



Anticipating Napoleon's evil designs to attack and conquer Russia, the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman (the first Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch), instructed his family to be ready to flee at a moment's notice.

The famous spiritual mentor, Rav Shmuel Gronem, noted: "The Alter Rebbe said, 'Napoleon is a very powerful evil force, and I fear that I will have to have mesirat nefesh (self-sacrifice) in order to humble him.'

Secretly the Alter Rebbe instructed his Chasidim to spy against Napoleon's army. The Alter Rebbe wanted nothing less than a total collapse of Napoleon's power.

In his eyes, the French leader was the greatest threat to the heart and soul of Judaism. Behind his abolishing the restrictions that existed was a veil hiding his true intentions. What Napoleon wanted to accomplish with his revolution was a refusal to accept any authority, which in turn would weaken religious adherence.

For this reason, the Alter Rebbe refused to live in Napoleon's conquered domain for even a short period of time. When he heard of the approach of the French army he fled with his entire family, assisted by the Russian forces.

The Alter Rebbe insisted that every possession of his be removed from his house, no matter how insignificant; he then gave instructions that it be burned down. Some say that the Alter Rebbe had reason to believe that Napoleon engaged in sorcery, and took stringent precautions that none of his things would fall into Napoleon's hands.

The rapid advance of Napoleon's army made it impossible for the Alter Rebbe to rest, and he was forced to constantly be on the run. His hope was to reach the Jewish community of Poltava before Rosh Hashana.

The Mitteler Rebbe wrote: "On Erev Rosh Hashana my father, the Alter Rebbe, confided to me, 'I am extremely pained and worried about the battle of Mazaisk [known as the battle of Borodino], since the enemy is becoming stronger, and I believe he [Napoleon] is also going to conquer Moscow.' He then wept bitterly, with tears streaming down his face.

"On Rosh Hashana, my father again called me to him and happily told me the sweet and comforting news: 'Today, during my prayers, I had a vision that the tide has changed for the better and our side will win. Although Napoleon will capture Moscow, he will eventually lose the war. This is what was written today in Heaven.'

With the rout of Napoleon's army, the Alter Rebbe could proceed toward Poltava. On Friday, the eighth of Tevet, the entourage arrived in the city of Pieno. As soon as he arrived there the Alter Rebbe changed his plans. He began organizing a relief campaign to aid all Jews who had been affected by the war, sending out emissaries to raise funds and organize and coordinate efforts.

No one could foresee the rapid deterioration of the Alter Rebbe's health. As the Rebbe for many thousands of Chasidim, the Alter Rebbe finally paid the heavy price of worrying about the sufferings of the Jewish community, the difficult traveling conditions (especially for someone of advanced years) in an unusually cold winter and his anguish in general about Napoleon's influence and effect on the Jewish nation. On Monday, the 18th of Tevet, he became bedridden with a gall condition.

Five days later, on the 24th of Tevet, after Havdala, he wrote a note stating that one of the main purposes of a soul's descent into this world (in addition to Torah study) is to do a favor for another Jew in whatever way possible. A short while after writing this he passed away.

The Mitteler Rebbe noted that in one of the greatest acts of mesirat nefesh, the Alter Rebbe put his own life in mortal danger against the evil ways of Napoleon.

Indeed, the Alter Rebbe's ill-fated prophecy about Napoleon came to be, for the humbled last remnants of Napoleon's army retreated from Russia the exact time of the Alter Rebbe's passing.

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Shortly before his passing, the Alter Rebbe said: "Anyone who will hold on to my door handle, I will do him a favor in this world and the world to come."

The Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, explained that "my door handle" does not merely mean learning Chasidut, for the Alter Rebbe, through his self-sacrifice, instilled in Chasidim the practice of ahavat Yisrael (love of a fellow Jew) -- and we must follow in his ways.

