



Rabbi Gershon, the brother-in-law of the Baal Shem Tov, had finalized his plans to travel to the Holy Land. A disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, he conferred with him before his departure and was told: "When you arrive in the Holy Land make sure to attend the yeshiva of Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, known as the holy Ohr Hachaim in Jerusalem. He has two separate yeshivas there – one in which they study the revealed Torah, and another, known to only a very few people, where he teaches the esoteric secrets of the Kabbala. Do everything you can to be admitted to the second yeshiva short of divulging your identity, unless you have no choice."

Rabbi Gershon's journey was successful and he arrived in Jerusalem and proceeded directly to the Ohr Hachaim's yeshiva. Anxious to see how they learned there, he attempted to join the students as they reviewed their study. But each time he approached them, he was told that it was permissible to attend the yeshiva only with the explicit permission of the Ohr Hachaim himself. When the Ohr Hachaim would enter the study hall to deliver his daily lesson, all strangers would be asked to leave.

Rabbi Gershon decided to approach the Ohr Hachaim personally and request his permission to learn. "Who are you?" inquired the Ohr Hachaim.

"I am a Jew who has come from Poland and I desire very much to study in your yeshiva," answered Reb Gershon.

The Ohr Hachaim gave him a penetrating, critical look and asked, "Are you fluent in the study of the Five Books of Moses and the Talmud?"

"Yes, I am," replied Reb Gershon.

"Then I give you my permission to remain here, and I will instruct my staff to accommodate you," the Ohr Hachaim said.

Rabbi Gershon was pleased with the outcome and settled down for the week to learn in the yeshiva of revealed Torah. All the while he was inquiring as to how to gain admittance to the yeshiva of Kabbala. He discreetly asked various students about the secret yeshiva, but none of them had the slightest idea what he was talking about. Those few who were the privileged students, refused to answer his repeated questions. So, Rabbi Gershon was forced to approach the Ohr Hachaim again and ask for permission to attend the yeshiva of esoteric study.

The Ohr Hachaim was surprised by the request. "How do you know about the other yeshiva?" he asked, as he stared into Reb Gershon's eyes, plumbing the depths of his soul.

Reb Gershon, wanting to avoid a detailed response, just looked down and said, "I was told by my brother-in-law." He hoped that his answer would pass without further comment.

"What is his name?"

"Oh, his name is Yisrael," was the matter-of-fact reply.

"I don't know him, but you may come to my lecture tonight," was the reply.

For the next three nights Reb Gershon learned Torah with the select group of students, but on the fourth night when he presented himself to the doorkeeper, he was refused admittance. He was astonished and turned to the doorkeeper crying, "Why have I been refused admittance, when I have the permission of the Head of the Yeshiva to attend?"

"I'm sorry, but I am following the instructions of the holy rabbi. He said that you are unworthy of learning the secrets of the Torah, since you have not attended to the needs of the Sages."

Reb Gershon turned away, puzzled, but resolved to do whatever was necessary to rescind the decree of the Ohr Hachaim. He noticed that the Ohr Hachaim donned a special pair of shoes and head covering before entering the bathroom. The next time he saw the Ohr Hachaim put on the special hat, he ran quickly and brought him the shoes. The Ohr Hachaim noted Reb Gershon's actions, but said nothing.

From that time forth, Rabbi Gershon was allowed to resume his midnight studies. He remained happily drinking in the learning at the Ohr Hachaim's yeshiva for the next few months. One day, he told the Ohr Hachaim that his own brother-in-law was a holy man.

"What is his name?" inquired the Ohr Hachaim.

"His name is Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov," Reb Gershon said.

"Oh," cried the Ohr Hachaim, "Of course I know him well. I see him very often in the supernal worlds. He is a holy man of unsurpassed greatness."

"Now I understand what happened to me in the Heavenly Court," continued the Ohr Hachaim. I had been sentenced to have some terrible calamity occur to me because of using a respected student of the Baal Shem Tov to perform a menial task for me. It was only through the intercession of the Baal Shem Tov that I was saved. If you had told me your true identity at once, I would have been saved the entire incident."

After this conversation, the Ohr Hachaim no longer permitted Reb Gershon to study in his yeshiva for, as he said, "You do not need me to teach you, if you have the Baal Shem Tov as a rebbe."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And Joseph went up to bury his father (Gen. 50:7)
A person is judged with the same yardstick he uses to judge others. Joseph, the most respected of the brothers, involved himself personally in the burial of his father. He thereby merited that none other than Moses himself would later carry his bones back to the land of Israel. (*Sotah, 9:4*)

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*)

Until Shiloh comes (Gen. 49:10)
Rashi comments that the above words refer to Moshiach. In addition, the *Baal HaTurim* points out that the Hebrew words meaning "Shiloh comes" have the same numerical value as the word "Moshiach." The word "comes" ("*yavo*") contains a profound allusion to the means by which Moshiach can be brought. For *yavo* is numerically equivalent to the word "*echad*" – one. When there will be unity among Jews, and in particular, when Jews will unite in speaking about Moshiach, they will succeed in drawing down and realizing the ultimate Redemption through the Righteous Moshiach. (*The Previous Rebbe*)



4:26 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
13 Tevet/Jan 6
Torah Portion *Vayechi*
Shabbat ends 5:30pm

L'Chaim

בס"ד
1755
13 Tevet, 5783
Jan 6, 2023

The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person
ניסד תוד ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"My help comes from G-d, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2) Year of Unity - Hakhel

LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, *Vayechi*, Jacob blessed his children before he passed away. To Judah he said, "Judah, your brothers will praise you." Rashi explains that since Jacob had rebuked Reuben, Shimon and Levi, Judah was worried that he would be rebuked as well. Jacob understood this and said, "Judah, your brothers will praise you." What deeper meaning can be found in these words?

