

L'Chaim

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January 14, 2011 – 9 Shevat, 5771

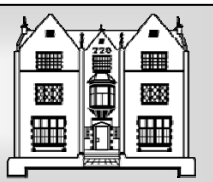
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Living with the REBBE



This week's Torah portion of Beshalach describes the miracle of the splitting of the Red (Reed) Sea. With the Egyptians in hot pursuit, the Jewish people found their way blocked by a body of water. The Sea then parted, "and the waters were a wall to them on their right and on their left."

In what merit did G-d perform such a miracle? Our Sages teach that it was in the merit of the Jewish children, who "recognized [G-d] first" - even before Moses, Joshua and all the elders. These children, who had been born into slavery yet had nonetheless been given a proper Jewish education - were the first to declare, "This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him."

Born in exile, the generation of children who went out of Egypt keenly perceived their status as "the smallest of all the nations." They knew that the Egyptian lifestyle was in stark contradiction to the Jewish way of life. And yet, they clung to their Judaism and were proud of it. Empowered by the Jewish education they received from their mothers, they did not hesitate to leave the "fleshpots of Egypt" for the "great and terrible desert," even though they did not have enough provisions. Rather, they had absolute trust and faith in G-d, and in their merit the Red Sea split.

With such children, there is no need to be alarmed. The Jewish people were surrounded on all sides, yet in the children's merit they marched into the Sea and the waters parted.

The miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea was extraordinary for another reason: Not only was the obstacle that stood in their way removed, but the waters themselves became a protective wall that shielded them from harm. This is the highest level of overcoming difficulties and hurdles, and it too came about in the children's merit. When Jewish children are given the kind of education that enables them to "recognize G-d first," the impediments themselves are transformed into a protective wall.

When a Jewish child knows that the only reality in the world is holiness, and that nothing can stop him from fulfilling G-d's will, he merits that all ostensible obstacles will not only vanish but actually help him in his Divine service.

Thousands of years later, the Jewish people are still in need of miracles. As "one sheep among seventy wolves," our entire existence is an ongoing supernatural miracle, like the splitting of the Red Sea.

In order to deserve this merit, we need to make sure that all Jewish children can benefit from a Torah-true Jewish education. We will then have the pleasure and nachas of seeing them "recognize G-d first" - even before their parents and grandparents. ■

Adapted from Volume 2 of Likutei Sichot.

Trees and Roots

In most parts of the world, we're not thinking about warm weather just yet. But with the approach of Tu B'Shevat, the New Year for Trees, some might just have the itch to get out the gardening catalogues or start thinking about nature.

We can learn a lot from the great outdoors-from every flower, shrub, plant, even each weed! So let's take a moment to examine just one of G-d's beautiful creations-trees.

Probably the most important part of the tree is its roots. A tree's nourishment and stability are derived through its roots. Trees with strong roots and root systems are able to survive strong winds, droughts, or a scorching sun.

On the other hand, trees that have bountiful, beautiful branches covered with glossy, green leaves are a magnificent sight to behold in spring, summer or fall. But without strong, deep roots, drastic changes in weather can be devastating.

In the Mishna known as Ethics of the Fathers our Sages speak about just this phenomenon. No, they weren't necessarily horticulturists, maybe not even farmers. But they did have keen insight into the human condition.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said, "Any person whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, to what is he likened? To a tree whose branches are many, but whose roots are few, and the wind comes and plucks it up and overturns it on its face...But anyone whose deeds exceed his wisdom, to what is he likened? To a tree whose branches are few, but whose roots are many, so that even if all the winds in the world come and blow on it, they cannot budge it from its place."

In the case of a tree, it is the roots that bring the entire tree-the trunk, branches, leaves and fruit-its nourishment. Rabbi Elazar is telling us that our deeds, our actual physical mitzvot, are what nourish us and keep our entire being healthy, strong, and able to survive even the most tempestuous

storms of life. This concept, that action is the most essential thing, is actually one of the most important concepts in Judaism.

Contemplating the deed, understanding the deed, studying the deed, does not exempt one from doing the deed. You can meditate on and study for days all the laws and commentaries related to putting a mezuzah on your door or making your kitchen kosher. But until you have done the action, you have not given nourishment to your roots that ultimately nourish the total person.

