents chance happenings. When I came to Chabad and began thinking about these incidents that happened to me, I understood that the Rebbe extricated me because he had an assignment for me. He sends every neshama to its place. Some of my

friends from the children's home are still paralyzed by polio. I could have been among them, but the Rebbe got me out of there for a reason.

Tell us about your service in the army.

I was drafted at age 18 and assigned to serve in the elite, top secret, Sayeret MaTKaL scouts unit. I had not planned on entering that unit, but was assigned there because I had done very well on the physical and psychological tests. Many kibbutznikim served in elite units because kibbutz society was very demanding.

I was drafted in Av 5728/1968. When we had concluded basic training, the real hard part began. We started an extremely difficult training process which included all the physical and technical skills we had to master: endurance, navigation, etc. Sometimes we got an order to march for a few nights in a row. We had to walk dozens of kilometers in the dark in desert terrain where walking is difficult, while lugging a heavy backpack, full weapons belt and other burdensome equipment. We had to learn the entire route from maps ahead of time because while walking we could not turn on a light to study a map.

We learned how to work at night, even in the pitch darkness. It was interesting seeing the world at a time when everyone is sleeping.

During training they gave us various strange assignments for training purposes, most of which I cannot tell you. These missions would prepare us to be able to carry out operations behind enemy lines.

I was assigned to the command of Bibi Netanyahu. He was a good and very thorough commander. For a period of time I also served under his brother Yoni (who was killed in Entebbe).

After an extremely difficult training period, we began going on real operations behind enemy lines.

All the operations I participated in are still restricted and I can't talk about them.

Of course, these operations were extremely dangerous. The terrain was often mountainous and rocky and difficult to get through, we had to brave pouring rain or deep snow, and it was all deep inside enemy territory. On some of our operations, we passed only a few dozen meters from enemy positions. It was extremely dangerous and I wasn't always aware of how much so until afterwards.

During the Yom Kippur War I fought, at first, on the southern front against Egypt. In the operations that I participated in, we served primarily as ground support to the armored forces and others. Later on we went up to the Golan Heights, where we carried out more quiet and dangerous operations behind enemy lines.

Did you ever ask yourself, during battle, what am I doing here?

Definitely. When you are in difficult situations, in danger, everyone grapples with this question. I asked this question mainly during the Yom Kippur War when I heard about a friend who fell, a neighbor who was killed. When you are in the midst of battle there is no time for thoughts like these because you are doing what has to be done. But during the breaks in the action it's hard. You sometimes feel like the ring is tightening around you, that your end is approaching and it's only a matter of time. At times like that, you make a cheshbon ha'nefesh. You assess your actions and accomplishments, and wonder what kind of a legacy you will be leaving behind.

Perhaps the whole mythos of the Sayeret MaTKaL is overblown?

In the Sayeret you do serious and complicated operations. That



Sayeret graduates annual reunion, in the center is Binyamin Netanyahu

doesn't mean that you have to carry yourself like in the movies, but the bottom line is that the people in Sayeret do the most difficult things.

I served in the most elite unit in the IDF for four years, with half a year in the Yom Kippur War. At the end of the war I was appointed as leader in the Erez unit. This unit was formed after the Chermom was captured, and would be prepared for combat under snowy conditions.

During their training exercises we learned, among other things, how to live and survive in snow, how to dig snow caves and to sleep in them.

The one in charge of the unit was a guy named Dovid Metek from kibbutz Sasa. We're still friends. They appointed me as madrich because I had prior experience in the part of the Chermom that was ours beforehand, and because of the fact that I had operated a lot even in areas that were not yet conquered.

Looking back at your military experience, what lessons do you see in avodas Hashem?

I'll tell you two stories from which you can learn a lesson in avodas Hashem. When I served in the Chermom there was once a major snowstorm. Our assignment was to get to one of the positions on the mountain, a post called Pitulim because of the winding and dangerous road that led to it. It was a position we had captured from the Syrians and it was manned by Israeli soldiers. The storm was so bad that visibility was zero. You couldn't see your own hand if you held it in front of your face. It is these kinds of blizzard conditions that cause what is known as snow blindness. Navigating under these conditions is complicated and dangerous but when you have an assignment, you have to carry it out.

There were some senior officers with me who came to see how the

unit operated and I had to lead them. Before we left I studied the course on the map and then we set out.

It's very hard to describe moving through the snow under these conditions. It's like nothing we know. Usually, when you go somewhere, there are landmarks – a rock here and a building there – but in the snow, especially in a snowstorm, there are no landmarks and everything looks the same.

In addition, our hike was through a tough mountain pass overlooking a deep abyss.

The trip was supposed to take two to three hours. After we had been walking for quite some time, panic began to set in. I was no longer certain we were heading in the right direction. I couldn't see a thing, just snow. I doubted myself. The frequent questioning of the officers accompanying me whether I was sure we were heading in the

right direction didn't do much for my confidence. I realized that they were also scared because the security danger in the slightest error was great. Perhaps we had mistakenly ended up in Syria.

