



# IT HAPPENED ONCE

Over 150 years ago in the town of Belz, there was a very holy Rebbe called Rav Shalom of Belz. He had tens of thousands of Chasidim and his name was famous throughout much of the Jewish world.

One year on the first night of *Selichot* (special penitential prayers said before Rosh Hashana), instead of going to the large synagogue to signal the beginning of the prayers, Rav Shalom asked his assistant to ready his carriage for they were going into the woods. The astonished assistant thought of the Chasidim who were waiting for the Rebbe's arrival in the synagogue but he knew better than to ask questions and went out to prepare the carriage.

A half hour into their journey, the Rebbe signaled the assistant to stop. The Rebbe told the assistant to remain in the carriage while he walked down a narrow path by foot. In the distance was a small hut. The Rebbe walked over to the window of the hut and looked inside. There sat an elderly Jew, alone at a small table. On the table was a bottle of vodka and two small cups, one in front of him and the other before the empty seat opposite him.

Through the window the Rebbe could see the Jew, raise his cup, say "l'chaim" ("to life") and drink the vodka. Then he saw the Jew drink the second cup as well. This he repeated two more times after which the Rebbe walked quickly back to the wagon. Together with his assistant, the Rebbe travelled back to Belz.

When the doors of the synagogue opened and the Rebbe entered, the congregation fell silent. All eyes followed the Rebbe to his place at the front of the synagogue, and the room burst into prayer as they began to say *Selichot*.

As soon as *Selichot* ended the Rebbe turned to his assistant and said, "There is an elderly Jew, who came in after we had begun and I'm sure he will finish after everyone else has left. Please wait for him to finish and tell him that I want him to come to my study."

A half hour later, Zelig stood in trepidation before Rav Shalom. "I want you to tell me what you did in your house before you came here tonight," began the Rebbe. "Why did you have two cups of vodka and with whom did you make a l'chaim?"

"The Rebbe knows that!" he asked, his eyes opened wide in amazement.

"I was at your house and saw what transpired. But I want to understand what you did there," the Rebbe explained.

"I'm a poor man, Rebbe, I have no children and my wife passed on years ago. I live alone with my few farm animals, that is, until a few months ago. My cow got sick so I prayed to G-d to heal the cow. 'After all,' I said to G-d 'You create the entire world and everything in it, certainly you can heal one cow!'"

"But the cow got worse. So I said, 'Listen G-d, if you don't heal that cow I'm not going to the synagogue any more!' I figured that if G-d doesn't care about me, I mean, it's nothing for Him to heal one old cow! So why should I care? But the cow died and I got mad and ... I stopped going to the synagogue."

"Then my goat got sick. I said to G-d 'What! You haven't had enough? Do you think I'm bluffing? If this goat dies I'm not putting on tefilin any more!' So the goat died and I stopped putting on tefilin."

"Then my chickens got ill and I told G-d that if they die I'm not going to keep Shabbat. A week later I was without chickens and G-d was without my Shabbat."

"Well, I held out for over a week until suddenly I realized that the time for *Selichot* was approaching. I thought to myself, Zelig, you aren't going to go say *Selichot* with the Rebbe? What, are you crazy!??? But on the other hand I was angry with G-d and I wasn't going to the synagogue."

"So I remembered that once I had an argument with Shmerel the butcher. For about a month we didn't even say 'hello.' Then one night he came to my house with a bottle of vodka and said 'Let's forget the past and be friends. We Jews have enough enemies.' So we said 'l'chaim' three times, shook hands and even danced around a little together and we were friends again."

"I figured I would do the same thing with G-d. I invited Him to sit opposite me, poured us two cups and said 'Listen G-d, You forget my faults and I'll forget Yours. All Right?'"

"I drank my cup and understood that G-d wanted me to drink His. And after we did it twice more I stood up and we danced together! Then I felt better and came to *Selichot*."

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The Rebbe became very serious. He looked deeply into Zelig's innocent eyes and said. "Listen, Zelig. Before we began *Selichot* I saw that in heaven there was a terrible decree on our holy congregation. The reason was that the Chasidim were saying the words in the prayer book but they weren't really praying seriously to G-d. But you, Zelig, you talked to G-d like He is your friend. Your simple heart saved the entire congregation!"