Excerpted from "Dates in Lubavitch" by Rabbi Sholom D. Avtzon

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the Weekly Torah Portion

And he returned to the land of Egypt; and Moses took the staff of G-d in his hand (Ex. 4:20)

While Moses certainly demonstrated to Pharaoh the proper honor due a king, he nonetheless "took the staff of G-d in his hand" in all his dealings with him -- prideful in his Jewish heritage, imbued with an attitude of G-dly assurance, and without any feelings of inferiority. (*Likutei Sichot*)

G-d heard their groaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob (Ex. 2:24)

When the Israelites were unable to endure the harsh exile in Egypt, they cried out to G-d. Indeed, G-d heard their cry and sent Moses to redeem them. So it is with us in our present exile.

When we cry out, "Take us out of galut and bring Moshiach!" G-d will certainly hear our cry and send the Redeemer. Moreover, our mere being in a state of readiness to call upon G-d is already enough for Him to respond, as it states in Isaiah, "Before they call, I will answer, and while yet they speak I will hear." (*The Rebbe, Parshat Tavo*, 5751)

And she put it among the reeds by the banks of the river (Exodus 2:3)

According to our Sages, Moses was born on the seventh of Adar; three months later, on the seventh of Sivan, when he could no longer be hidden from the prying Egyptians, his mother placed him among the reeds. It was on that day -- the seventh of Sivan -- that Moses received the Torah at Sinai; this future merit was what allowed his life to be saved. (*Talmud, Sotah*)

Moses returned to G-d and said, L-rd! Why have You mistreated this people? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he made things worse... You have not saved this people at all (Exodus 5:22-23)

We are not allowed to resign ourselves to our present situation of exile with the excuse that "such is the will of G-d." The harshness of the galut is a sign that the Redemption is near, yet it is still bitter and painful. Therefore, even while reaffirming our absolute faith in the principle that "The ways of G-d are just," we are also to express our anguish with the prayerful outcry "Ad Masai?" -- "How much longer?" and ask for the immediate coming of Moshiach. (*The Rebbe, Parshat Va'eira*, 5743)

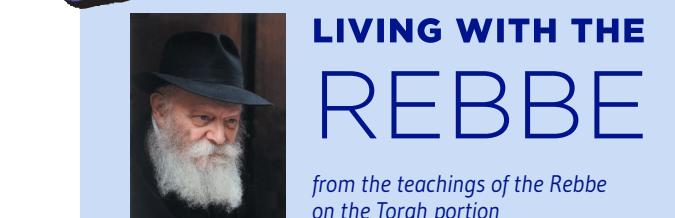
4:29 PM Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
20 Tevet / January 9
Torah Portion Shemot
Shabbat ends 5:33 PM



1906

20 Tevet, 5786
January 9, 2026
The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person
וְשַׁדְּתָן יְמִינֵי הַשְׁלֹשִׁים
"Our help is in the name of the L-rd, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalms 124:8)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

This week we begin the Book of Exodus with the Torah reading of Shemos. Our portion opens with a list of the names of the Children of Israel who went down to Egypt, describes the slavery that began after the death of Jacob and his sons, and narrates the birth of Moses, the Redeemer of Israel.

As every Jew is obligated to remember and "relive" the exodus from Egypt every day in the spiritual sense, it follows that each stage in the Jewish people's historical descent to and liberation from Egypt contains deep significance and meaning that is pertinent to our daily lives.

The primary threat of the entire Egyptian experience was expressed in Pharaoh's decree: "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river." The mighty Nile River, upon which all of Egypt was dependant for its sustenance, is symbolic of the laws of nature. Venerated as a god by the Egyptians, the Nile's waters periodically rose to fertilize their otherwise parched land.

The objective of the Egyptians was for the Jews to reject a G-d Who transcends nature and join them in their devotion to natural phenomenon. While still in their own land, such a possibility was inconceivable to the Jewish people.

In Israel, the direct relationship between man and G-d was open and apparent: Whenever rain was needed, the Jewish people had only to pray to G-d, and He sent His blessing. It was not hard to perceive that all good emanates from G-d alone. It was only after emigrating to Egypt, a land fertilized by the natural, periodic rising of the Nile, that the possibility for error could even arise.

