

L'Chaim

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Weekly Publication
for every Jewish Person

December 31, 2010 - 24 Teves, 5771

1152: VAERA

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Living with the **REBBE**



This week's Torah reading, Va'eira, narrates the dramatic first confrontation between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh. G-d commanded Aaron that if Pharaoh were to ask for a miracle as proof that G-d had sent them, Aaron was to throw his staff upon the ground and it would turn into a serpent.

Indeed, Pharaoh asked for a sign, and Aaron did as G-d had instructed him. Pharaoh then called for his magicians and ordered them to do the same. "They cast down every man his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs."

While this whole incident demands further explanation, one of the most remarkable occurrences was the miracle of Aaron's staff swallowing up the other staffs. Why did this miracle take place and what was its significance?

To explain:

The miracles and plagues G-d inflicted on Egypt were not intended only as punishment; rather, their purpose was to break the Egyptians' opposition to G-d. The underlying belief in Egypt was that G-d has absolutely no effect on reality. They believed that after G-d created the world, He placed it under the sole control of natural forces.

This false notion was disproved by the Ten Plagues, each one of which refuted a different aspect of the Egyptians' world-view. The miracle of Aaron's staff swallowing the magicians' staffs laid the groundwork and prepared the Egyptians for the events that would follow.

Symbolically speaking, Aaron stood for the "side of holiness," while his staff was symbolic of the G-dly power of sanctity. The serpent was symbolic of Egypt, as the Prophet Ezekiel termed it, "Egypt, the great serpent that lies in the midst of its streams." When Aaron's staff turned into a serpent, it demonstrated to Pharaoh that Egypt, even against its will, is ultimately sustained from the forces of holiness. Not to be outdone, Pharaoh summoned his magicians and had them turn their staffs into serpents, thereby "proving" that Egypt has its own sources of power. But when "Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs," it showed, definitively and absolutely, that all of Egypt's unholy powers were only an illusion, without a true and independent existence of their own.

In this way, G-d demonstrated to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt that His influence and dominion extended even to them. It was, in effect, the first chink in the Egyptians' theological armor, and thus a precursor to the Ten Plagues, each of which negated a different level of Egypt's spiritual impurity. ■

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Volume 26

It's Not Fair!

It's not fair. Why can't I? You let him do it! You gave her the prize! I was only five minutes late. I only missed it by two points.

We hear these kinds of complaints from children all the time. They involve a perceived injustice. The injustice, in adult eyes, is slight - if it exists at all. But in the eyes of the child, the injustice is great indeed, an affront to the child's dignity, to his or her worthiness. So the child believes, or would have us believe.

We soon graduate to greater injustices. In Little League, we're second team. In the school play, we don't get the part destined for us.

Someone cut me off from the parking space when I was running late. I didn't have time to do the report. The professor gave us homework even though there's a big game - what does he expect?

We fill our lives with excuses. And we excuse those we care about. Our explanations and excuses are clever, convincing, irrefutable - and denied to others.

This starts early in life: In elementary school, if you came to school on time, ready to start the day, you got a point or a star. After so many points or stars, those who came on time got a reward. And those who didn't? How many children, and mothers, complain and whine and accuse.

From elementary school through adolescence: How many students complain and argue and whine that they worked so hard on the paper, studied so hard for the test, and the teacher gave them a grade that they didn't deserve.

As children, we try to excuse our irresponsibility. As adults, we often teach and live a life of excuses.

It doesn't have to be this way. For the pattern of excuse making is detrimental not only emotionally and psychologically, but spiritually as well. And this in two ways.

First, getting angry at another for our irresponsibility, turning the consequences of our behavior into an injustice, may be described as "all the more so like idolatry."

Additionally, not accepting the consequences of our actions avoids our primary spiritual responsibility. Chasidic teachings explains that we are to transform this world into a "dwelling place for G-dliness" - specifically by transforming our portion of the world. More than our Torah study and performance of mitzvot (commandments), we need to transform those actions and influences under our control.

And the only way to create that transformation is through teshuva - through acknowledging the consequences of our actions (and teaching others, our "children" in whatever sense, the same) even if it's as simple as: I was tardy three times, so I don't get the ice cream.

