



THE THREE SONS

By Rifaela Freedman

Once there was a king who had three sons. Now, this king was growing old, and he knew that soon he would have to choose one of his sons to take over his kingdom after his passing. The king called together the three young men.

“My sons,” he said, “I am going to hold a contest to determine who among you will be the one to take over my kingdom. In the lower level of the palace is the wine cellar. I am going to give each of you a month to fill this wine cellar with whatever it is you want to use, and whomever fills the room to its fullest capacity will be the next ruler after me.”

The king and his sons then decided that the contest should begin by the order of age, and so the oldest son would have his turn to fill the cellar first. At midnight of the 30th day of the month, the king would examine the contents of the room and judge its completion.

The first day of the month was the beginning of the oldest son’s turn to fill the room. After much consideration, he decided to fill the room with rocks. For hours every day the son would gather rocks from his yard, town and beyond. He gathered boulders and pebbles. He sent away for chunks of marble and alabaster, whetstone and flint. As the month went by, the room began to fill with rocks of different shapes, sizes and colors. Soon thirty days had passed and the king went down to his wine cellar. At midnight the door to the room was shut, the window opened, and the king peered in. He looked around, nodded, smiled and said:

“Son, you have done a fine job. The room is packed with rocks, but because of their shapes, there is always space in between them, and therefore, the room can always be filled more. But for now, you are in the lead.”

The next morning was the middle son’s first day to gather his contents. He began to use feathers to fill the room. He found bright feathers and dull feathers. He collected feathers from peacocks and ravens. He threw whole turkeys into the room just to take up space. Day in and day out, he would walk through the town, scrounging up any feathers he could get his hands on. Eventually his thirtieth day arrived, and the son was called to the cellar. The king once again walked the steps down to the room. The door was shut, the window opened, and the king peered in. He examined his son’s job and smiled broadly.

“You have exceeded my expectations,” the king praised his second child. “But feathers can always be pushed down further to make room for more feathers. As of now, though, you are surpassing your brothers.”

At sunrise the next day, the youngest son’s turn began. His brothers watched expectantly to see if he found something more expansive or more easily compressed than they had. But the son rose early for prayer and continued his regular daily study schedule. He seemed to be doing nothing different to acknowledge the fact that his entire future was dependent on his actions this month.

The next day he followed suit, and so on through the first week. By the middle of the second week the older brothers began to talk amongst themselves.

“He’s not working on the project,” the eldest remarked. “He doesn’t seem to care about the outcome.”“Do you think he doesn’t understand the importance of the situation?” the second son asked.

The two brothers decided to speak with their father. Perhaps there was something he could say to the young son to encourage him to take action. After hearing what they had to say, the king approached his youngest son.

“My child, you are much younger than your brothers,” he reasoned. “If you need an extra week to prepare yourself, we would all be willing to extend your time limit.” The king made his offer and was stunned by his son’s reaction.

“Father, I thank you, but another week is not necessary. I will use my thirty days as planned, and I will not disappoint you.”

The king and his older sons did not discuss the matter any further, but they all were nervous when the thirtieth day of the month arrived and the youngest son still seemed unprepared for the trial which awaited him. Just before midnight, they saw him enter the room with a small sack. At twelve o’clock the son left the room, slowly closed the door behind him, and stepped back so his father, the king, could look through the wine cellar window.

The king approached the room and looked inside the window. The brothers were stunned to see a broad smile light up his face. The king called over the two boys and motioned for them to look into the room.

“My son, my dearest,” the king spoke, with tears in his eyes, “the light you have placed in the room could never fill it more than the joy I am feeling right now fills my heart. May you follow in my rule for many long and prosperous years.”

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT
on the weekly Torah portion

And Jacob dwelled in the land of his father’s sojourn (Gen. 37:1)

Jacob was able to dwell in peace even when forced to contend with Esau’s mighty armies. It was not until jealousy and hatred broke out among Joseph’s brothers over a seemingly insignificant issue -- the coat of many colors -- that the period of enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt began. We learn from this that contention and strife among brothers has the potential to cause far greater damage than even the most powerful outside enemy can inflict. (Alshich)

There has been no harlot here (Gen. 38:21)

No element of impropriety surrounded the birth of Peretz and Zerach; the entire incident was all part of the Divine plan that would lead to the birth of Moshiach, who will be a descendant of Judah. The reason for the circuitous and concealed manner in which this came about was solely to divert the attention of the Satan. (Rabbi Meir of Premishlan)

How then can I do this great evil and sin against G-d? (Gen. 39:9)