As I was trained, I was guided by two things, a compass and a map. I had plenty of navigating experience and I knew that when you aren't certain, a person is naturally inclined to think the map is wrong. As absurd as it sounds, it always happens.

From past experience I knew that you must rely 100% on the map and the compass but in this case, a little doubt crept into my heart. I didn't know whether to cave in to the pressure and follow the suggestions of my escorts, or to continue to stick with the map. I knew that if I veered even slightly from the path, I would have lost direction and be unable to find my way back to my original route. And then I would have no idea where I was.

"I'm following the compass and map," I informed the officers. "If you want to rely on yourselves and change direction, go ahead."

Despite my confident stance I was afraid that maybe they were right. After all, I was only a lieutenant and my escorts were of higher rank. It was a very tough situation to be in.

Suddenly, all my doubts were dispelled; there we were - we had arrived at the post.

If we think about the period we are in, it can be compared to a snowstorm in which we are walking blindly; some people say to go one way while others say to go another way. There are many possible directions and all the paths may be right from a logical standpoint, so "little you" has no way to know which way to go. The only solution is to follow the compass, i.e. the sichos of the Rebbe, to understand what the Rebbe said in their simple sense and not to try forging our own direction. If we rely on our map and our compass, we will know that we are on the right path.

I will tell you another story that happened during a covert operation we did in Syria. One harsh winter night, in a rain storm and unusual winds, we were charged to enter Syria to carry out an operation. The "corridor" of our little invasion was 800 meters, meaning that on either side of us, at a distance of 400 meters, there were Syrian posts. We had to be extremely careful not to stray from the middle of the road.

We crossed the border and walked single file, but the darkness was so complete that we could not see one another. The darkness is blacker in the Golan Heights than elsewhere, because the rocks are

black basalt rather than lighter earth which increases visibility somewhat. You could not see who was in front of you or behind you.

One of the big dangers in a situation like this is that it only takes one person veering off the path, thinking he is following behind another soldier, for everybody behind to end up off-course, a situation which can end tragically. In enemy territory it is vital that you don't get lost, even by a few meters.

We decided that each of us would hold onto the belt of the guy in front of him and that is how we continued walking through the pouring rain. Sudden lightening lit up the area and for a second or two I was able to see the long line of soldiers walking as a unit, each holding on to the other. It was an unusual and beautiful sight and I only prayed that none of the Syrians saw it too.

There's a lesson in this too: When you are in darkness, you have to hold onto one another and that is how you don't get lost. If someone decides that he knows better and he will go it alone, he will falter from his course.

Those are two incidents that happened during my time in the Sayeret, from which I derived lessons in avodas Hashem.

[To be continued be"H]

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MOSHIACH: WHAT WE BELIEVE



Rabbi Gershon Avtzon, Rosh Yeshiva in Cincinnati

As the saying goes, “75% of known facts are either not known or not facts.” This is especially true regarding belief in Moshiach and Geula, where there are many preconceived notions and questions that remain unasked – and unanswered.

PART 19 OF 20

In our previous article, we discussed the excitement that a Jew should have over the imminent arrival of Moshiach. We were left with the obvious question:

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THE ARRIVAL OF MOSHIACH IS IMMINENT?

It seems pretty obvious that as the generations progress, the level of devotion to Hashem and passion to do His will is diminishing. We are less “involved” in Judaism and more exposed to the destructive temptations of this physical world than the previous generations. As time goes on, we

become more accustomed to life in exile than the previous generation, and resign ourselves that exile is our fate. The memories of the Beis HaMikdash in all its glory seem increasingly vague and little more than wishful thinking. If Moshiach did not come in earlier generations, why would he come now?

But the Lubavitcher Rebbe - the Jewish leader of this generation - has assured us that Moshiach is coming in our days, and not just as a promise, but as a prophecy! These are his words (Shoftim 5751) “One must make known to all members of the generation that we have merited that G-d has

chosen a person endowed with free choice, who is incomparably higher than the members of his generation, to be ‘your judge’, ‘your counselor,’ and the prophet of the generation.

“This chosen leader will provide the instructions and advice relevant to the service of all Jews and all people of the generation, in all matters of Torah and Mitzvos, and daily conduct in the matter of ‘in all your ways, know Him’ and ‘all your deeds should be for the sake of heaven.’ His counsel has extended to the essential prophecy - **not just as a sage or judge, but as a prophet** - of ‘immediate redemption’ and ‘Behold he - Moshiach - comes!’”

There is a tremendous difference between a *prophecy* about the arrival of Moshiach and a statement from a holy man. Throughout the generations, many Tzaddikim have told us - based on different verses - that certain years are auspicious times for Moshiach. These dates - known as “Kitzin” - were indeed noteworthy, whether in the dissemination of Kabbala and Chassidus or terrible pogroms and destruction of Jewish

communities.