There are of course real injustices we must argue against. There is evil we must fight.

But an "it's not fair" requires a different response. An affront to our ego is a signal to accept the consequences of our actions, to use our mistakes and errors as opportunities for teshuva - for through the small, seemingly trivial transformations we make in our "corner of the world" will come the larger, world transforming teshuva - and the era of Redemption. ■

**MEZUZAH
DID YOU
KNOW???**

It takes:

22 Lines, 713 Letters, 4649 Laws

governing the writing of each Mezuzah by an ordained scribe.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman

This Friday (December 31 this year) is the 24th of Tevet, the *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Chasidic philosophy.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman opened a new path which allowed the teaching of the previously hidden aspects of the Torah - P'nimiyut HaTorah - to be comprehended through the intellect and thus reveal additional G-dliness within the world.

But Rabbi Shneur Zalman was not only a master in the area of the more esoteric aspects of the Torah. Even as a child he was considered a great scholar of the revealed parts of the Torah - *nigle d'Torah*, as well.

This quality of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's is alluded to in his name, Shneur, which can be broken up into two Hebrew words, "Shnei" and "ohr" which mean "two lights." Rabbi Shneur Zalman illuminated the world with his greatness in the two light of the Torah.

In Rabbi Shneur Zalman's magnum opus, *Tanya*, he writes: "The Messianic Era... is the fulfillment and culmination of the creation of the world, for which purpose it was originally created." This means that our spiritual service will reach its full completion only with the fulfillment and culmination of the entire creation which will take place when Moshiach is revealed.

The entire purpose, in fact, of the revelation of Chasidic philosophy was to hasten and prepare the world for the Messianic Era.

Thus, when each one of us studies Chasidut, whether the more sublime aspects or the most esoteric concepts, we prepare ourselves and the world around us for Moshiach. ■

The Rebbe Writes

10th of Nissan, 5721 [1961]

Greeting and Blessing:

This is in reply to your letter and questions:

(1) Regarding the mechitzah [partition] in the synagogue.

You mention several explanations which have been suggested to you, according to which the necessity for a mechitzah would be qualified and limited to certain conditions only.

Let me preface my answer with a general observation about a misconception in this matter. It is a mistake to think that the mechitzah is degrading to the honor or dignity of the Jewish woman. The best proof of this is that although the love of parents for their children is not only a very natural one, but has even been hallowed by the Torah, as we pray to G-d to show us the same fatherly feeling ("As a father has mercy on his children"), yet there is a *din* in the *Shulchan Aruch* [Code of Jewish Law] that it is forbidden to kiss one's children in shul [synagogue], and, moreover, even not during the time of prayer. Not to mention the *din* of the Torah to esteem and honor every human being created in the "image" of G-d. To think that there could be anything degrading in the mechitzah is to betray complete ignorance not only of the significance of the mechitzah but of the whole attitude and way of the Torah.

One of the inner and essential reasons for the mechitzah - since you insist on an explanation - is that the synagogue, and the time of prayer in general (even when recited at home), are not merely the place and time when a formal petition is offered to Him Who is able to fulfill the petition; it is much more profound than that. It is the time and place when the person offering the prayer unites himself with Him to Whom the prayer is offered, by means of the prayer. And as our Sages declare: Know before Whom you stand: before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. "Know" (*da*), as the term *daas* is explained in the *Tanya*, in the sense of unity, as in "And Adam knew Eve." The union of two things can be complete only when there is not a third element involved, be it even a matter of holiness and the like.

From the above it follows that there certainly must be nothing to distract the attention and the attunement of the heart and mind towards the attainment of the highest degree of unity with G-d.

From the above it also follows that the separation of the sexes by a mechitzah has nothing to do with any particular condition or state in the women, as has been suggested to you.

It further follows also that the purpose of the mechitzah is not just to set up a visible boundary for which a mechitzah of several inches might do, but it must be one that completely hides the view, otherwise a mechitzah does not accomplish its purpose.

