

L'Chaim

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Weekly Publication
for every Jewish Person

December 17, 2010 - 10 Teves, 5771

1150: VAYECHI

This month's L'CHAIM has been generously sponsored by:

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Living with the **REBBE**



No words in the Torah are chosen arbitrarily, least of all the names of the weekly Torah portions. The name of a particular Torah portion expresses the essence of that section and tells us something about its content. This being the case, why is this week's portion entitled Vayechi ("and Jacob lived"), when it deals exclusively with the events which led up to his passing?

The answer to this question lies in understanding the true meaning of life. Is life our temporal existence in this world, where we are constantly faced with extinction from numerous forces threatening us at every turn? Or is true life something even greater?

Only G-d, the source of all life, can rightly be termed "alive," for He is never changing and exists forever. In this sense, only G-d truly lives, for His existence does not depend on outside forces. But human beings may also attain eternal life, by cleaving to that which is Eternal. G-d is the only entity which lives forever; attaching oneself to Him enables mere mortals to do the same.

"And you, who cleave unto G-d - all of you therefore live today." This is the reason that the Jews are called "alive" by our Sages, for they cleave unto the Eternal Living G-d.

This is demonstrated most clearly when a Jew encounters difficulties and obstacles lying in his path, which serve to make his passage through life all the more challenging. Leading a carefree existence unencumbered by problems is no test of our attachment to G-d; successfully overcoming life's hurdles is what reveals our true devotion and commitment to serving G-d. It is only then that we may be considered "alive."

This illustrates why this week's Torah portion is named Vayechi. It was precisely just prior to Jacob's passing in Egypt that the meaning and purpose of his life was fully revealed. The years Jacob had spent in the Holy Land, although fraught with various trials and tribulations, were insufficient to adequately demonstrate his true devotion to G-d. It was only on his deathbed, in the lowest and most abominable land on earth at the time, that Jacob's true "life" could be recognized by all.

The Talmud states that "Jacob did not die...as long as his seed is alive, he lives too." The continued existence of the Jewish people and their adherence to G-d and His Torah follows in the footsteps of their forefather Jacob and ensures his eternal perpetuation.

Furthermore, it is precisely now, at the very end of our long and bitter exile, that our adherence to Torah and our faith in the imminent coming of Moshiach demonstrates the attainment of true and eternal life. ■

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

A House Full of Books

What's the first thing you see when you walk into a person's house or apartment?

That depends, of course, on how the house is decorated as well as their own personal taste and style.

Sometimes the first thing you'll see are flowers.

Sometimes it's artwork.

Sometimes it's the dining room table, the sofa, a rug or an accent piece.

And sometimes it's the books.

There's something impressive, even awe-inspiring, about walking into a house full of books. Not just any set of books. Jewish books. Even if it's your own home. The mood changes, if only for an instant. Seeing the books, gives one pause.

You can observe this effect on anyone, no matter who. When they walk into a Jewish home and see shelves and shelves of Jewish books.

Why is this? What is it about books?

In this age of the computer and the iPad and the e-readers, books still carry within them a spark of the ancient, the valuable, the enduring. And they ignite a similar spark in us - a sense that as modern as we are, we are connected with something quite ancient; as insignificant as we sometimes feel, we have inherited something priceless; and as finite as we are, we are yet part of the eternal.

That is what a book, a Jewish

book does for us. And for others who enter our home.

Thirty-five years ago, the Lubavitcher Rebbe started a campaign to transform Jewish homes, all Jewish homes, into places of holiness. There was the mezuzah campaign, to put mezuzos up on one's doors; the kosher campaign - transforming the kitchen; and the home-full-of-books campaign.

Because a home is not the four walls, the roof, the food processor, the drapes or the garden furniture. The home is who lives there, and how they live there.

And books live. Especially Jewish books. They create an environment, provide balance, offer wisdom. They help the home become a place of tranquility and holiness.

You don't have to start with big expensive sets. Buy one book. A Chumash: the Five Books of Moses. In English. Then buy another. A Siddur - prayer book. And another, Tehilim - the Psalms of King David. Buy another.

Clear off a shelf for them. If you don't have a bookcase, buy one - just for those three (or five - or even one, to start with). When you see them sitting there, you'll want to provide them company. You can fill the empty spaces slowly.

Check online. Join a Jewish bookclub. (See Kehotonline, for example.)