The Alter Rebbe explains in Maamarim HaK'tzarim, page 354-355, that though those sages saw "on high" that these were special dates, when the way they were actually realized in this physical world was different. When things are said as a prophecy, however, they must occur as the prophet said. A prophet is stating the true current reality of this physical world. (For an in-depth discussion on this, see Seifer HAKETZ from Rabbi Shneur Z. Hertzel.)

Where do we see that this world is ready for Moshiach?

1) Judaism is accessible to every Jew. In past generations, there were many obstacles for a Jew to learn Torah. The books were all in Hebrew and many people did not have access to them. In addition, there were countries that had rules against the learning of Torah. Today, not only are there no countries with such rules, there are Rabbis living in almost every country and city that speak and can teach in the native tongue. Books of Torah are available in all languages, including Braille, and with the Internet, there is literally no limit of how much Torah you can access instantly.

2) The thirst for Judaism and Jewish mysticism is on an all-time high. The "T'shuva" movement is booming, and people are being inspired to search deeper into themselves. The desire and ability to visit and settle in Eretz Yisroel - with Aliyah and "Birthright - Israel" etc. - is stronger than ever.

3) The wars being fought today are "wars of peace." The focus in this generation is Humanitarian-Aid, and the goal is to educate rather than control. The war to eradicate terror and evil is not a war to conquer other countries, rather to liberate them from terrorist oppressors. The emphasis

on agricultural, rather than military, development is a foretaste of the Biblical prophecy (Isaiah 2:4), "They shall beat their swords into plowshares."

PART 20 OF 20

After all the above, we are left with the main question:

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HASTEN THE REVELATION OF MOSHIACH?

Every Mitzvah we do and every bit of Torah that we learn brings G-dliness into the world and hastens the coming of Moshiach. For example, the mitzvah of Tz'daka is singled out in the Talmud (Baba Basra 12a) as one of the strongest conduits to hasten the Geula.

However, there is a "Direct Path" to Moshiach. Allow me to share it with you through a story. The lesson within should be readily apparent.

Rabbi Laibel Cohen had three sons. Menachem, his oldest son, was a Rav in Eretz Yisroel. Levi Yitzchak was a farmer and Shmuel was a businessman. One Shabbos, all three sons were visiting their father, and they passed a beautiful new fruit tree.

Menachem - the Rav - wondered: "Is this tree Mechuyav in Shmita?"

Levi Yitzchak - the farmer - wondered: "What technique was used to get this tree to grow?"

Shmuel - the businessman - wondered: "How much money can be made from selling the fruits of this tree?"

* * *

The world is seen through the lens of our reality. Whatever we are involved in, we see that Inyan in everything. Even if the thing that we are looking at is remotely connected to the focus of our lives, our mind and heart will

automatically find that association.

In the Sichos following Chaf-Ches Nissan - the day the Rebbe gave the us (the Chassidim) the responsibility of bringing Moshiach - the Rebbe demanded that we begin to look at the world through the lens of the Geula. He even gave us examples: When we see the fall of the communist Iron curtain and the mass exodus of the Russian Yidden to Eretz Yisroel, we have to see Kibbutz Goliyos (VaYakhel 5752). When we see the UN decide to abolish nuclear weapons and focus on agriculture and education, we should see the fulfillment of the Nevua of "V'chitzu Charvosam Li'itim" (Mishpatim 5752). When we see the miracles of the Gulf War, it should remind us of the Yalkut Shimoni which prophesied a special war before Yemos HaMoshiach.

Where and how do we pick up the Rebbe's lenses? How can we acquire this perspective? Through learning IN DEPTH about Geula and Moshiach, especially the way they are explained in the Rebbe's sichos (Tazria-Metzora 5751)! When we become engrossed in the world of Moshiach, we begin to see the Moshiach that is in everything. Kehos is printing a set of S'farim (Yalkut Moshiach Al HaTorah) that connects every pasuk in Chumash to Moshiach! Being that the Torah is the blueprint of creation, there must be Moshiach in everything that was created. We must "open our eyes" to this special world. Go to your local eye-doctor (bookshelf) and get your lenses prescription (sicha) today!

Now we are left with but one final but essential question:

AD MOSAI?!!

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WHAT A LITTLE SHIUR CAN DO

By Rabbi Yaakov Shmuelewitz
Shliach, Beit Shaan

When a shliach learns even a short Mishna or Chassidic thought with someone, it can have far-reaching effects. Many shluchim can tell you about a person whose commitment to full observance started from a brief shiur or a Chassidic saying which changed his life.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING TO DANNY

Rabbi Boaz Kali, shliach in Haifa, is friendly with a wealthy man who lives in one of the small settlements near Haifa. Whenever R' Kali meets with him, he devotes a few minutes to learning the weekly D'var Malchus with him. It's his opportunity to share some stories and speak to his friend about the Rebbe's prophecy of the Geula, Chabad customs, etc.