Adapted from [www.ohrtmimim.org/torah](http://www.ohrtmimim.org/torah)

## THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

**"Reproof"**  
The Torah portion of *Ki Tavo* contains a section known as the "Reproof" – punishments that will be inflicted on Israel if they do not obey G-d. On a deeper level, however, these curses are directed at the Evil Inclination, as the Torah states several chapters later (Deut. 30:7): "And the L-rd your G-d will place all these denunciations upon your enemies, and on those who hate you." This will reach its culmination in the Messianic era, when "I will cause the impure spirit to depart from the land." At that time, all of Israel's enemies, both within and without, will be destroyed. (*Ohr HaTorah*)

**I have not deviated from Your commandments, and I have not forgotten (Deut. 26:13)**  
If a person hasn't deviated from G-d's commandments, isn't it self-evident that he hasn't forgotten them either? Why the seeming redundancy? Rather, he goes on to say, it is entirely possible to perform a mitzva yet "forget" what one is doing – if the mind is focused on other matters. (*Sefat Emet*)

**Because you did not serve the L-rd your G-d with joy and gladness of heart...therefore will you serve your enemies (Deut. 28:47-48)**  
Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidic Movement, would cite this verse to underscore the importance of serving G-d in a happy and joyful manner. Doing so brings joy to G-d Himself, as it were, and has the power to nullify all decrees.

**In the morning you will say, "Would that it were evening!" And in the evening you will say, "Would that it were morning!" (Deut. 28:67)**  
The early Chasidim interpreted this "curse" as impetus along the path of self-improvement: When you wake up in the morning and consider the quality of your G-dly service, you will pine for the superior level of the night before. In the evening, when assessing the day's spiritual progress, you will find that you have descended even further, and hope to return to that morning's level.



### 7:18 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area  
19 Elul/Aug 27  
Torah Portion *Ki Tavo*  
Ethics Ch 3 & 4  
Shabbat ends 8:16 PM

# L'Chaim

בס"ד  
1687  
19 Elul, 5781  
Aug 27, 2021  
The Weekly Publication  
for Every Jewish Person  
ניסד תור ימי השלושים  
Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson  
"... I have called out to the L-rd and He answered me" (Psalm 120:1)



## LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe  
on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, *Ki Tavo*, Moses teaches the Jewish people about bringing the gift of the first-ripened fruits – *bikurim* – to the Holy Temple. *Bikurim* requires a declaration of our gratitude to G-d; it is the basis for the commandment to show appreciation.

The portion continues with the laws of the gifts given to the Levites and the poor. It then contains the list of blessings if the Jews will follow the Torah and the curses if not.

Finally, Moses tells the Jewish people that "G-d didn't give you a heart to understand... Until this day."

Usually we connect the brain with understanding and the heart to emotions. However, here it says "a heart to understand." What is the connection between the heart and understanding that we speak of here?

The answer could be found by looking at the Hebrew word used here, "da'at," which we translate as understanding.

Just because someone is smart, doesn't stop him from doing immature or stupid things. Watch a smart child play in the mud wearing his nicest clothes or a genius implode over a trivial matter.

This is because he lacks da'at.

What is da'at? Da'at is the ability to take your smarts and apply it to your emotional make-up. It is the bridge between the mind and heart. This takes time and effort.

For the Jewish people in the desert it took 40 years to develop this level of understanding, where their heart and mind beat to the same Jewish drum.

This process can be accomplished by every one of us, through time and effort. Every day we become more in sync, every Torah lesson we apply to ourselves, we become more in tune with G-d.

The same is true for our relationships. First you get to know each other. But with time and effort the relationship gets deeper and you begin to sense your other way of seeing things. Until there comes a time that you are so in sync, that you don't have to think about it, you just know.

This is "a heart to understand." When your emotions, and subsequently your actions, are in sync with your mind, specifically with your Torah knowledge.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, [yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com](http://yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com). Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

## So Sorry

"Listen, I'm really sorry it happened and I'm going to try to make sure it doesn't happen again," you say spontaneously but with genuine regret after the minor snafu. It was, after all, a mistake – an avoidable error that you hope you will not repeat.

What about when a bigger slip-up happens? One that you can't smooth over as easily with an, "I'm sorry, it won't happen again"? Whether you've got to come clean with your boss, your significant other, a colleague or a family member, you've got to put more thought into your apology and into how you can make sure the mistake won't reoccur.

And if it's a really serious transgression, it'll take more than a well-thought out apology to clear the air. It might take a series of open discussions, a chain of actions to undo the harm done, and lots of time to heal the wounds.