I have indicated above, though quite briefly, some of the basic facts about a mechitzah and the essential explanation behind it in order to answer your questions and satisfy your curiosity. I must say, however, quite emphatically, that the approach of measuring Torah and mitzvot by the yardstick of the limited and often fallacious human reason is totally wrong. The human intellect is a very unreliable gauge, and quite changeable from one extreme to the other. Even in the so-called exact sciences, the unreliability of human reason and deduction has been amply demonstrated, and what was one day considered as an "absolute" truth is the next day abrogated with equal certainty and absoluteness. Hence to presume to make conditions in regard to the eternal and G-d-given Torah and mitzvot [commandments] is completely out of place.

Therefore, inasmuch as we have been instructed to have a mechitzah in the house of prayer, it would violate even the common sense to present a petition to the Almighty in a manner which displeases Him, and to add insult to injury, to declare that "the reason I do not accept this regulation is because my human intelligence suggests to act otherwise than is the will of the *En Sof* [the Infinite], yet, please fulfill my request anyway!"

Much more should be said on this subject, but it is difficult to do so in a letter.

Continued in next week's issue ... ■



SLICE OF LIFE

A Mezuzah Story

by Tzvi Zimmerman

Since childhood, my daughter Shirley was a gifted athlete. Her favorite sport was swimming, and her trainers predicted a bright future. When she was 12 years old, in 1982, she had already won a number of local competitions in her hometown, Haifa.

Suddenly Shirley began to complain of pain in her legs. My wife and I thought it was due to her heavy exercising. Her doctor, after examining her, agreed with our assessment and advised Shirley to lay off exercising until the pains would subside. However, Shirley was stubborn. She ignored the doctor's advice and continued training for swimming competitions.

After a few days, the pains intensified, to the point that Shirley began to limp. We immediately had her hospitalized in the Carmel Hospital in Haifa. The doctors performed more tests but could not pinpoint the cause of her pain. Her legs weakened until she was unable to stand altogether.

I consulted with top orthopedic doctors in Israel. However, they were all unable to explain the sudden paralysis in Shirley's legs.

Six weeks passed, in which Shirley lay in bed in great pain. I remember lifting Shirley in my arms to feed her, to wash her. My eyes would fill with tears to see this decline in my active, athletic daughter.

One Thursday evening, the telephone rang in

my office. My wife was on the line, and she told me that a half-hour ago, three young Chabadniks came to our door. Now they were waiting in my home to speak to me. She asked me to hurry home to find out what they wanted.

When I came home, I saw an unusual sight. Two of the Chabadniks were chatting in the kitchen with my older daughter. A third was playing piano and singing with my youngest son, Danny. My wife, who was exhausted from the difficult weeks, had gone to her room to lie down, leaving the children with the guests.

The Chabadniks were not perturbed at all by my sudden appearance. They felt completely at home. The three identified themselves as Gidi Sharon, Menashe Althaus and Zohar Eisenberg. They told me that they had heard of my daughter Shirley's difficulties, and wanted to help. They offered to write a letter on my behalf to the Lubavitcher Rebbe to request his blessing.

I gave my consent, and then there ensued a series of conversations between the Chabadniks and the Rebbe's secretariat in New York. On one occasion, the Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Groner, asked to speak with me. He asked me several questions, and then told me that the Rebbe had promised to pray for Shirley at the gravesite of his father-in-law, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe.

In accordance with the Rebbe's instructions, the young Chabadniks removed the mezuzot from my door posts for inspection. The first mezuzah to be inspected was from the door of Shirley's bedroom. They unrolled the mezuzah and began reading through it, letter by letter. When they came to the word "u'vkumecha" (when you will stand up) they stopped. The letter "kuf" in the word was rubbed out, which rendered the mezuzah unfit. They had brought with them an extra kosher mezuzah, which they proceeded to affix on the doorpost of Shirley's room.

Personally, I was not all that convinced that changing the mezuzah on Shirley's bedroom door would have any effect on her legs. But the Chabadniks had utmost confidence that Shirley's recovery was practically a done deal. They wanted to make a toast, as if Shirley had already begun to walk again. "You'll see," said Eisenberg. "The Rebbe has given his blessing, the mezuzah was replaced - everything will be OK now."