At a siyum of the Rambam that took place in Teveria, R' Kali met the shliach who works in that little yishuv near Haifa. The young shliach told R' Kali, "You don't know what's happening to Danny. You can't imagine what an effect your little shiurim with him, have. These shiurim are changing him and

his entire family. You have to see how he explains the concept of 'do all that you can' to his young daughter – it sounds like a mashpia talking! He absorbed not only the meaning but the atmosphere, the feeling with which it was said."

SAVING A LIFE AT THE UNITED NATIONS

R' Kali told me about an interesting visit he made at the United Nations. R' Kali is very involved in spreading knowledge of the Seven Noachide Laws. He has (Arab) friends in Abu Gush, Om-el-Pacham, lower Haifa and at the United Nations too.

There is an enormous visitor's center at the United Nations and every day thousands of visitors pass through. R' Kali went there

numerous times to meet with ambassadors of several countries for the purpose of publicizing the Seven Noachide Laws.

One day R' Kali was walking there among the visitors when he saw someone nodding a greeting with a big smile on his face. He asked him where he was from and the man introduced himself as a human rights activist in some state of the US. R' Kali told him about the Seven Noachide Laws and that we Jews try to spread this message to the world.

"If you're telling me about Jews, then I'll tell you that I am half Jewish."

"Which half?" asked R' Kali.

"My father isn't Jewish and my mother is. My grandmother was Jewish, too, and it happens that I have a Jewish wife."

"So maybe you'd like to put on t'fillin?"

"What are t'fillin?" asked the man. He couldn't resist R' Kali and they went off to the side, where the man rolled up his sleeve and was saved from the category of "a skull that did not have t'fillin."

A SHIUR AT A MILITARY TRAINING EXERCISE

Rabbi Mendy Ofen has been working for years now with IDF soldiers and commanders. He visits IDF camps and bases and has forged close relationships with all the high commanders of the different military branches. Sometimes, his work makes it into the headlines when some leftist, anti-religious journalist gets annoyed about a Chabad Chassid being invited to lecture to thousands of soldiers in the presence of their parents and relatives and is warmly thanked and has his hand shaken by all the senior commanders.

Nearly every day, R' Ofen has something to do at one military base or another in the north or south of



Rabbi Mendy Ofen (right) with IDF commander

the country (I know this because sometimes he passes through Beit Shaan with his helpers and our community gets to enjoy a spontaneous farbrengen with stories from the field). He has a certain charisma, which does wonders in his friendships with all the generals and commanders. They are happy to cooperate with him and any of his projects.

R' Ofen told me about one official with whom he is in constant contact. Whenever he meets with R' Ofen, he asks to hear an idea from the Rebbe. It makes no difference whether the meeting takes place in the corridors of the "Kirya" (Israeli equivalent of the Pentagon) or during a training exercise. R' Ofen always has to be prepared with a d'var Torah.

Lately, they decided that whenever they meet, R' Ofen will relate a question that appears in the Rebbe's sichos and the officer will try to think of an answer by their next encounter. Likewise, the officer

Whenever he meets with R' Ofen, he asks to hear an idea from the Rebbe. It makes no difference whether the meeting take place in the corridors of the "Kirya" (Israeli equivalent of the Pentagon) or during a training exercise. R' Ofen always has to be prepared with a d'var Torah.

asks the rabbi a question in halacha or other topic and the rabbi has to respond as soon as possible.

These short "shiurim" are greatly mekarev the officer to mitzvos and Chassidus and enables R' Ofen to enter all the bases for his work with the soldiers.

MIVTZA T'FILLIN IN COMFORT

"People are looking for meaning," say R' Ofen. "We put a lot of work into mivtzaim, putting

t'fillin on with people, menorah lightings, mishloach manos, dancing and singing, but the thing that changes a Jew's consciousness is divrei Torah and ideas of Chassidus."

Every Friday, R' Ofen and two bachurim visit the Rama base north of Yerushalayim. "We show up with boxes of frozen treats and some pairs of t'fillin. We go to the center of the base and all the soldiers know already that it's worth showing up. There are comfortable chairs and every soldier gets ices and sits down

to talk.” R’ Ofen directs the conversation towards a Chassidic concept, whether it be “hashgacha pratis,” “emuna,” or ideas from Tanya. “The soldiers lap it up,” he says.

“Last week, we spoke about the idea of Hashem’s word forever remaining in the heavens and the explanation for this given in Shaar Ha’Yichud V’Ha’Emuna, that at every moment Hashem sustains the world anew. The soldiers were fascinated by this and one got up and said, ‘Now I’m interested in putting on t’fillin.’”