And of course, read the books. Or even better, start a study group, so others can read them, too.

A house full of books. A house full of holiness. One book at a time. One spark at a time. ■

**MEZUZAH
DID YOU
KNOW???**

When a mezuzah that has been removed -- for checking, when renovations are being done, or for any other reason -- is remounted, the blessing should be recited only if the mezuzah was off the doorposts for at least one night. If you are also adding new mezuzahs at this time, it is preferable to recite the blessing on a new one (providing that it is mounted on a door that requires a blessing). ■

**A WORD FROM
THE DIRECTOR**

Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman

This Friday, December 17, is the Tenth of Tevet, one of the four commemorative fasts associated with the destruction of the Holy Temple. On this date Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem, ultimately leading to the Temple's destruction and the exile of the Jewish people.

The First and Second Holy Temples were constructed without iron. Iron, with its potential to be forged into weapons, has negative and harmful connotations. Indeed, the siege of Jerusalem that began on the Tenth of Tevet is associated with iron, as iron represents the exact opposite of the Holy Temple.

But iron can also have a positive dimension. The Land of Israel is described in the Torah as "a land whose stones are iron." Similarly, a Torah scholar is encouraged by our Sages to have "the strength of iron." By using iron and the strength it symbolizes in the sphere of holiness, the negative dimension of iron can be corrected and nullified.

This process will find its culmination in the era of the Redemption, when not only will the negative aspects of iron be nullified, but completely transformed into positive factors. Unlike the first two structures, the Third and eternal Holy Temple will be constructed with iron, which will be used for reinforcement. (The Book of Chronicles relates that King David prepared a large amount of iron with which to build the Temple, yet there is no record of it actually being used. It is explained that David, the progenitor of Moshiach, prepared the iron for use in the Third Holy Temple.)

Thus although the Tenth of Tevet commemorates a tragic event, it can also be seen as the beginning of a positive process of construction, as the destruction which began on that day was intended to ultimately lead to the Third Holy Temple.

May we merit to see it materialize immediately. ■

The Rebbe Writes

17th of Teves, 5734 (1974)

Greeting and Blessing:

It was good to see you at the recent Farbrengen [gathering], and now I have received your welcome letter of the 3rd of Teves.

To begin with your good wishes at the conclusion of your letter, the acknowledgment has already been made in the Torah, when G-d assured Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you," and G-d's blessings are, of course, much more generous than those of a human being can be. These Divine blessings will surely include a special blessing for your wife to complete her pregnancy and give birth to a healthy offspring in a happy and auspicious hour, and that together with your wife you should bring up all your children to a life of Torah, Chuppah [marriage] and Good Deeds, in good health and ample sustenance.

Needless to say, I was indeed gratified to read about your readiness to "volunteer," as you express it. The reason for the quotation marks is not, G-d forbid, to minimize in any way your dedicated resolve to do your utmost, but rather to emphasize that insofar as a Jew is concerned, while he is given the opportunity to be a "volunteer" out of his free volition, and as it is written [in translation] "Before you I have placed life. . . the blessing. . . Therefore, choose life, so that you and your descendants will live" (Devarim [Deut.] 30:19) - the Torah tells us at the same time that every Jew is indeed conscripted into Tzivos Hashem [G-d's Army]. Clearly, one who has the qualification to influence others is not to consider himself an ordinary draftee, but rather a Commanding Officer in G-d's Army, and one who has even greater qualifications to lead and inspire such "Officers," should consider himself a General. It is, therefore, in this elite corps that you have been "drafted," and the fact that you are at the same time a "volunteer," makes it certain that you will discharge your duties and privileges with the highest degree of dedication, which also ensures the utmost Zechus [merit] for you and all yours.

May G-d grant that you should always have good news to report about yourself and your family, as well as about your good works. ■

Free Translation of a letter written by the Rebbe in the lifetime of the Previous Rebbe

The fourth candle of Chanuka, 5703 (1942)

Greetings and blessings,

...The Gemara states (Shvuos 39a): "All Jews are areivim for one another." The Rebbe shlita offers three interpretations of the word areivim:

1. sweet, i.e., every Jew must consider another Jew sweet;
2. intertwined, i.e., every Jew is intertwined with another Jew; and
3. mutually responsible; every Jew is responsible for all other Jews.