As Rashi explains, gentiles as well as Jews were forbidden by G-d to commit licentious acts. Being that the prohibition thus applied to Potiphar’s wife as well as to Joseph, would it not have been more correct for Joseph to say “we” instead of “I”? In truth, however, Joseph was referring to himself. His piety was such that he refused to speak directly to her; even one word alluding to something they shared in common was abhorrent. (Reb Bunim)

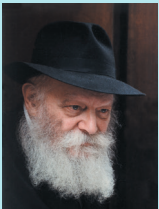


4:11 PM Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
22 Kislev / December 12
Torah Portion Vayeishev
Blessing of the new month of Tevet
Shabbat ends 5:14 PM

L'Chaim

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“Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth” (Psalms 124:8)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In the beginning of this week’s Torah portion, Vayeishev, we read about Joseph’s two dreams, both of which revolved around the same theme: that Joseph would one day rule over his brothers.

Next week, in Mikeitz, the Torah relates the two dreams of Pharaoh, which also shared a common message. There, however, the Torah tells us that the reason Pharaoh had two similar dreams was to emphasize that G-d was about to fulfill them imminently. No reason is given for the repetition of Joseph’s dreams; we must therefore conclude that although the two dreams shared a common theme, each one alluded to a different matter.

Let us now compare and contrast the dreams of Joseph and Pharaoh in order to obtain a better understanding of them.

In Joseph’s first dream his brothers’ sheaves of grain were bowing down to his, alluding to the physical plane of existence - (“And behold, your sheaves placed themselves round about, and bowed down to my sheaf.”) His second dream involved “the sun and moon and the eleven stars,” alluding to celestial and heavenly matters. In other words, Joseph’s second dream represented an ascent from the material realm to the realm of the spiritual.

Both of Pharaoh’s dreams, however, referred to the physical plane. The first dream involved the animal kingdom (the seven cows), and the second dream pertained to the lower level of plants (the seven ears of corn). Neither of Pharaoh’s dreams had anything to do with higher spiritual matters at all.

This underscores the essential difference between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. The Jewish people, even while leading a physical existence, are intimately connected with both worlds -- the physicality of the material world and the spirituality of the World to Come.

In truth, this is the task of every Jew: to properly utilize both realms and turn them into one. Not only must the Jew’s physical concerns not hinder his spiritual progress, his role is to harness the materiality of the world and transform it into spirituality, as Rabbi Shmuel, the fourth Chabad Rebbe, once explained to a group of young children: “The Jew’s nature is that he eats in order to live; he needs to live in order to be a Jew and perform G-d’s mitzvot.” Because the Jew’s underlying intent in all his physical concerns is spiritual, the material plane itself is successfully transformed, as the Baal Shem Tov declared: “Wherever a Jew’s will is, that is where he is found.”

Adapted by Maayan Chai from Likutei Sichot, volume 3

Image and Influence

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

How much do our parents and grandparents influence us? Of course, the genes we inherit from them determine lots of important things about us—from our cholesterol levels to when we will go gray. But what about emotionally or spiritually?

I’d like to suggest that they influence us more than we might care to admit. We also tend to underestimate the potential they have in molding the value systems of the next generation.

A powerful case in point is a story in this week’s Parshah. Joseph is sold into slavery down in Egypt, and winds up in the house of Potiphar. His master’s wife casts her lustful gaze on the handsome young man and repeatedly attempts to seduce him. Joseph is consistent in his refusal to even consider her advances. Then, one day, the entire household goes to the temple for a special occasion. She feigns illness in order to be home alone with Joseph. He comes to the house “to do his work” (Genesis 39:11). Rashi offers two interpretations: the simple, that he came to work; and another, that he actually came to do his “work” with her!

Joseph was beginning to falter. Morale and morality were weakening, and it seemed as if he was about to succumb to the temptress’ entreaties.

Then suddenly, something happened to help Joseph regain his senses and self-control. Says

Rashi: there appeared before Joseph a vision, one so potent that it restored his composure there and then. What was that image? Joseph suddenly saw the face of his father, Jacob, and with that his moral resolve was restored.

The straightforward understanding of this Talmudic passage is that Joseph remembered his father and envisioned his patriarchal face. And with that image in his mind, Joseph found renewed spiritual stamina to resist temptation.

Some might understand this episode as Joseph not wanting to disappoint his aged father. Others might see the image as a catalyst evoking in Joseph his own latent spiritual resources. Either way, with Jacob’s visage in his mind, Joseph wasn’t prepared to lose the moral high ground. He couldn’t and wouldn’t do it to his dad. And, through his father, Joseph remembered who he was—a proud son of Jacob and grandson of Isaac and Abraham.

Such was the effect Jacob had on Joseph, and such is the effect every father and mother, grandfather and grandfather, can potentially bring to bear on their offspring. Of course, they would have to be respected by their children as men and women of stature for their image to represent any kind of moral symbolism.