Rabbi Elazar was very exacting in the way he expressed himself. He spoke about one whose deeds exceed his wisdom. This means that our deeds, our mitzvot, have to be greater in number than our Jewish knowledge, in order for our "trees" to be healthy and firmly established.

One might object, "But if I do mitzvot and I don't understand them, I feel like a fake. What do I gain from doing something I don't understand, or saying words I don't comprehend?"

In answer, let's get back to the total tree, including its fruits. When you're hungry and you eat an apple, do you understand exactly how that fruit nourishes your body, how it is broken down by acids and enzymes, goes through your digestive system, into your blood stream, and finally nourishes each and every organ in your body? Probably not. Were you not to eat that apple until you understood exactly how it nourishes you, it would take years of study of biology, nutrition, physiology, medicine, etc. And in the meantime, you'd be a lot more than a little bit hungry!

Basically, Rabbi Elazar is telling us, "Just eat! Even if you don't understand exactly how it nourishes you or what you're eating, *ess mein kind-eat, my child.*" And if you are lucky enough to be one of those people who have had a strong Jewish education, then you are obligated to do even more deeds, more mitzvot, because your deeds should exceed your wisdom. ■

RAMBAM THIS WEEK

Prohibition 320: working on Shabbat

By this prohibition we are forbidden to do any work on the Sabbath. It is contained in the Torah's words (Ex. 20:10): "In it you shall not do any manner of work." [The term "work" embraces the 39 main categories of labor forbidden on the Sabbath.]■

The Rebbe Writes

15 Shevat, 5738 [1978]

*To the Participants in the Weekend Seminar
Lubavitch Council for Universities and Colleges*

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to be informed of the Seminar this coming weekend. Since time is a factor and, by Divine Providence, the event is taking place in the week of Mattan-Torah [reading the Torah portion of the giving of the Torah] and Rosh Hashonoh Lo'ilonos [the New Year for Trees], I am confident that the Seminar will prove particularly illuminating and fruitful.

"Man is like a tree," declares the Torah, *Toras Chayim* [the Torah of Life] - the Jew's true guide in the everyday life. The analogy is instructive in that it emphasizes, among other things, that man's purpose in life is to grow and develop and produce "fruits" to be enjoyed not only by himself, but also by others.

This reminder is especially relevant to young people, who are in the midst of their development - in character and *Weltanschauung* - which will determine their future course and aim in life. During these formative years in particular - the Torah serves notice - one should bear in mind that the basic goal of a human being in general, and of a Jew in particular, is to be like a "fruit-bearing tree." The Torah *shebe'al peh* [the Oral Torah-Talmud] is even more explicit, as our Sages declare that the fruits of *Tzaddikim* [righteous] ("and Thy people are all *Tzaddikim*") are the *Mitzvos* [commandments] and good deeds.

A further point in the analogy is that a fruit contains in itself the seeds to produce trees and fruits after its own kind to all posterity. The inference is obvious.

Needless to say, to achieve the best results a fruit-bearing tree has to be cultivated when it is still young, and this is the time when every effort is rewarded out of all proportions in later years.

There was hardly a time when young people faced greater challenges than in this day and age, and serious efforts are required to face up to them and overcome them. However, the Torah assures us that when a Jew is truly determined to lead a life of Torah and *Mitzvos* to which every Jew is committed from Sinai, he has the full capacity to do so and receives help from On High. My father-in-law of saintly memory - whose *Yahrzeit-Hilulo* [anniversary of the passing] we observed a few days ago (10 Shevat) has shown by example that where there is a firm will and determination, there are no difficulties that a Jew cannot overcome.

To be sure, who can compare to his stature - but then the difficulties one faces in the "free world" are quite minimal by comparison, and many of them are more imaginary than real. Certainly Jewish youths endowed with energy and enthusiasm and unafraid of a challenge, should have no serious problem in this regard.

May G-d grant that each and all of you participating in this get-together should rededicate yourselves to your real goal in life, as indicated above, and advance from strength to strength in this direction, with joy and gladness of heart.

With prayerful wishes for *Hatzlocho* [success],

With blessing, ■

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This Monday is Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of trees. One of the characteristic attributes of trees is that they are always growing. Indeed, in Hebrew the plant kingdom is called "tzomei'ach," the present tense of the verb "to sprout," implying ongoing development. From a seed to a sapling to a stately fruit-bearing organism, the tree is constantly growing.