Through our one Torah, the Jews become one nation, connected with G-d, who is "our L-rd," and who "is One."

It is our hope that you will not content yourself with looking after your own personal welfare, but will instead become one of those who bring merit to people at large, and will participate with all your resources in the broad range of activities promoted by Machne Israel.

As the Rebbe shlita has frequently alerted us, we are in the last phase of the exile, and Torah and teshuva [repentance] are the only means to alleviate the birth pangs of Moshiach.

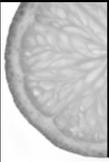
The love which one Jew must feel toward another Jew spurs the heart to great feelings of mercy for those who do not do teshuva in the present time.

From the newspaper clipping which accompanies this letter, you will be able to find the aspect of our activities in which it will be easiest for you to begin work.

Before beginning any task, it may appear difficult. As one proceeds with the work, however, one sees that with G-d's help, it is possible to achieve results.

Awaiting your speedy reply, I conclude with the blessing, "Immediately to teshuva, immediately to Redemption,"

Rabbi Menachem Schneerson
Chairman of the Executive Committee



SLICE OF

LIFE

Reconnecting

by Eddy Levin

From a talk at the Muswell Hill Synagogue in London

I grew up in South Africa, with my long suffering mother from Lithuania and my armchair Communist, atheist, father from Poland. Although my father gave us a tough time as we grew up, I loved him dearly: when he was widowed and in his 90s, I brought him to live with me in London, until his death at 95.

Suffering from anti-Semitism in Poland, my father fell in love with Communism and the wonderful promise of "equality for all." Whilst he taught me a great deal about Communism and atheism, he never said a word about the religious Judaism of Poland with which he grew up.

My father's greatest disappointment with me was that I had become Torah observant, and not just that but a "fanatic" affiliated with Lubavitch! He knew all the traditions and prayers but had never shared them with me; he didn't want me to be tainted by religion. Nevertheless one evening at a Malava Malka Saturday night meal at my home, my father astounded everyone by spontaneously singing the Havdala prayer (marking the end of Shabbat).

At the age of about 17, my father had been conscripted into the German army to fight against his beloved Russian communists. As soon as he could, he deserted and escaped into Lithuania, where he was introduced to my mother. In 1926 they had my sister and soon after, as the net for army deserters was closing in, my father escaped to South Africa with a false passport.

Back in Lithuania my mother waited in vain for his call to join him. Eventually, together with my sister, she set sail for South Africa, having little or no idea of where or how to find him. I never did discover how she found him, but find him she did and I was born in 1932.

Like many other Jewish South Africans, my youth was strongly influenced by Habonim and the wonderful annual Habonim camps by the seaside. We all thought that Habonim was just

the Jewish version of the Boy Scouts which included a strong love of Israel. We never thought of Habonim as a political organisation. Zionism and Judaism seemed synonymous.

I qualified as a dentist in 1954 in South Africa, leaving soon after, much to the despair of my parents. After a year's practise in London I made my way to Israel to join Hadassah when they were just starting the new Dental School. It was very exciting being there at the beginning. They were very advanced and I learned things there that only years later did I fully appreciate and understand.

After a year in Israel I came back to London where I was attracted to the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky which promised understanding of myself and my own paradoxes as well as the paradoxes of society. I was an active member with them for 20 years and met interesting, like-minded people. During this time I was also initiated into the Maharishi system of Transcendental Meditation. I then went on to study other esoteric cultures and other systems of meditation.

The point of telling you all this is to share the magic moment with you, when I realized, that I knew a fair amount about the esoteric side of many different religions, but I knew very little about Judaism. I began to feel a great hunger to be more connected with Judaism and synagogue life. Unfortunately my annual pilgrimage to the local Orthodox synagogue on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana had left me very frustrated and dissatisfied. I also tried Reform, Conservative and the Liberal synagogues, but became equally frustrated after a few months.

My solution almost came when I saw a poster advertising a lecture on Jewish Mysticism by Lubavitch. It was interesting enough for me to phone for more details. I spoke to a charming lady, Mrs. Perla Rader, who politely answered all my questions and then invited me to join her and her family for tea to discuss my interest further. It sounded like a typical insincere English invitation, so I decided to call her bluff and asked if it was all right if I come this Sunday with my wife at 4 p.m. "Fine," she answered!