Beginning this Saturday evening and continuing each morning until Rosh Hashana, we say special prayers asking G-d for forgiveness. Known as *Selichot*, they are a spiritual work-out that helps us get ready for the Day of Judgement – Rosh Hashana. On Rosh Hashana, when we stand before the Heavenly Court, all of our misdemeanors cheerfully come to greet us, so to speak. We have to be well-prepared for the encounter with real and practiced feelings of regret and positive plans for the future. The *Selichot* prayers help us accomplish just that.

"G-d, may our prayers come before You, and don't turn away from our entreaties, for we are not so impudent and hardened as to declare before You

that we are righteous and have not sinned. Indeed, we and our ancestors have sinned.

"We have transgressed, we have deceived... we have maligned... we have purposefully sinned... We have given harmful advice, we have lied, we have scoffed, we have rebelled, we have provoked, we have been disobedient, we have done wrong... we have oppressed others, we have been obstinate...we have gone astray, we have led others astray."

The *Selichot* prayers also foster Jewish unity. How so?

The story is told of a young boy, the son of a great rabbi, who heard his father reciting the *Selichot* prayers in a somber voice punctuated with sobs and bitter tears. "We have transgressed, we have deceived, we have robbed..."

The boy was shocked and heartbroken. All these years he had thought that his father was a righteous person. So many people came to him for advice. So many studied Torah with him. So many came just to bask in the presence of this special person. Yet, here stood his father, reciting a litany of heinous transgressions.

The young boy ran home crying, ashamed and bewildered. His mother listened to his woeful tale. "All Jews are connected one to another," she explained. "Your father did not commit all of those sins himself. We say the *Selichot* prayers in the plural – 'We have sinned, we have transgressed...' because we are all one. What one Jew does affects every single Jew. And so, before Rosh Hashana, when we ask for forgiveness for ourselves, we ask for forgiveness for every single Jew."

# SLICE OF LIFE

## Tour of Happiness by Rabbi Uriel Vigler



Ten days this summer were incredibly moving and inspiring, as we had the pleasure of hosting 12 wounded IDF soldiers as part of our Belev Echad program. This is the 25th time we've done this trip in NYC, and thank G-d we've perfected the experience to provide the best of the best for our heroes.

I asked one of the soldiers, we'll call him Yaakov, what his favorite part of the trip was. And there is a lot to choose from – we take them on helicopter rides, Ferrari rides, to the Hamptons, dinners in the finest restaurants, and all the very best that New York has to offer. And what did he say? "Receiving a new family."

"From day one I connected with the other 11 soldiers. We're like brothers now and I know we'll stay connected forever. When you spend 10 days with people who share your history, feel your pain and understand your trauma, it forges a deep and permanent bond. Nobody can understand my PTSD like my fellow soldiers who experienced the same pain, fought in the same wars, and were injured by the same terrorists."

Towards the end of the trip we went to the Rebbe's ohel to pray. Going to the Ohel is always an emotional experience, but when you go with a group of wounded soldiers it's even more so. They were all visibly moved.

I noticed that Yaakov seemed particularly pensive, and I asked him about it. "This was the best part of the trip," he said, "to be able to pray and connect to something deeper and more powerful than myself."

He mentioned that he had prayed for his newfound family – his fellow soldiers – to find their life partners and marry. He is the only married one in the group so far, and wants his brothers to experience marriage and children like he has.

"I was concentrating on them so much that I forgot to pray for myself and my son," he added.

Hearing that blew me away. Yaakov suffers from severe PTSD. It's with him all the time and triggered frequently. The first thing most people would pray for would be relief and healing for themselves and protection for their immediate family. But here Yaakov stands above and beyond, demonstrating extreme selflessness, praying for his friends!

Interestingly, the Talmud promises, "Whoever prays for his friend, he is answered first." You see, when a person focuses on others, and exerts himself to help someone else despite his own need, G-d says "Look how you care about your friend! I care about you," and takes care of his needs.

What a lesson in selflessness!

Amongst the soldiers participating in this 25th hosting of IDF soldiers by B'Lev Echad are: Liron: During the 2104 Gaza War, Liron and his unit were struck by explosives. He was hit with shrapnel in his legs and back, causing four herniated discs. Liron still suffers from his injuries today, and receives hydrotherapy.

Natan served as a paramedic during the 2014 Gaza war and was often called upon in life-threatening situations to help the wounded. Sadly, the trauma of the war, as well as treating those injured left a deep scar on his heart. Natan has severe PTSD, which he is still struggling with to this day.