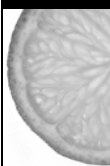
There are many lessons to be learned from Tu B'Shevat, one of which is the need for continual growth in the realm of Torah and *mitzvot*.

Regardless of how much one has already accomplished, a Jew must always strive to make tomorrow better, and the day after that even better. For whenever a Jew resolves to learn more Torah, increase his observance of *mitzvot* and in general, improve his behavior, he is promised Divine assistance in his spiritual progress.

Moreover, while the physical body is constantly regenerating itself, the most important aspect of a Jew's existence is his soul, which animates the body. It is thus self-evident that along with doing all we can to ensure good physical health, special efforts must be made to nurture the Jewish soul, allowing it to flourish and express itself.

The Torah likens man to "a tree of the field." In the same way the purpose of the tree is to ultimately bear fruit, a Jew must also strive to "bear fruit" in the form of Torah, *mitzvot* and good deeds. The "seeds" of our fruit will then in turn produce seeds of their own, in a never-ending process that brings holiness and illumination into the world.

The Torah describes Israel as "a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olives that produce oil and honey (dates)." As we make a blessing over these fruits this Tu B'Shevat, let us reflect upon the special, innate connection every Jew has with the Holy Land, which will find its full expression in the Messianic era, may it commence at once. ■



SLICE OF

LIFE

Hidden No More

by Robert Leitner

Over the last year or so, I periodically discussed with my wife the possibility of my wearing a kipa full-time, always ending the conversation by wondering what would push me over the line or give me the courage - and that was the word I used - to do it. It finally happened, but in a way I would never have imagined.

I went to Spain and Poland on back-to-back Jewish heritage tours this summer, and returned wearing a kipa. The reasons why are varied and the events that led up to it cumulative, but there was a single moment - and an image - that freed me to do what I had spoken about doing so often.

This particular European tour began in the northeastern part of Spain. We flew into Barcelona, and proceeded to Gerona, renowned in Jewish his-tory as the home of the great scholar Nachmanides.

The purpose of this leg of the trip was twofold: to tour a number of cities important in the development of Spanish Jewry and to get some sense of the tourist possibilities in the area that might also be of interest to Jewish travelers.

We spent a lot of time in a bus moving from village to village. We would arrive at our destination early in the morning and walk all over the medieval quarter, all the time hearing about the triumphs and eventual dangers of Spain in the Middle Ages.

Because the goal was also to expose us to tourist pleasures, we did a lot of eating at some splendid restaurants. I kept as close to kosher as possible. And as always when I travel, I had my kipa, wore it most times when we ate and quietly said the bracha (blessing) before digging in.

In all, it was a splendid ten days, but as with all these kinds of trips, there was a disquieting side. I find that there are only so many Judenrein towns I can take before I start feeling queasy. In Spain, as in Poland and Germany, you can find Jews in the large cities, and that's comforting. But to hear about so many small towns that contributed to the splendor of Spanish Jewry and not see a single trace of anything Jewish is maddening.

And to also hear about all of the subterfuges the hidden Jews had to go through to keep even the tiniest vestiges of Jewish tradition alive in their lives - while at the same time keeping the Inquisition at bay - was often heartbreaking.

Switch to Poland, where I traveled with a completely different set of journalists, who had come primarily to witness the unveiling of a new monument to the Jews slain during the Holocaust in the town of Jedwabne.

During this ten days, we spent time in Warsaw, Crakow, Tikochin and Bialystock. We did a lot of eating in these places, but the Polish Tourist Bureau made certain that many of our meals were kosher.

Two people in the group wore kipas all the time and tried to keep as glatt kosher as possible. (They had brought food for those times we spent in the boonies). It was their example that emboldened me to start wearing my kipa, even when we weren't eating.

But there were layers to this experience, and Shabbos in Krakow added much to the overall effect.

We spent erev Shabbos (the Sabbath eve) at the Ronald S. Lauder Center in Kazimierz. That night, the narrow, high-ceilinged dining room was packed with people of all ages. Yonah Bookstein, head of the Lauder Foundation in Warsaw, is a disarming young man with great energy and spirit, and he and two young Lubavitchers visiting from Brooklyn kept the evening buoyant, getting the men and boys up and dancing, and everybody else singing. It was like no other Shabbos I had ever spent.