I arrived to a lovely tea and meeting with her and her husband Rabbi Hershel. I learned that their son-in-law, Dr Bunim Weinbaum, was a dentist like me. He later became my life-long mentor. But I forgot all about them until the seed germinated about a year later.

Hunger for Judaism prevailed, thus on one Shabbat morning, with great trepidation, I ventured into Lubavitch on Kingsley Way in Hampstead Garden Suburb, London. I was greeted like a long lost brother and by the end of the service I already had six invitations for lunch.

I began to regularly attend Lubavitch on Shabbat and spoke about my desire to learn Kabala, because I knew that Lubavitch was somehow connected. "Of course we will teach you Kabala," they answered, "but first it might be better to learn to read Hebrew properly and then to study a little Chumash and a bit of Rashi's commentary and then you'll be ready to learn Kabala." You know, I'm still studying Chumash!

At that time I was shown the plans for the new Giant Menorah that was to be put up by Lubavitch, for the first time, at Golders Green station. "That will fall over in 5 minutes with the first puff of wind," I stated, and then explained what simple steps to correct the problem. They were quick to see the value of what I said and even quicker to ask me to implement the plan. I learned then that in Lubavitch circles, if you open your mouth you get the job. The taste and passion for building Jewish constructions continued and was satisfied last year when I built a large Succa for the Muswell Hill Synagogue, enjoyed by all.

Another major discovery I made after returning to Judaism, is that what I had learned from the cults, was all in Judaism. My cult experience made it easier for me to understand the many hidden aspects of Judaism. I find it quite painful and do my own outreach work to try to make young people attracted to Eastern cults aware of their rich, ancient heritage right here at home, in order to stop their exodus to the East. ▣

What's In A Name?

YARDENIA means "garden of the L-rd."

This is not to be confused with Yarden, the feminine of Yarden meaning "to flow down, descend" and the name of a river in Israel (the Jordan River).

YAAKOV is from the word "ekav" meaning "heel." Yaacov was the son of Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaacov is the only one of the three patriarchs whose children all followed in his ways.

News

New Emissaries Rabbi Zalmi and Esty Katz will be moving to Johannesburg, South Africa, soon to facilitate programs for youth and young adults at Chabad of Illovo. Rabbi Sruly and Chaya Kotlarsky have just moved to Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania, where they have established a new Chabad House serving the Jewish community in that area.

First Mikva in Honolulu The first mikva in Honolulu, the Hawaiian Islands, was recently completed by Chabad of Hawaii under the directorship of Rabbi Itche and Pearl Krasnianski. Mikvas Batsheva, named in memory of Mrs. Krasnianski's mother, was introduced to the community's Jewish women through a special opening party. ▣

Important Times December 17 – 24 <i>Shacharis</i> 7:00am Sunday/Friday 8:00am Monday/Thursday 7:00am <i>Minchah/Maariv</i> 5:15pm Shabbos 4:50pm <i>Shabbat</i> <u>Chassidus Club 8:15am</u> <u>Kabbalah of Cholent 9:05am</u> <u>Shacharis 9:30am</u> Light Candles 5:04pm Shabbat Ends 6:03pm	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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It Once Happened It was already the middle of the night when the stranger appeared in the doorway, a thin figure dressed in rags. Obviously exhausted, the traveler looked ready to tumble to the ground.

The innkeeper, a warm-hearted, G-d-fearing Jew, immediately invited him in and sat him down. After bringing the stranger a warm drink to revive him, he served him an entire meal and sent him off to bed.

The next morning the traveler was much revived from the food and the good night's sleep. After praying the morning service and eating breakfast, he packed his meager belongings into his knapsack, thanked his host for his hospitality and prepared to leave.

The innkeeper, sizing up the man's outward appearance, stuck his hand into his pocket and offered him a handful of change. To his surprise, the stranger politely refused. Thinking that perhaps he had offended him by offering too little, the innkeeper added another few coins, but the man was adamant. "Thank you anyway," he said, "but I really don't need it."

The innkeeper was at a loss for words. "What do you mean you don't need it?" he asked after a few seconds.

"I'm not your usual door to door beggar," the man explained. "You may not believe it, but I'm actually very wealthy. In my hometown I own many properties, fine houses, fertile fields and abundant orchards."