Or served in the Duvdevan unit. He sustained injuries to his leg as a result of a bomb explosion during a covert mission. Or continues to experience pain and struggle with walking despite being treated for his injuries.

Ido joined the Golani Brigade and then took a naval course. During the 2014 Gaza war, Ido was part of a unit that went into the Sajaiya neighborhood in Gaza and fought Hamas terrorists. Following the war, he completed his military service. Since fighting in the Gaza war in 2014, Ido has been

experiencing post-traumatic symptoms that have only intensified over the years. During Covid, the economic and mental stress exacerbated his PTSD, with new symptoms appearing, including intense flashbacks, strange hallucinations, nightmares, screams, and many sleepless nights.

Shlomi served in unit Modiin Shel Chel Hayam. During the Israel-Gaza conflict of 2014, Shlomo and another soldier of his unit were attacked by four terrorists. Shlomi suffered multiple injuries such as burns and a fracture in his palm. He also needed to get stitches on his eyebrow. Shlomi was in the hospital for 3 months and started rehabilitation right after. Today he is a psychology student and is still being treated in a pressure chamber for his injuries.

Moshe served in the Handasa Kravit unit. During an operation in the Golan Heights to uncover underground tunnels from Lebanon into Israel, Moshe was in a D9 caterpillar that rolled over into a 20-meter deep cliff. That caused him fractures in his skull and pelvis, three broken vertebrae, a problem with his lungs and visual impairment. He was transported to Rambam hospital where he underwent several surgeries and after almost a month was moved to a rehabilitation center at Tel Hashomer hospital for four months. Today Moshe is still an outpatient and is being treated for his injuries.

Omer was on a commander's course in the 55th Battalion and was deployed a few kilometers from the Gaza border. Together with another soldier, he was on guard a hundred meters away from the rest of the company, and a rocket exploded right next to them. Omer was evacuated by helicopter to Soroka straight into the operating room. After three weeks and six surgeries in hospital, he entered Tel Hashomer for six weeks of rehabilitation. Omer is still left with injuries to his legs, including a nerve problem in his foot, which has resulted in a drop foot.

Farewell my dear soldiers, we miss you already and look forward to seeing you all in Israel real soon.

*Founded in 2009 by Rabbi Uriel and Shevy Vigler – directors of Chabad Israel Center of the Upper East Side – Belev Echad began as an annual tour of New York City, as a gesture of solidarity and support for wounded warriors of the IDF. What started off as a local initiative of the New York Upper East Side Jewish community has now become a global movement dedicated to helping veterans of the IDF reintegrate into civilian life with the love and support they need to thrive.*

## The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence  
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Freely translated

In the Days of Selichot 5725 [1965]  
To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel,  
Everywhere, G-d bless you all!

We are at the threshold of a Shemittah Year (the seventh and sanctified "Sabbatical" year in the cycle of years); may it be a good one for all of us, amidst our people Israel.

One of the central teachings of Shemit-tah is conveyed in the order of the verses and words by which the Torah defines the institution of Shemittah, namely: "When you will come into the land... the earth shall rest a Sabbath unto G-d. Six years shalt thou plant thy field," etc. (Lev. 25:2-3)

The order in the text seems to be reversed, for the six work years precede the Sabbatical rest year, and not vice versa. Hence, the text should have first mentioned the six years of planting, and then decree the resting.

However, order in Torah is also Torah ("instruction"). The arrangement in the text mentioned above, relating to Shemittah, is significant and instructive in that it teaches the proper approach to life. It is expressed as follows:

When one "comes into the land" and desires to establish his way of life, which involves "working the soil," it is necessary to bear in mind that first and foremost, as an idea and as a goal, is "Sabbath unto G-d"; not the "earthly" and material, but the spiritual and sacred. This approach will ensure one against being submerged by the material and mundane aspects of life. Moreover, bearing constantly in mind the above idea and goal will transform the six drab working years; they will lose much of their drabness and become more refined and meaningful. Furthermore, the change and elevation of the six years will raise to a higher plane also the seventh year: from a "Shabbos unto

G-d" to a "Sabbath of Sabbaths" unto G-d (v. 4), with a dedication and solemnity of a higher order.