THANKS TO A SICHA

In Beit Shaan there is a rabbi who is known throughout the city for his acts of chesed and his soup kitchen, as well as a shul and kollel where dozens of men learn Torah during the day and then give shiurim throughout the city. Until a few years ago, this rabbi worked at one of the local businesses and then he suddenly began getting involved in promoting Torah and Judaism and established a k’hilla of Torah and chesed.

One day we met and he told me that he remembers the first shiur he heard from me. It was in shul, between mincha and maariv, and as he recalls, a new young Lubavitcher shliach got up and began saying divrei Torah. He even remembers the Mishna on which I based the Chassidic explanation from the Rebbe.

“At that moment,” he said, “I decided that if this young newcomer in town could have such a positive impact on the public, then so can I.”

THANKS TO ONE SHIUR IN “DERECH MITZVOSECHA”

Rabbi Michoel Reinitz, shliach in Rechovot, spent a Shabbos at Kaplan hospital when one of his children was born. In the maternity ward he met someone who was just starting the t’shuva process. The man was happy to have the rabbi guide him on how to spend a Shabbos in the hospital.

The friendship that began that night in the hospital solidified the following morning on the way to the mikva before Shacharis and at their joint Shabbos meal. It continues till this day. The man confided that although he looked religious, he still did not wear tzitzis. “It’s too warm and it bothers me.”

R’ Reinitz recalled a story that he had recently heard and he told it to the man. There was a French Jew who was not religious, who began taking an interest in Judaism with the help of various rabbis in Paris (not Lubavitch). He attended a yeshiva and committed to mitzvos except for one thing. He was loath to give up non-kosher French cuisine and a constant battle waged inside of him because of this.

One day, about a year or two after he began learning in yeshiva, he was walking down a street that had many restaurants. As he passed each restaurant and inhaled the luscious aromas wafting by from inside, it became increasingly difficult for him to withstand the test. By the time he had covered a few blocks he could no longer restrain himself and he walked in

and ate what they served.

He felt terrible about it afterwards and consulted with his mentor. The rav was horrified and strongly censured him, “How could you do that? Tell me why you did it!”

The young man became depressed and this started a spiritual deterioration. He left yeshiva and his observance. One day, he met a good friend and he told the friend how estranged he was from religion because of what happened. The friend advised him to try the Chabad yeshiva in Brunoy near Paris.

He went to the Chabad yeshiva and was immediately received for a talk with Rabbi Nissan Nemenov. He told the mashpia about his spiritual ups and downs and how it was all because of his desire for non-kosher food. R’ Nissan asked him to go the zal and bring him a volume of *Derech Mitzvosecha*. The man came back with the book and R’ Nemenov began reading the paragraph that explains how forbidden foods are spiritually contaminating. When it was presented in this light, he was able to accept it and he remained in yeshiva and became a Chassid.

This is what R’ Reinitz told the man in the hospital on their way to the mikva Shabbos morning. R’ Reinitz invited him to his house after Shabbos and they sat down and learned about the importance of tzitzis in *Derech Mitzvosecha*.

When they concluded, the man said he was happy to commit to wearing tzitzis. And he bought woolen tzitzis because “I want the best.”

**ADD IN ACTS
OF GOODNESS & KINDNESS
TO BRING MOSHIACH NOW!**

THE TRIP IS ON ME

By Nosson Avrohom

Translated By Michoel Leib Dobry

It was Shabbos B'Reishis and the joyous and festive farbrengen at the Heichal Levi Yitzchak shul in Tzfas' Kiryat Chabad was attended by hundreds of chassidim and "friends of Chabad." Many of those present used the opportunity to relate some of the powerful experiences from spending the month of Tishrei in "Beis Chayeinu". Numerous chassidic stories and emotions flowed like water from the lips of the official and the not-so-official speakers. The large farbrengen quickly turned into smaller farbrengens, where a chassid sat in every corner of the shul and told his listeners about the "peckel" he brought back with him from 770.

The speakers' statements, some more eloquent than others, were filled with much chassidic vitality. The farbrengen was a symbol of "to live and to enliven, to remind and to be remembered", but above all, to illuminate the hearts of those in attendance who didn't have the privilege this year of visiting the king and his court.

As one who took part in this farbrengen, I bring the story of Rabbi Dror Ben-Kish, a member of the Chabad community of Tzfas, who told how he merited to travel this year to the Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach, together

with his wife, his three children, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and sisters-in-law.

SUDDENLY JOINING IN THE DECISION

"When it had been decided that the entire family would be traveling to the Rebbe, my mother-in-law got a little bit nervous. Not the strongest of Chassidim, the idea that her three small grandchildren would be milling around hundreds and thousands of chassidim in the Crown Heights neighborhood frightened her. Nevertheless, we were firm in the decision we had made. Someone had told us that there is a sicha from the Rebbe which alludes to the fact that the Sukkos holiday contains 'aftereffects' from the Hakhel year, and we jumped at the opportunity as if we had found a vast treasure. 'If not now, when?', we concluded, and we ordered the airline tickets.