By this time the innkeeper was completely confused. He demanded that the stranger give him a more detailed explanation:

"The whole thing started a little over two years ago," the stranger began, "when a large sum of money was stolen from my home. After the initial investigation, suspicion fell on one of the servants, a young orphan girl who was in my employ. I insisted that she be taken to the town magistrate, who would soon get to the bottom of the matter. But the policemen who led her away were very cruel, and they struck her repeatedly. As a result of the beating, she passed away a few days later. Till the very end she maintained her innocence.

"A few weeks after this happened, the real thieves were apprehended and the money was recovered. I became almost insane with remorse. My conscience would not allow me to live. Not only had I shamed the poor girl, but I had inadvertently caused her death. How could I ever expiate my sin? In my sorrow I turned to the tzadik Rabbi Meir of Premishlan for help.

"The tzadik's face turned grave when he heard my story. He looked deep into my eyes - into my soul - before speaking. 'You must choose one of three ways of doing teshuva [repentance],' he said. 'The first choice is death. This will save your portion in the World to Come. The second choice is illness, in which case you will need to suffer for three years as atonement. Or, you can choose to go into exile for three years. This is the punishment for taking a person's life accidentally.'

"I asked the tzadik for several days to make up my mind. Each one of the alternatives seemed too much to bear. I just couldn't decide. A few days later I started to feel terrible pains all over my body. A doctor was summoned, and he diagnosed me as having an incurable illness. I understood that the first option - death - had been chosen for me, as I seemed incapable of making a decision.

"With my last ounce of strength I went back to Rabbi Meir and asked him to pray for my recovery. I was ready to accept exile.

"The tzadik set several conditions. 'The first stipulation is that you must leave all your personal belongings with me,' he said. 'From now on you must only wear clothing that is old and torn. You must never spend more than one night in the same place. And when you are hungry, you mustn't ask for food but wait until it is offered. For three years you are forbidden to return home, but once a year you may stand at the entrance to your city and send word for your wife to bring you your accounting books. Come back to me when the three years of exile are over, and I will return all your possessions.'

"I accepted my fate and set out, and for the past two years I have obeyed the tzadik's words to the letter. Just recently, however, I learned that Rabbi Meir of Premishlan passed away, and I don't know what to do. How can I go back to him if he is no longer alive? I've decided to go to Rabbi Chaim of Sanz for guidance." With that, the stranger concluded his tale.

The innkeeper, who was a follower of Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, insisted on accompanying him. When they entered the tzadik's chamber, Rabbi Chaim began to speak before they could even state why they had come. "Go home," he instructed the weary traveler, "but make sure you pass through Premishlan. Go to Rabbi Meir's grave and tell him that the Rabbi of Sanz has ruled that two years of exile are enough, for you have fulfilled them with true self-sacrifice." ■

Moshiach Matters In the Torah portion of Vayechi we read, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah... until Shilo comes (Gen. 49:10) "Shilo" is the numerical equivalent of "Moses" (345); "until Shilo comes" is the equivalent of "Moshiach" (358). ■
(Zohar and Baal HaTurim)

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt (Gen. 47:28)

Our forefather Jacob is symbolic of the attribute of truth, as it states in the Book of Mica (7:20), "You will give truth to Jacob." For with the quality of truth, a person can survive even the worst of times and live through the direst of circumstances. (The Hebrew name for Egypt, Mitzrayim, means narrow boundaries and limitations.) *(Chidushei HaRim)*



Gather together and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days (Gen. 49:1)

The Talmud relates that Jacob wished to reveal the end (of the exile) but it was concealed from him. The literal meaning, however, is that Jacob wished to "reveal, i.e., manifest and bring about, the end." In this context there is an important moral for every Jew. We are to follow in the footsteps of Jacob, and wish and pray for the manifestation of the ultimate end - the final Redemption. Seeking and contemplating this will of itself assist our service of G-d, inspiring us to attain our ultimate goal of Moshiach. *(Likutei Sichot, Vol. XX)*



And when he saw that the resting place was good...he bent his shoulder to bear (Gen. 49:15)

Issachar recognized that although leisure is a good and pleasant thing, it can also be dangerous. In times of peace and tranquility the Evil Inclination intensifies its efforts to lead a person astray, which can lead to disaster. Issachar therefore "bent his shoulder to bear" the yoke of Torah, for Torah study is the antidote to this pitfall. *(Likutei Diburim)*