Joseph was nearly lost in Egypt, but that image of his father saved him from sin and helped him go on to achieve greatness. May we all be good role models, and may our own images help inspire our children and grandchildren.

SLICE OF LIFE

A Birthday Gift That Keeps Giving



Avi Tavisal at the Chabad Tefillin booth near the Western Wall

The scribe who had prepared to write a Torah scroll was taken aback. “There’s a change in plans,” announced the businessman who had commissioned the work. “Instead of a Torah scroll, I need you to write sixty pairs of tefillin for me.”

This conversation took place just over a decade ago. Avi Tavisal, a businessman from Ramat Efal, Israel, was approaching his sixtieth birthday and had originally planned to commission a Torah scroll to mark the milestone. When he mentioned this idea to his friend Rabbi Levi Gopin, the Chabad emissary at Sheba Medical Center and Ramat Efal, the rabbi had a different suggestion.

“He proposed an upgrade to my original idea,” Avi recalls. “The rabbi pointed out that while many Jews commission Torah scrolls—which is wonderful—I had an opportunity to do something truly original. Why not order sixty pairs of tefillin and place them at stands where they could

benefit countless people?”

The idea immediately resonated with Avi. The scribe, too, was inspired by the unconventional project, and work began on the ambitious undertaking. Today, those sixty pairs of tefillin have been serving the Jewish community for over a decade, stationed at stands throughout Israel and beyond—from the Western Wall and Ben Gurion Airport to Tel Hashomer hospital, and extending internationally to countries like Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia, and Ukraine.

Tavisal, a jeweler who has long been involved in charitable work, finds himself deeply moved by the constant stream of reports about his tefillin in action. “I receive video clips from emissaries around the world showing me Jews from every background putting on the tefillin I donated,” he explains. “What touches me most are the videos of people putting on tefillin for the very first time—experiencing this sacred Jewish tradition that connects them to thousands of years of heritage. It’s pure joy to witness.”

Avi’s connection to Jewish outreach work spans decades, with the Serbia Chabad house serving as one particularly meaningful example of his involvement. Rabbi Yehoshua Kaminetzky, the emissary to Serbia, recalls how it all began: “About fifteen years ago, I was a newly married young man living in Kiryat Malachi and studying Torah full-time. My study partner mentioned this businessman named Avi Tavisal who operated a jewelry store in Serbia and couldn’t understand why there wasn’t a Chabad house there.”

The rabbi admits he had to consult a map to locate Serbia. “When I contacted Avi to learn more about the possibility, his response was characteristically direct: ‘Don’t ask questions—buy a plane ticket and go see for yourself.’ He connected me

with his employees, who introduced me to the local Jewish community. Every person I spoke with gave me the same message: ‘Just come—we’ve been waiting for you.’”

The decision came swiftly. “My wife and I knew immediately that this was our calling. After receiving approval from Chabad’s international headquarters, we began our mission in Serbia, where we continue our work to this day.”

As Avi’s sixty-ninth birthday approached, he faced no uncertainty about how to commemorate his upcoming seventieth. Rabbi Gopin had already planted the seed for the next milestone. “He suggested I reach seventy having already distributed seventy pairs of tefillin,” Avi shares. “Over this past year, I’ve been able to place additional pairs at stands throughout Israel—the Western Wall, the Cave of the Patriarchs, Har Homa neighborhood, Arad, Tel Aviv’s Carmel Market, and other locations.”

Avi maintains meticulous records of his donations. “I keep a detailed list of where every pair of tefillin is located. Some pairs are used by nearly a hundred people each day! It’s an extraordinary privilege to facilitate these connections.”

His willingness to share these stories stems from a desire to inspire others to similar acts of giving. One interaction particularly exemplifies this approach: “A soldier once called me, explaining how much he wanted to put on tefillin but couldn’t afford to buy them. I invited him to meet with me, and I could see the genuine longing in his eyes. I gave him a pair as a gift, with one condition—that he become an emissary within his unit, helping other soldiers experience this tradition as well. He gave me his word, and from what I understand, he’s been true to his promise.”

Adapted from Sichat Shavua

A CALL TO ACTION

Participate in the Chanuka Campaign:

Send or give someone you know (a friend, a college student away from home, a co-worker) a Chanuka menora and a box of candles to light each of the eight nights of Chanuka beginning this year on Sunday evening, December 14, 2005.

Most Judaica stores sell inexpensive tin menoras, or call your local Chabad-Lubavitch Center.

For more information about the Chanukah holiday and for a comprehensive Chanukah Guide please visit www.chabad.org

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

BETTER AND BETTER

Rosh Chodesh Kislev, 5736 [1976]

.... I was pleased to be informed of the forthcoming event taking place in the middle of this month of Kislev, which is highlighted by the Festival of Chanuka. This makes the occasion particularly timely and auspicious.