Reuben comes from the word "*ra'ah*" which means "seen," as Leah said, "G-d has seen my humiliation." Reuben is symbolic of the first paragraph of the Shema prayer, where we connect with G-d on a level of sight, as if we see Him. Sight is a very powerful sense, much greater than hearing. When you see something you know that it is true and nobody can talk you out of it, because you saw it. When we are connected to G-d on the level of sight, we understand Him in a deep way and connect with Him through love. This is why we say in the beginning of the Shema, "You will love G-d your G-d."

Shimon comes from the word "*shama* – heard." Leah named him Shimon, "because G-d heard that I felt hated." Shimon is symbolic of the second paragraph of the Shema, where we connect with G-d out of awe. It begins, "It will be, if you will hear," and later it continues, "Beware, lest you be misled." This is the idea of awe or fear that comes from hearing, a step lower than seeing.

Levi comes from the word "*yilaveh* – attached." As Leah said, "this time my husband will be attached to me." Levi is symbolic of the next paragraph that begins with 15 accolades about G-d and continues, "this thing is upon us forever and ever." "This thing" refers to the Torah, that attaches us to G-d.

These three steps and paragraphs are the preparation for the silent *Amida* prayer, when we stand before G-d in utter humility.

Judah comes from the word "*odeh*," meaning to thank, praise or admit. As Leah said, "this time I will thank G-d." To thank, praise or admit, is to recognize the other, and that takes humility. Judah is symbolic of the *Amida* prayer itself, when we stand before G-d, and at that moment only He exists.

This state of nothingness before G-d is the natural state of the *neschama*, G-dly soul, which is the essence of a Jew. It is just that the animal soul, the body, the physical world and the dark exile, covers up who we are, our essence. But at times we can reveal it, and one of these times is when we reach the *Amida*.

The verse continues, "your hand will be on the neck of your enemies." Meaning, that when our essence shines the world is affected by us, as our sages say, that "When our voice is the voice of Jacob, in the houses of prayer and the houses of Torah study, then the hands of Esau have no power over us." To the contrary, instead of working against us, they help us serve G-d.

May our acts of kindness, Torah and prayer reveal our essence, and affect the world, to the point that our light shines so bright, that Moshiach will come and lead us to our Holy Land.

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

An Attitude of Gratitude

The term "global village" was popularized by Marshall McLuhan in his 1962 book analyzing the effects of mass media, especially the printing press, on European culture and human consciousness.

In the past 60 years, mass media has moved exponentially beyond the printing press. So perhaps talk of the world as a global village is already passe. But discussing the world as a global home is a different twist altogether.

In truth, however, Judaism has been teaching for thousands of years that the world is in the process of becoming one, great big home. Home to G-d.

G-d created the world with a purpose: to make it into a "home" for Himself.

We all know what a home is. Home sweet home is a place where we feel totally comfortable, totally at ease. Where we can be ourselves without having to hide anything. With the coming of Moshiach the world will be G-d's home. No longer will G-dliness have to be hidden to a world that is unready or unable to appreciate it. The world and everything in it will be fitting receptors to this G-dliness and G-d will be able to "be Himself;" so to speak, in the world of the Redemption.

We are the contractors, the builders, the electricians and the bricklayers of G-d's home. We are its plumbers, tilemen and woodworkers. But G-d is the owner and makes the final decisions.

The 613 mitzvot that G-d gave us are our tools, materials, supplies and instructions. Some are necessary for the foundation and others are for the finishing touches. Some are for the detail work and others are for the basics. But they are all in the original blueprint

approved by the Owner.

After thousands of years of working on this great global home (and you thought you had the slowest contractor around!) it's finally complete.

We stand at the threshold of the Redemption and we need only open the door and enter.

But, some ask, how can we say that the home is complete as evil in all its forms and permutations still exists in the world? Maybe we have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go!

Chasidic philosophy explains that good is cumulative whereas evil has no permanent substance. Goodness and holiness are eternal. Hence, when one fulfills a mitzva, it is eternal.

Evil, by contrast, has no true existence: it is no more than a concealment of G-dliness, the same G-dliness that will be revealed in all its glory in the world of the Redemption. Hence, when a person has been punished for his evil, or when he repents, the evil ceases to exist.

Considering, once more, the home in the process of being built, makes it easier to understand the temporary nature of evil as compared to the permanence of good. If a brick is not laid level, a pipe is installed incorrectly, or a wall is painted with a mistaken color, the wrong is righted – the "evil" ceases to exist – and the correction remains.

Since good is eternal, all the accumulated good of all the past generations still exists. And this is why now, specifically, even though superficial appearances might indicate that our generation, or the world, is not worthy, we will soon be privileged to open the door and walk over the threshold of G-d's home into the Redemption.

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