And the same high spirits were repeated the following day in the same dining room, where another large crowd had gathered for lunch. When I said goodbye to the two young Brooklynites - who identified themselves only as "Chaim" and "Avi" - I thanked them for making the day special. And, for a moment, I thought to warn them to look out for themselves in Poland, but then stopped myself. It seemed too fatherly a thing to do, and so I kept my concern to myself.

Then came Jedwabne, the place where 60 years earlier, the Polish Christians of the town had slaughtered their Jewish neighbors, leaving at least 1,600 dead. For six decades, a plaque affixed to the spot where the massacre occurred blamed the Nazis for the crime. But recent investigative work disclosed that the Poles had carried out an eight-hour pogrom, which ended with Jews being herded into a barn that was then set on fire. Now there was going to be a new monument that would admit that Jewish citizens of the town had been slaughtered.

It was an extraordinary day, one of highs and lows. The Polish president went a step further and asked for forgiveness from the murdered Jews. The unveiling of the monument was appropriately solemn, but the citation didn't go far enough to name Poles as the perpetrators.

And when this great media event finally drew to a close, not much had changed in Jedwabne. Some townspeople called the story of the massacre propaganda and lies. I watched as people peered out of windows, then drew away. There were also Polish men loitering on street corners, drunk and vocal, making remarks about anyone wearing a kipa.

Then, I saw the most astonishing thing. There were Chaim and Avi, the two Lubavitchers, standing across from the town square - and they were helping Jews who'd attended the ceremony to wrap tefilin. I was glad to see them alive and well, I told them, and wanted to find out more. All they wanted to know was whether I wanted to wrap tefilin.

I hesitated for an instant, then undid my shirt sleeve. As I watched Avi wrap my arm in the ancient leather, I was even more taken with these young men, more amazed at the strength it took for them to travel in a country where Jew-hatred is still very much alive. I said the Hebrew words slowly, reverentially, realizing only then that you can be a hidden Jew in lots of ways, that you can live much of your life believing in Judaism's importance but not do one thing as courageous as these two young men had done - to defy the anger, spite and potential violence of a crowd to teach others a bit of tradition.


It was then I decided to "come out" Jewishly, in deference to the glimpse of eternity Avi and Chaim had given me in the middle of Jedwabne. ■

This article first appeared in The Jewish Exponent. Philadelphia. PA.

Moshiach Matters

Rabban Gamliel lectured: "In the future [Redemption] the trees will bring forth fruit every day, for it is said 'And it shall produce boughs, and bear fruit' (Ezek. 17:23). I.e., just as boughs are produced every day so also will fruit be brought forth every day. ■

(Iturei Torah)

Important Times January 14 – 21 <i>Shacharis</i> 7:00am Sunday 8:00am Monday/Thursday 6:45am <i>Minchab/Maariv</i> 5:15pm Shabbos 5:05pm <i>Shabbat</i> <u>Chassidus Club</u> 8:15am <u>Kabbalah of Cholent</u> 9:05am <u>Shacharis</u> 9:30am Light Candles 5:23pm Shabbat Ends 6:22pm	Brought to you by: Chabad-Lubavitch in Cyberspace www.chabad.org Copyright © 2010 Lubavitch Youth Organization www.lchaimweekly.org	Re-printed by: Chabad of Scottsdale (480) 998-1410 chabadofscottsdale.org  The Jewish Learning Center of Scottsdale 480.443.5362
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If Once Happened The Roman Emperor Hadrian was a cruel and wicked man. It was under his oppressive regime that the Bar Kochba revolt broke out, which ultimately led to destruction of the city of Betar. However, Hadrian was not without a sense of humor, albeit a malicious one.

Once, during one of the Emperor's periodic visits to the Holy Land, he was strolling through an orchard in Tiberias when he came across an old man. The elderly Jew with the long white beard was obviously well on in years, yet he was busily planting saplings in the ground. "Ancient one!" the Roman Emperor called out to him sarcastically. "You must have slacked off in your youth, that you need to work so hard in your old age!"

"No, your Majesty," the Jew replied. "I worked plenty hard when I was younger, and I see no reason to stop now. G-d willing, I will continue as long as the L-rd will give me strength."

"But surely," Hadrian persisted in taunting him, "you can't expect to enjoy the fruits of your labor. Where will you be by the time these trees bear fruit?"