We said L'chaim, and the young men went off on their way.

The next day, Friday, I went to the hospital early in the morning to visit Shirley. When I got to the hallway leading to Shirley's ward, I rubbed my eyes in surprise - Shirley was walking towards me! She was still limping and leaning on a walker, but she was on her own two feet.

After Shabbat, Shirley was released from the hospital. Her condition improved rapidly and the pains subsided. After two weeks, she was back in school and showed no signs of the pain or paralysis. The doctors admitted that they could find no cause for her sickness or for its sudden disappearance. ■ *Reprinted from www.OhrTmimim.com*

Moshiach Matters

In Exodus (6:6) we read: "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." The Jewish people possess an extra measure of patience, a special capacity for enduring the trials and tribulations of exile. And yet, when the exact time for redemption comes, they find it impossible to continue. This in itself is a sign that the redemption is imminent. ■

(Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop)

What's In A Name?


SHOSHANA means "rose." In Song of Songs, the verse "Like a rose among thorns" alludes to the Jewish people amongst the nations.

SHEMAYA is from the Aramaic, meaning "to hear." Shemaya was a prophet during the times of King Rehovoam (I Kings 12:22). Shemaya was also the name of the President of the Sanhedrin (Great Court) during the first century, b.c.e. He said, "Love work; abhor taking high office; and do not seek intimacy with the ruling power." (Avot 1:10)

News

New Torah Scrolls

A new Torah scroll destined for the Chabad Talmud Torah in Tel Aviv, Israel, was paraded through the streets of the Yad Eliyahu neighborhood where the Talmud Torah is located amidst dancing and singing. A double completion ceremony for two Torah scrolls took place in the Golders Green neighborhood of London, England. Over 1,000 people gathered on the streets to accompany the scrolls, one of which had been written in memory of the Jews murdered in Mumbai. The scrolls will be used by the congregation of Heichal Menachem. Chelsea Piers in Manhattan, NY, was the venue for a Torah scroll completion ceremony at the National Committee for Furtherance of Jewish Education (NCFJE) 70th Annual Awards Dinner. The Torah, started two years ago, on the 18th Anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Jacob J. Hecht, was completed with the participation of 800 supporters of the organization. Jubilant dancing accompanied a newly completed Torah scroll to its new home in the Chabad Synagogue in the Kiryat Hayovel neighborhood in Jerusalem, Israel. A Torah was completed on the heights of the Masada fortress in the area of the Dead Sea, Israel. The Torah will be housed at the very spot where the original Masada Torahs are buried, symbolizing the vitality of the Jewish nation. The Jewish community of Saratov, Russia, celebrated with a new Torah that had been anonymously gifted to the community and brought into the synagogue. A new Torah was paraded around the Stamford Hill neighborhood of London, England, and found its home in the Beis Moshiach Center of London. ■

Important Times <i>Shacharis</i> 7:00am Sunday 8:00am Monday/Thursday 6:45am <i>Minchah/Maariv</i> 5:15pm Shabbos 5:00pm <i>Shabbat</i> Shabbos Mevorchim Tehillim Minyan 8:00am Shacharis 9:30am Light Candles 5:12pm Shabbat Ends 6:11pm	December 31 – January 7	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 The court of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Chasidism, was located in the small, White Russian town of Liozna. His many chasidim flocked there to be near him, to pray, to celebrate the festivals, to receive his blessings and to benefit from his Torah-wisdom.

Once, a chasid came to the Rebbe with a heavy sorrow weighing on his soul. When he entered the Rebbe's chambers, he couldn't restrain himself, and tears flowed from his eyes. "Rebbe," he sobbed, "my son has turned away from everything we have taught him. He no longer follows mitzvot (commandments), and I'm afraid that he will be completely lost from the path of truth. Please, Rebbe, give me some advice how to get him back."

The Rebbe felt his chasid's pain, and he was silent for some moments. Then he replied, "Do you think that you might be able to persuade the boy to come to see me?"

"I don't know," the man sighed. "The way he's been acting recently, I'm afraid it might be very difficult. He has some wild friends, and he hardly listens to his parents."