Realizing that the trip was a fait accompli, she decided to join us as well, and she bought tickets on that same flight for herself and her youngest son. This would be the first time that they had ever left the territorial boundaries of Eretz Yisroel. They had enough time to get their passports, their

visas to the United States, and even to 'infect' two sisters-in-law, not Torah observant at the present time, with their excitement. One of them was convinced rather quickly, and she immediately made an appointment with the American Consulate to get an entry visa, too.

"Seeing her sister's enthusiasm, the other sister-in-law also made an appointment to join her at the consulate to arrange her own visa. She had no plans to visit the U.S. in the immediate future, but who knows, maybe she will decide to fly to the land where anything is possible? In any case, she declared, she wouldn't have anything to do in 770, since 'everyone there is religious, and I'm not one of those; they're all interested in things and concepts that don't arouse my curiosity in the slightest.' Yet, when the two of them stood before the stern-looking clerk who asked them the reason that they wanted to travel to the United States, they replied simply: *The Lubavitcher Rebbe*.

"When do you want to travel?" he inquired. "This coming Sukkos," came the reply. The clerk entered the information into his computer, and then happily informed them that they would each receive a visa for ten years. "But you have to make the first trip this fall, just as you said," he added.

"At that moment, the other sister-in-law decided that she, too, would come to the Rebbe. When the Rebbe wants a Jew to spend time with him, he has a wide variety of ways to make that possible..."

MONEY COMES IN THE MOST UNUSUAL WAYS

"This is only a preface to the real story of our trip.

“After everyone got their passports and visas, we ordered tickets and scheduled our flight for Tuesday night, the day after Yom Kippur. The problem was that to our great regret, we still hadn’t managed to obtain the full amount to pay the travel agent for all the tickets. The long awaited time had arrived, yet we still stood empty-handed. Faith that everything would work out warred with doubts about just how things would develop.

“On Motzaei Yom Kippur, I went to the home of a chassid in our community who has a loan fund. I wanted to borrow two thousand dollars to cover the cost of the tickets and to pay rent on an apartment in Crown Heights for the whole family. His wife opened the door and told me that her husband was not home, as he had spent Yom Kippur in B’nei Brak. I told her that I would be flying the very next day to the Rebbe and I must receive this loan. She agreed to call him, and he asked me how much I wanted. I stated the full amount, explaining the intended purpose of the funds.

“After a brief discussion, he asked if I had brought checks and the application form signed by appropriate guarantors. When he heard that I already had everything prepared, he told his wife to give me one thousand eight hundred dollars. Nevertheless, I didn’t leave his home any calmer than I had come. This amount would cover two weeks of accommodations in Crown Heights for nine people, but I still hadn’t paid anything for the airline tickets. I assured the travel agent that I would stop by en route to the airport, and I would pay him in full for the tickets. I knew that the Rebbe would help us.

“On that day, we had



Rabbi Dror Ben-Kish with his son at Simchas Beis HaShoeiva in the streets of Crown Heights

I didn’t leave his home any calmer than I had come. This amount would cover two weeks of accommodations in Crown Heights for nine people, but I still hadn’t paid anything for the airline tickets.

tremendous help from Heaven. Many of those who have already traveled to the Rebbe can tell about their own incredible experiences of Divine Providence. Anyone who truly wants to go the Rebbe sees the help from Above. The funds simply come, one way or another.

“My mother decided to give us five thousand shekels, and a few other friends and relatives lent us some money. In the end, we had the full amount necessary. But

that’s not the end of the story...

THE REBBE PAYS BACK THE DEBT EXACTLY

“The feelings and emotions we experienced when we finally arrived at 770 were beyond compare. Anyone who spent Sukkos and Simchas Torah with the Rebbe can testify to that. Davening with the Rebbe, the farbrengens, and the dancing are a source of tremendous spiritual strength for the entire year.

“After several days jam-packed with experiences that re-charged our chassidic batteries, it was time to return to Eretz HaKodesh. I knew that I had to pay back about a thousand dollars that my friends had lent to me and another one thousand eight hundred dollars to the Gemach loan fund. I thought about numerous ways to raise this money, but the possibility never even crossed my mind that the Rebbe, the merciful father of all chassidim, would pay the entire amount without any great effort on my part. We saw clearly that if someone wants to come to the Rebbe and does so without a lot of p’shetlach – the Rebbe helps him, plain and simple.

“On our way back to Eretz Yisroel, we had a three hour stopover in Paris. It was seven in the morning, so the Chabad passengers decided to organize a minyan to daven Shacharis in the terminal. Towards the end of davening, my brother-in-law came up to me and said that the airline

is looking for volunteers who are willing to stay in Paris until the next flight that evening in exchange for monetary compensation. The offer appealed to me, and when I finished davening, I went to the airline offices and confirmed that they indeed were prepared to pay those willing to wait until the evening flight.