"Everything is in G-d's hands," the Jew answered. "We are all in G-d's hands, young and old alike. If G-d so wishes, I will be able to enjoy them."

"That is highly unlikely," the Emperor said. "Tell me, how old are you?"

"Today is my one hundredth birthday."

"And you still hope to eat the fruit of these saplings? Hah! Don't you realize that there is only a very slim chance that you will have the opportunity?"

"If G-d wants it to happen, it will happen. But even if it doesn't, my work is not in vain. In the same way my parents toiled on my behalf, my labor will benefit future generations."

"Then here's to your good health," the Emperor said in parting. "And if you're still alive when these fruits ripen, let me know."

"I will be happy to fulfill the Emperor's command," the Jew replied.

Years passed, and the young saplings grew into sturdy fig trees. Indeed, the old man lived to eat the juicy and delicious fruit, and continued to enjoy vigorous health. The time had come to fulfill his promise to the Emperor.

After some initial difficulties getting past the royal guard the old man was granted an audience, but the Emperor did not recognize him. "What do you want, old man?" he asked impatiently. "And what's that in your basket?"

The old Jew reminded him of their previous encounter, and the promise the Emperor had extracted from him. The basket, he explained, was full of succulent figs for his Majesty's pleasure.

The Emperor was shocked. After all, the elderly Jew had already been ancient at the time of their last meeting...

The Emperor ordered a golden chair to be brought for the old man to sit on. He instructed that the basket be filled with gold in exchange for the figs.

The Emperor's attendants were very surprised at the honor being paid the old Jew, until he related the story. "If the Creator saw fit to grant him such a long life," Hadrian admitted, "it must mean that he was worthy."

The old man returned home with much pomp and circumstance, and all his neighbors came out to greet him. When the wife of one of them saw the gold coins she became very jealous, and began to berate her husband. "You lazy good for nothing!" she scolded him. "Didn't you hear that the Emperor loves figs? This foolish old man brought only a small basket and it was filled with gold. Go to the Emperor and bring him an entire crate of figs! Surely he will fill it with priceless treasures." The husband agreed to make the trip. He arrived at the royal palace with his donkey struggling under the huge load.

The keepers of the gate didn't know what to do. A soldier was sent inside to inform the Emperor that a man had arrived with a whole case of figs, expecting to be paid handsomely.

The Emperor was furious. "Let the fool stand by the entrance of the palace," he ordered, "and he will be given a taste of his own figs. Whoever passes by must pick one up and throw it in his face!"

The Emperor's decree was obeyed. The unfortunate man was made to stand like a statue until nightfall, when the "ammunition" was exhausted. He returned home, his face red and swollen from pain and embarrassment.

To top it all off, his wife then berated him for failing in his mission. To which the husband suggested that the next time she came up with a brilliant plan, she should be the one to actually implement it. "I wish you had been there to share my wealth," he added.

"Well, there's one thing you should be grateful for," the wife conceded. "At least they were dried figs and not fresh citrons!" ■

And the one came not near the other all the night (Ex. 14:20)

As the Talmud relates, the ministering angels wanted to sing songs of praise as the Egyptians were drowning in the Red Sea. However, G-d stopped them by pointing out the inappropriateness of rejoicing at a time when "the work of My hands is drowning." An analogy is given of a serious yet necessary operation to save a patient's life. During the painful surgery, there is no room for rejoicing. Only after its successful completion can one begin to offer praise and speak of its benefits. (Yeshuot Malko)



And they believed in G-d and in Moses His servant...Then sang Moses (Ex. 14:31, 15:1)

It was precisely because the Jews believed in G-d and that Moses was His servant that Moses was able to sing the "Song on Crossing the Red Sea." For having faith in the tzadik (righteous person) actually empowers the tzadik. (Degel Machane Efraim)



Go out and fight with Amalek (Ex. 17:9)

Why were the Jews told to do nothing before the splitting of the Red Sea, whereas they were encouraged to actively wage battle against Amalek? In general, in most areas of life, a Jew must have simple faith that G-d will provide him with all his needs, independent of human effort and intervention. However, when it comes to the struggle for Judaism (Amalek is symbolic of everything that is antithetical to holiness), passive faith is not enough, and practical action is required. (Pardes Yosef)