"Nevertheless, I want you to think up some way in which you can get him to come here. Maybe there's some errand you can send him on that would bring him to Liozna. When he gets to the town, a way will be found to bring him here to me."

The prospect of the Rebbe taking charge of his wayward son lifted the chasid's spirits. He returned home in a far brighter mood than the one in which he had come.

The man spent the whole return trip to his village deep in thought, trying to hatch some plan which would draw his son to the Rebbe. Suddenly he had an excellent idea. Much to his dismay, his son was very fond of horse-back riding, an activity considered improper for a Jewish boy. The boy, however, cared not the least for public opinion, and to his father's consternation, he took every opportunity to ride into town. This seemed a perfect ruse to get his son to the Rebbe. He would ask the boy to go and pick something up in town.

When he asked his son to go on the errand, the boy responded, "I'll go only if I can go by horseback." This time the father quickly acquiesced.

The boy happily galloped into town, unaware that his father's friends were on the lookout for him, and that the errand was merely a signal to them to bring him to the Rebbe's house.

No sooner had he arrived in Liozna, than he was spirited to the Rebbe's house, and found himself standing face to face with The Alter Rebbe. "I'm glad to see you," said the Rebbe. "But, tell me, why did you come by horseback, instead of in a wagon?"

"To tell you the truth, it's because I love to ride. And my horse is such a fine specimen, I figure, why shouldn't I take advantage of him?"

"Really? Tell me, what exactly are the advantages of such an animal?" asked the Rebbe.

"Surely you can imagine, an animal such as mine runs very fast. You jump on his back, and speed down the road, and in no time at all you are at your destination," the young man replied with great enthusiasm.

"That is truly a great advantage, but only provided that you are on the right road. Because, if you're on the wrong road, you'll only be going in the wrong direction faster."

"Even if that's so," countered by the young man, "the horse would help you get back on the right road more quickly as soon as you realize you're on the wrong road."

"If you realize yourself that you are on the wrong road," the Rebbe slowly emphasized. "It's true, my boy, if you catch yourself, before it's too late, and you realize that you have strayed from the right path; then you can quickly return."

The words of the Rebbe, uttered so slowly and deliberately, hit the young man like a bombshell, and the Rebbe's penetrating eyes seemed to pierce right through him. The young man fell down in a faint.

He was quickly revived, and in a subdued tone, he asked the Rebbe's permission to remain in Liozna, so that he could renew his Torah studies. ■

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob... I have also heard the groaning of the Children of Israel (Exodus 6:3-5)

Moses was concerned that after 210 years of slavery in Egypt the Jewish people would have grown too accustomed to the exile to fully absorb the message that their redemption was imminent. G-d's answer about our Patriarchs thus reassured him that his worries were unwarranted; the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can never accustom themselves to exile, for to them it is an unnatural state. Every day that passes is as bitter as the very first. The same is true for us today. Despite the fact that this present exile has lasted more than 1900 years, the Jewish people is more than ready to accept the message that the Final Redemption is indeed imminent.

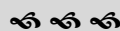
(The Rebbe, Shabbat Parshat Shemot, 5751)



Behold, the Children of Israel have not hearkened to me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me? (Ex. 6:12)

To Moses' claim that the Jews were unwilling to hear him talk about redemption, G-d replied, "These are the heads of their family divisions." In other words, it isn't the Jewish people's fault that they are unwilling to listen; it is the fault of their leaders, who are so far removed from the concept of redemption that they don't allow anyone to even mention it.

(Ohr HaChaim)



Why does Rashi comment that G-d appeared "to the Patriarchs"? To teach us that G-d revealed Himself to them not because of their great virtue, but solely because they were the fathers of the Jewish people, and would thus pass on everything they received to their descendants forever.

(Likutei Sichot)



And Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh (Ex. 7:7) Why does the Torah need to tell us the ages of Moses and Aaron? To refute the common misconception that only young people can carry the banner of liberation and redemption. Older people, too, can be "revolutionaries," if G-d determines it is necessary and the proper time.

(Shaarei Yerushalayim)