“The offer was very enticing and most worthwhile: one hundred and fifty Euros in cash or a three hundred euro credit on a future flight (for anyone) – for each ticket. Since I wasn’t in any particular rush to get anywhere, the whole family stayed behind – me, my wife, and our children. Some simple arithmetic showed that the total amount was one thousand two hundred Euros, the equivalent of **one thousand eight hundred dollars** – the exact amount that I had to pay back to the loan fund.

“The time flew by, and we boarded a flight to Eretz Yisroel that evening, greatly reassured

that the money for the trip had simply fallen into our lap.

“Not long afterwards, we were called regarding another offer, bringing us another **one thousand dollars** – the exact amount that I had borrowed from my family and friends...”

* * *

Though Rabbi Ben-Kish’s audience sat in silence, it was obvious that they were inspired by his story. “The Rebbe paid all of the expenses connected with my trip, without the need for me to lift a finger. It seems that when a chassid decides with every fiber of his soul to travel to the Rebbe and experience Tishrei in 770, the Rebbe will not leave the debts unpaid.

“It is our earnest hope and prayer that we should merit very soon to see the hisgalus of the Rebbe with our own physical eyes, and with our sons and our daughters, with our young and our old, we will march to the Third Beis HaMikdash, immediately, mamash, NOW!!”

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ב"ה

יחד אדונינו מורנו ורבנו מלך המשיח לעולם ועד

WHY BE HAPPY?

By Rabbi Yosef Karasik
District Rav Bat Chefer – Emek Chefer

G-d has blessed our generation in ways our ancestors could never have imagined. Pogroms, famine and religious persecution have been replaced with freedom and abundance. You would think this would make our generation a particularly happy one, but alas, it is not.

**** A Jew has to be happy all the time. The Rebbe spoke on numerous occasions about the countless reasons that every Jew has to be b'simcha. Sadness over deficiencies in avodas Hashem is but a ploy of the Evil Inclination! * A fascinating look at simcha from the perspective of Chazal, Kabbala and Chabad Chassidus.***

Chazal say, "When Adar enters, we increase in joy." In Adar, simcha is a mitzvah! The Rebbe explains that it's not only when involved in matters of holiness, Torah and mitzvos, that you need to be happy, but throughout the month, even when involved in everyday activities, you need to rejoice – "when Adar enters ... the main thing is simcha"

(Likkutei Sichos vol. 4, p. 42).

Ask anybody what the easiest mitzvah is and he's likely to say "to be happy." The other mitzvos, getting up to daven, giving tz'daka to the poor, putting on t'fillin, fasting on Yom Kippur – all require effort and exertion. Simcha is seems so easy. How hard is it to crack a smile occasionally? However, the

mitzvah of simcha is much more than that, and is far from easy. The point is not to laugh with a cup of vodka in hand or to take pleasure from eating, music, beautiful sights, etc., but to acquire the simcha that comes from inner joy. A happy person is relaxed. It's like he's raised a bit above the world and its troubles and he forgets all his worries. It is, in fact, much more difficult than the other, more technical mitzvos. It is far easier to go through certain motions than to control your feelings, to dismiss all sad and worrisome thoughts and be happy.

Jewish history is full of tragedies, pogroms, expulsions, terrible decrees and abysmal poverty. In the previous century, tens of thousands of Jews died of starvation and millions more through Hitler and Stalin's extermination policies. Now, in our generation, G-d has blessed us with abundance, with a world where there hardly exists the possibility of a Jew dying of hunger and the threat of mass extinction is distant.

You would think this would make our generation a particularly happy one, but alas, it is not. The Jewish communities of previous generations experienced levels of simcha that are virtually unimaginable to us today. The cramped apartments were often lacking basic necessities, but they overflowed with genuine simcha. What do we have today in our age of plenty? Many people feel sad, depressed, anxious, helpless and hopeless, and this leads to strife within the family. Sadness is the "mother" of all spiritual and material failings, while simcha is the "mother" of success in both realms.

SADNESS AND GUILT – POSITIVE OR NOT?

In Tanya (chapters 26-29) the Alter Rebbe discusses the person who didn't do a certain mitzvah and regrets it afterwards. Is the source of his distress from the Good

Inclination or the Evil Inclination? The Alter Rebbe says it's from the Evil Inclination! A person did not daven properly or neglected an opportunity to perform a mitzvah, and later in the day, as he walks down the street, he remembers and feels great regret. We would think this is a positive thing, that he feels bad about his sins! But the Alter Rebbe asks - how come he feels pangs of guilt and sorrow while in the middle of his workday? When he is in shul and wrapped in tallis and t'fillin he has thoughts about mundane matters, so why would he have thoughts of t'shuva while on the street?

