

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

This week we read two Torah portion, *Matot* and *Massei*. At the start of *Matot* the tribes of Israel, usually referred to in Hebrew as "shvatim," instead are called "matot." And it is specifically when the portion is discussing the annulment of vows that it refers to the tribes as *matot*.

Why the different word? What connection does it have to annulment of vows?

Though the two words *shvet* and *mateh* are alike in meaning, roughly translated as "stick" or "staff," they have fundamental differences.

Shvet refers to a branch still attached or recently detached from the tree. It is still wet inside. *Mateh* however has been separated for a while and has had time to dry and harden.

A craftsman who wishes to create something of quality needs to be aware of the moisture content of the wood. The conditions the wood was subject to will also have an effect on the quality of the wood.

(Today for example. Reclaimed wood – old wood once used in construction, resold and reused – is very sought after for its qualities that are not found in new lumber.)

Next, the craftsman using his tools to saw, drill, chisel etc. the wood, brings out the true natural beauty and function of the wood.

Now, why would a person take a vow. When a person has a weakness bringing him or her to commit a sin. Taking a vow to abstain from it is helpful because of the strength and the fear of breaking that vow. However the vow doesn't change the person. For someone to annul this kind of vow seems counterproductive.

That is where the wise man comes in. The job of the wise man who does the annulment, is to help the one who took the vow work on himself to become stronger. To bring out strength from deep within to overcome the weakness. The vow would then be unnecessary.

Each of us is a *mateh*. G-d puts us through all different kinds of situations, some happy and in some we suffer. However, we know that it is G-d, the Ultimate Craftsman, who is putting us through these conditions and that He helps us overcome any obstacles he puts before us. We know that He will bring out our greatest potential.

The same is true of the Jewish people. G-d has put us through all kinds of difficult conditions. Though we don't know why, we do know that he has a plan and that what He does is good.

By now we are an ancient piece of wood, we have been through so much, we are truly magnificent.

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.

Punctuate

It's all a matter of emphasis – punctuation, that is. It depends on where we pause, where we focus. It's true of grammar, it's true of life, it's true of the spiritual ramifications of all we do.

Let's take a simple sentence: What you want I can't give. (Is this an unemotional statement of fact? A disappointment?) Now let's punctuate it differently. What? (Incredulous.) You want. (Defiant) I can't give. (Rejection.)

And so too in life. Events happen around us and to us. From the trivial to the essential, from tragic to joyous.

For instance, you get up in the morning, make your coffee, get the paper, and on the way to the table bumped into an unexpected object and spilled your coffee. You place it high on the tragic-significant curve until a couple hours later when (let's go positive) your boss gives you a raise.

Another example: On the way home, traffic's snarled and you get home almost an hour late. You walk in the door in a rage, until you look at the mail and see the check from your publisher. The traffic snarl sinks to the trivial-tragic as the check rises to the essential-joyous.

We can multiply examples. The point is that even the truly tragic can sink in significance if something else, also essential, elevates the joyous.

We find this concept embodied in the Chasidic reading of a Talmudic statement. The *Talmud*, observing the tragic nature of the month of *Av*, when the Temples were destroyed, declares, "When *Av* enters reduce in joy." In Hebrew: *M'shenichnas av m'atim b'simcha*. But we can read

it – punctuate it – differently, resulting in a very different perspective, a very different emphasis: *M'shenichnas av m'atim – b'simcha*. "When *Av* enters, reduce – through joy.

The first version tells us to reduce our joy, because *Av* is the month of mourning. The second tells us to reduce the mourning in the month through joy. We cannot of course forget the tragedies; we should not minimize the significance of events. But we can alter our perspective, change the scales of significance.

Yes, the Temples were destroyed. Yes, we must remember, commemorate and observe the laws. Yes, the mourning on *Tisha B'Av* epitomizes the horrors of our history, including the Holocaust. Yes, we are still in exile.

Nevertheless and still, "serve G-d with joy," the Psalmist says. There is joy within our lives, and Judaism rejoices – rejoices with the study of Torah, rejoices with the performance of *mitzvot* (commandments). The future will bring the rebuilding of the Temples and the Redemption is imminent.

In the microcosm of our lives, we can focus on the disappointments, the negatives and the painful. Or, we can acknowledge them, but punctuate them – interrupt, stop their significance – so that the emphasis, the focus is on the myriad acts encountered daily, big and small, of goodness and kindness.

By emphasizing the essential joy, we reduce not the existence, but the significance of the tragic. And in so doing we expand our perspective, we see differently, we perceive the third Temple built on *Tisha B'Av* and the imminent coming of *Moshiach*.

SLICE OF LIFE

No Silly Questions

by Rabbi Shlomo Elkan



Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, is a historic institution, founded in 1833. Famous for its progressive views and social activism, it was the first college in America to accept black students and women. Those who attend are socially conscious young people seeking meaning in their lives. Fraternities and sororities are banned from Oberlin College life to foster a more serious, inclusive, and introspective campus culture.

My wife Devorah and I were excited to start Chabad at Oberlin College. Out of the small student body of 2,000 students, about 700 are Jewish.

We organically built our community through personal Shabbat meal invitations and cementing relationships. Now, in our twelfth year, we recently finished building our new Chabad House, welcomed a Torah scroll that we commissioned, and opened a kosher dining hall in partnership with the college.

But I'll go back to the beginning:

We moved in just two days before the Sukkot holiday. I had visited Oberlin a few days earlier to meet our realtor and sign our lease. I was a little early so I went into a coffee shop. Before I even sat down, someone approached me, "Are you a Lubavitcher?"