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Similarly, in the daily life there are those aspects which have to do with material preoccupation (to earn a livelihood, etc.) and "common"

necessities, such as eating and drinking, etc. — all those aspects wherein there is "no preeminence in man over animal." But there is also the area of "earthly rest" — of breaking away from the mundane living. Here, too, the teaching of Shemittah is that it is necessary to begin the day with the idea and approach that, although it may be necessary later in the day to engage in "mundane" activities, the essence and purpose of these things are — to attain a "Sabbath unto G-d." In this way, even the mundane aspects will attain refinement and real content, while the aspects of holiness and G-dliness will be intensified and elevated to a higher order. This is the way to attain a complete and harmonious life.

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Standing on the threshold of the Shemittah Year, we pray that the Alm-ghty help each and everyone, man and woman, to begin the year with the above-mentioned approach: That not the material, but the spiritual is the essence and goal in life; that "the earthly," the material has a raison d'être only if it is permeated with the idea of "the earth shall rest a Sabbath unto G-d" — which is when the material serves and fulfills the higher aspirations of holiness and G-dliness. It is only then that all the days in the year, and all the activities of each day, will reflect "the preeminence of man over animal" and give evidence that man was created in the Divine "image and likeness," living accordingly; while those moments and periods which are characterized as "Shabbos" will in turn rise to the sublime heights of "Sabbath of Sabbaths."

Then will surely also be fulfilled the Divine blessing that goes with Shemittah — "And I will command My blessing upon you" (v. 21) — in a supernatural way.

Rosh Hashana is the day to make the firm and lasting resolution to implement the above approach. It is the day when the first man was created in the Divine image and likeness; the day when he gained mastery over all of Nature and elevated all Creation to the recognition of the Sovereignty of the Creator with the call, "Come, let us worship, and bow down, and kneel before G-d our Maker" (Ps. 95:6); The day when we pray for the realization of G-d's Kingdom on earth, "reign, in Thy Glory, upon all the world... and let everyone who has a breath in his nostrils declare, 'G-d, the G-d of Israel, is King, and His Kingdom rules everything!'"

With the blessing of Kesivo Vachasimo Toivo [to be inscribed and sealed for good]

For a happy and pleasant year blessed with the joy of children, life and ample sustenance

## A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

Since the beginning of the month of Elul we have added prayer and additional customs to "get us into the mood" of the upcoming High Holidays.

But this Saturday night we're going to really get down to business, as Jews around the world go to the synagogue to recite Selichot. These special penitential prayers are the next stage of our preparation for the High Holidays.

Chasidic philosophy makes the following distinction: During the month of Elul, we concentrate on improving our thought, speech and deed. But when we say Selichot, we focus on an even deeper level of the soul and correct the emotive powers themselves.

Though it sounds serious, Chasidim have always approached Selichot (like everything else!) with a sense of joy; rather than sadness and gloom. We look forward to the opportunity to reach even higher levels of holiness and sanctity.

The Rebbe Rashab, quoting Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidut, explained one of the lines in the Selichot thusly: "The needs of Your people are great, and their knowledge is narrow and limited." Our needs are many precisely because our knowledge is limited. If our knowledge were "wider," our needs would be fewer.

The pursuit of luxuries, adds the Rebbe, can even diminish the "regular" measure of blessing a person would otherwise receive. Because our "knowledge is limited" we demand too much, over-inflating our importance and assuming that G-d "owes" us. Our "needs" tend to multiply when we put too much emphasis on material rather than spiritual concerns.

Nonetheless, the Rebbe concludes, "Our request from G-d is that He fulfill all the needs of His people, even though what we ask for stems from a deficiency in knowledge. And may every single Jew lack for nothing."

Amen.

Shmuel Beilman

## L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקה

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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## TODAY IS...

21 Elul

Our ancestor, Abraham, as a result of his work with self-sacrifice to make G-d – the one G-d – widely known among all people, merited to bequeath to his descendants (to the end of all generations) pure faith in G-d and His Torah. Hence, every Jewish man and woman has the power and fortitude to offer his life for the holy Torah.

## MOSHIACH MATTERS

The mitzva (commandment) of bikurim will be restored with the coming of Moshiach. We are presently at the threshold of the redemption, thus we must prepare ourselves for the

observance of this mitzva. This preparation is possible by already fulfilling this mitzva in a spiritual sense: Every Jew must regard himself as being "first fruits." This means that with respect to every one of his deeds or utterances, and even his thoughts, one must see to it that they be not only correct but excelling in quality. Every deed must be of the finest sort, and so, too, one's speech and thoughts. From *Living with Moshiach* by Dr. J. I. Schochet