The subjugation of the Jews could not begin while Joseph and his sons still lived, for that generation had personally witnessed Divine Providence and understood that the forces of nature are only G-d's tools. Slavery, in both the physical and spiritual sense, could only take root in a new generation that had not merited to live in the land of Israel.

It was then that the true descent into Egypt began and Pharaoh was able to issue his evil decree -- the aim of which was the immersion of the Jewish people into the idolatrous worship of natural law.

Moses, G-d's "faithful servant," was the one who gave the Children of Israel the strength to break the bonds of servitude and abandon the lure of Egyptian idolatry.

Moses instilled in his brethren a pure and holy faith in G-d, at a time when it was difficult for them to even imagine that such holiness could exist. In the merit of their belief the Jewish people overcame the decree of Pharaoh and were redeemed from Egypt. This process is experienced by every Jew in his daily life as well. By beginning the day with prayer and Torah learning, a Jew is able to perceive his direct relationship with G-d, and maintain this perception throughout the rest of the day.

The attribute of Moses that exists within every Jew reminds him that everything -- including those things that appear to be perfectly natural phenomena -- comes solely and directly from the One Above.

Adapted from *Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe*, Vol. XVI

The Jay Covered Bridge

By Rabbi Mendel Rubin

As part of our Thanksgiving 2025 getaway we visited the historic Covered Bridge in Jay NY, built in 1857. It's a beautiful spot. On one side of the bridge the craggy rocks and descent create a roaring rapids, and just past the bridge the waters flow briskly but more calmly. And all around there are gorgeous mountains rising in various degrees of distance.

And as Baal Shem Tov taught us to learn meaningful life lessons in our service of G-d from all that we see and hear, we found lessons while visiting this bridge:

THE WINDOWS IN THE COVERED BRIDGE

Like most wooden covered bridges, the Covered Bridge at Jay (which is quite long as far as covered bridges go) is dark inside. There is dark wood everywhere, the floor boards, the walls and support trusses, and the beams and roof -- all dark wood. It has a confined feel.

But there are cut-out windows along both sides of the bridge that open to the expanse of the outdoors, to gorgeous views of the churning river below, and the vistas of the mountains beyond.

It recalls the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov that each "Amen!" is a window out of the confines of our world, it opens up into the infinite beyond. Each mitzvah is a window! It is an opening, an opportunity! There's also the Chassidic story we heard as Yeshiva students of the imprisoned Chassid in the jail over the marketplace, when the warden opened the cell window to let in the light and sounds of the marketplace below...

The windows on the Covered Bridge at Jay demonstrated the juxtaposition of finite and infinite that is at the heart of Chabad Chassidic teaching. We may live in a finite world, and we must reckon with that, but our hearts are open to opening up to and allowing the infinite into our lives.

WATER BEFORE THE BRIDGE, AND THE WATER AFTER

It so happens that the style of the water of the AuSable River (which winds it way throughout many parts of this area of the Adirondacks) changes drastically at this bridge.

Looking out the windows on one side of the bridge the water is crashing down a short falls amidst large rocks, creating a churning rapids. But looking out the other side of the bridge the water flows briskly but much calmer as there are no rocks, the water runs deeper and less noisily.

This recalled for me a dream of the Mitteler Rebbe (Rebbe Dovber, the 2nd Rebbe of Chabad). In his dream he saw his father, the Alter Rebbe, flanked by two men. They came to a calm and serene stream and all three men crossed the stream on a plank of wood as a bridge. Next they came to a roaring raging fuming colorful rapids that also had a plank of wood across it. But only his father was able to cross at the rapids.

When he asked his father to explain the dream, the Alter Rebbe explained that the serene stream is the service of the righteous or the simple. No blockages, no challenges. The water is calm. But rapids are rapids because of the rocks which block the water, the obstacles build momentum and intensity as the water rushes round to overcome them. This is the service of the Baal Teshuvah, the Jew who struggles, the Jew who has challenges.

One of the prettiest images you see traveling around the Adirondacks are the many streams and creeks flowing between mountains and alongside roads, filled with jagged rocks, with water churning and pulsating around them. And in life, while it makes things harder, the challenges do add a depth and intensity, they make it richer, so much more alive!