The Alter Rebbe explains that this is the tactic of the Evil Inclination. Though this seems incongruous with that evil force that aspires to trip us up, it is a clever strategy indeed. The feelings of regret and sorrow pull a person down in two ways: 1) the sorrow can lead to depression and lack of energy, in the guise of k'dusha and piety. The insidious voice plants a seed of self-doubt: "What are you worth when you didn't do the mitzvah properly?" 2) Later on, when the person goes to do another mitzvah, the Evil Inclination will whisper a bit of "friendly advice": "Why do mitzvos when you aren't worth anything anyway. You are very spiritually low and you and your actions have no value. A pity for you to invest in good deeds that aren't worth anything anyhow."

For example, to someone who did not withstand the test and desecrated the Shabbos, the Evil Inclination says: "Why go to shul and daven when you desecrated the Shabbos? You're worthless and there is no reason to continue observing Shabbos. It's not right for you to appear in shul because your lowly presence will impinge on the honor of the holy place."

The Evil Inclination turns into a righteous sounding entity that



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seemingly cares about G-d's honor. It uses the same reasoning that people use when they have failed on a diet. They have been careful not to eat the wrong foods but then they slip and feel guilty. A seductive voice whispers: You messed up anyway, so why bother continuing watching what you eat?

The only time that it's okay for a person to feel guilty is at the

moment when he is actually committing a sin. Regret at that point is definitely coming from a positive source which is trying to help him fight the evil and stop sinning. There are specific times when a person may focus on his past misdeeds and resolve to correct them, like during the days of repentance in Tishrei and before retiring each night. Even then, we

“These thoughts are from the Evil Inclination. You are caught in the net of the animal soul which is making you depressed, to confuse you in your holy service of Hashem. You must desist from these thoughts and increase in simcha. In this way, you will increase and rise up in your avodas Hashem.”

must differentiate between regret that leads to repentance and guilt that leads to despair. At all other times, our avoda is to be b’simcha.

LOOK AT THE CUP AS HALF FULL

The question is asked, is the cup half full or half empty? Happy people see the cup as half full; they look for the positive in every situation. On many occasions the Rebbe spoke about the countless reasons that every Jew has to be happy all the time, including:

1-Out of the billions of people in the world, Hashem chose us, the Jewish people, the few, to be his beloved nation. It is within our homes and our bodies that the King chooses to dwell. This should make us exceedingly happy. How happy would a person be if the greatest king in the world would visit his home? What kind of preparations would he make in his honor? And here we are privileged to host not a human king but the King of kings, who comes to dwell in a Jew’s home and body.

2-We live in a generation of abundance, in a time with marvelous inventions and developments in every area. For example, in the medical world there are astounding advances. Fortunate are we that we merited to see and benefit from all this and to use them for k’dusha. In

earlier generations they did not have the spiritual abundance that we have. Today, we can buy s’farim and Jewish items at reasonable prices. The Rambam only had eighty s’farim in his library. Today, ordinary Jews have hundreds - if not thousands! - of s’farim.

3-The most essential thing of all, the Rebbe announced prophetically, is that we are the last generation of galus and the first generation of Geula. This ought to dispel all sad thoughts and feelings and make us inordinately happy. Any moment now, all of galus and sorrow will be as though they never were; hinei, hinei, Moshiach ba!

A STORY ABOUT A CHASSID WHO BECAME SAD

In Niezhen lived a Chassid, Meir Zalman, who was a businessman and a yerei Shamayim. He did mitzvos, followed the darkei ha’Chassidus, davened with a minyan regularly, had set times for learning Torah, and on Shabbos he spent a long time on his davening and reviewed Chassidus publicly.

One day he began to think that he wasn’t doing enough in his avodas Hashem, he wasn’t devoting enough of his time to Torah and mitzvos, and he slowly sank into sadness and

depression. Feeling utterly miserable, he went to his Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, and tearfully poured out his bitter heart to him.

The Tzemach Tzedek told him, “These thoughts are from the Evil Inclination. You are caught in the net of the animal soul which is making you depressed, to confuse you in your holy service of Hashem. You must desist from these thoughts and increase in simcha. In this way, you will increase and rise up in your avodas Hashem” (Igros Kodesh Rebbe Rayatz vol. 8, p. 658).

Let’s think about this. A Jew felt truly sorry about his spiritual state, which needed correcting, to the point that it caused him heartache and depression. Isn’t it wonderful that he felt so deeply about his spiritual weakness? But the Tzemach Tzedek told him that this sorrow derived from the animal soul, from the counsel of the forces of evil! Sadness over deficiencies in avodas Hashem comes from the Evil Inclination!

Dovid HaMelech told us, “serve Hashem with simcha, come before Him with song.” Through simcha we hasten the coming of the Geula, speedily in our days.