Chanuka commemorates the miraculous victory of our people over the forces of darkness and assimilation that had threatened to extinguish the light of the Torah and mitzvot. It also reminds us that this victory was achieved through the efforts of a few, but totally dedicated Jews, and that the victory was celebrated by kindling lights in the Sanctuary in Jerusalem with pure, undefiled oil, which gave us the meaningful mitzva of the Chanuka Lights.

Of the Chanuka Lights our Sages of blessed memory declared: “These lights shall endure and shine forever.” Unlike the seven-branched Menora, the lighting of which had to be discontinued when the Sanctuary was destroyed nearly 2,000 years ago, the lighting of the eight-branched Chanuka lamp, which was inaugurated some 200 years prior to the Destruction, continued uninterruptedly ever since, not only in the Holy Land but also in the Diaspora, and not only in the Sanctuary, but in every Jewish home.

What are some of the eternal messages of these eternal lights of Chanuka?

One basic truth is that the destiny of the Jewish people is not determined by material and physical criteria, but by its spiritual strength derived from one G-d-given Torah and mitzvot.

The victory of the greatly outnumbered and physically disadvantaged Jews over

the many and mighty forces of the enemy clearly demonstrated that it is our spiritual strength that really counts -- even in areas where physical superiority is usually decisive.

A further lesson is that Jewish strength begins at home.

A Jewish home is an abode for the Divine Presence, very much as the Beit HaMikdash [Holy Temple] in Jerusalem was in a collective sense. Both are included in the Divine command, “Make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell within each one of you.”

This, too, is reflected in the Chanuka Lights, for they must be lit in every Jewish home.

The time and location of the Chanuka Lights are also significant:

The lights are kindled “when the sun sets” -- when “darkness” falls outside it is high time to light up our homes with the sacred Chanuka Lights, symbolizing the eternal light of Torah and mitzvot. While the location -- to be visible also outside -- further indicates that the Torah and mitzvot not be confined within the walls of the home, but must shine forth also outside.

Yet another important lesson must be mentioned here, namely, that however satisfactory the observance of Torah and mitzvot may be on one day, a Jew is expected to do better the next day, and still better the day after. There is always room for improvement in matters of goodness and holiness, which are infinite, being derived from The Infinite.

This, too, is underscored by the Chanuka Lights. For, although all that is required to fulfill the mitzva of candle-lighting on the first night of Chanuka is to light one candle, yet the next night of Chanuka it is required to light two candles, and when another day passes even the higher standard of the previous day is no longer adequate, and an additional light is called for, and so on, to increase the light from day to day.

The above-mentioned practical lessons which are so basic to Chanuka as to the Jewish way in general, are also the basic principles that pervade all Lubavitch activities to spread the light of Torah-Judaism, particularly through Chinuch, Torah-education.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

It is human nature that when a person who is involved in a particular issue confronts any new concept, he immediately looks for the connection it shares with the idea with which he was originally involved.

A Jew must constantly be involved in the yearning and desire for the coming of Moshiach. “Each day, we must wait for him, that he come.” Therefore, it is natural for a Jew to look for a connection to Moshiach’s coming in every event or concept which he encounters.

(The Rebbe, 28 Kislev, 5751-1990)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'Chaim Publication.
From the Archives

As we approach the Chanukah holiday, let us examine a lesser-known aspect of Chanukah. There are numerous reasons why the festival is referred to as Chanukah.

One of these reasons is because the Holy Temple was rededicated - after it had been cleansed and purified from the Greek idolatry - on the 25th of Kislev.

The Hebrew word for “dedication,” - “chinuch,” shares the same root as the word Chanukah. But chinuch does not only mean dedication. It also means “education.”

Chanukah is an appropriate time to think about education: our Jewish education and the education of Jewish children, whether ours or other people’s.

Jewish education must be like the cruse of oil found in the Holy Temple even after the Holy Temple had been defiled by the Greeks.

The cruse of oil used to relight the menorah was pure and unsullied. Its seal was not broken by the Greek invaders; they were not able to taint it with their cynicism and disdain for that which is holy.

Jewish education must be pursued in a similar manner. Whether it’s learning to read Hebrew (at the age of five or fifty), finding out the whys and wherefores behind the many beautiful customs and rituals, learning the weekly Torah portion in-depth, or assiduously studying the more esoteric aspects of Jewish teachings, it should be pursued with an open mind, an open heart, and with purity of spirit.

What better time than the Festival of Lights to dedicate ourselves to Jewish education at all levels.

Shmuel Butman

L’ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה'י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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