"What gave me away?" I chuckled in reply.

He sat down and told me a little about himself.

"You're right on time," he told me. "I've been searching for spirituality and have experimented with Buddhism and ashrams across India. I realized recently that I don't know much about my own Judaism, and was wondering how to find out more."

Of course, I invited him for Sukkot. He brought some friends with him, so we ended up with six students in our tiny, hastily erected sukkah!

One day, a group of freshmen walked into our Chabad House. "We heard you teach *Kabbala*," one of them said. I had given a class on *Tanya*, the basic book of Chabad Chasidic philosophy, but it had fizzled out because everyone interested had graduated. I invited these students to a *Tanya* class on Thursdays, and they started coming every week. (We completed the first section of 53 chapters and are about to finish the second.)

The impact of this *Tanya* class continued to spread. It became "cool" to study *Tanya*. I now give five *Tanya* classes every week to different groups.

At Oberlin College, for two weeks, there is a "winter term" program, where students are given time off from classes to enroll in an enrichment program that will enhance their lives. Devorah and I were asked to create a program through Chabad.

One student was supposed to attend a program abroad in Italy, but it didn't work out. He decided to attend our program and his friend asked if he could come as well.

The friend's father was Filipino and his mother was Jewish. He was raised without any Judaism. I said that he is a full-fledged, card-carrying member of the Jewish nation, and I encouraged him to join our winter term program. His first exposure to Judaism was an intense, two-week study of the Torah, Prophets and Jewish holidays, along with a tour of a mikva, kosher restaurant, and grocery. This young man, who would have denied his Jewishness just eight months earlier, is now an engaged Jew. He also started attending one of our *Tanya* classes.

At our Shabbat meals, we ask our students to choose one of seven ways to participate at our Chabad House. A number of students have chosen the weekly "ask the Rebbetzin" with Devorah. The students are amazed to find that my wife is just as – if not more – knowledgeable than me, and brilliant!

Shortly after moving, I was contacted by the Aleph Institute. They had received a request from some inmates in a prison near me. I worried that I had

nothing to offer the inmates. Some of them had been sitting in prison for longer than I'd been alive!

I became a volunteer chaplain and have been visiting weekly for the past eleven years. My goal is to make them feel like a human being for the hour or so that I'm there. We talk and do some light learning. Before holidays, I bring a few students with me, and we put on a holiday event. We bring *hamantashen* and read the *Megilla* for Purim, bring a *menora* and doughnuts for Chanuka, and dance together on Sukkot. It is highly beneficial to all involved; the inmates appreciate contact with young Jewish folks who are full of energy and life, and the students gain valuable experience, seeing firsthand how immense their impact on others can be.

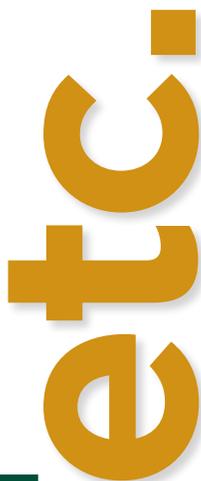
One inmate in particular, who was 35 years into a life sentence, asked me some thought-provoking questions about the meaning of Passover. "How can I celebrate freedom, given my circumstances?" he asked, gesturing to the yard, hemmed in by imposing fences and satumine guards.

I quoted the powerful answer given by Rabbi Ephraim Oshry to the community of Kovno when they asked "How can we make the blessing 'who has not made me a slave' when we are slaves in this ghetto?" Rabbi Oshry replied that the blessing refers to freedom of the mind, spirit, and their ability to connect to G-d. Whether enslaved by the Nazis, prison walls, or one's own actions, every person still has the ability to take the environment around them and elevate it to a positive experience.

Our children are sometimes the driving force behind the students' involvement and growth. When students sit on the floor to read a Jewish book to our children, they're learning. It's not uncommon for students to feel silly about some of their questions. While there's really no such thing as a "silly question," it can still be intimidating to ask me or my wife. Sometimes, it's easier for them to ask our children, instead.

Our older children engage with the students in deep conversations about life as observant Jews and Chabad chasidim. Our students are part of our family. One of our alumni was getting married out of town. We all wanted to attend, but my daughter's school would only permit absences for the weddings of family members. "But she is a family member!" my daughter told her principal. "She's spent so much time in our home and our Chabad house!"

An IllumiNations story from dollardaily.org, a platform to donate \$1 per day to help Chabad emissaries around the world.



New Emissaries

A five-hour drive and long ferry ride from S. Jose is **S. Teresa, Costa Rica**. This pacific coast city's Jewish community is welcoming **Rabbi Berel and Chana Dubinsky** who are opening Chabad of S. Teresa. The Dubinsky already tested the waters with Sukkot holiday celebrations and a Passover Seder attended by 300 Jewish community members.

Chaim and Mushkie Loschak are establishing **Chabad of Montecito, California**. The Loschak's aim to reach every Jew in this heavily Jewish enclave south of S. Barbara through Shabbat dinners, holiday events, educational classes and one on one encounters.

New Torah Scroll

Chabad of Forest Hills North, New York under the direction of Rabbi Mendy and Chaya Hecht. Following the writing of the final letter, the crowd participated in a joyous Grand Torah Parade down to Queens Boulevard and looped back around. The procession even met folks from a nearby senior residence.

Today Is...

1 Menachem Av

The unique quality of Mashiach is that he will be humble. Though he will be the ultimate in greatness, for he will teach Torah to the Patriarchs and to Moses, still he will be the ultimate in humility and self-nullification, for he will also teach simple folk.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

23rd of Tammuz, 5727 [1967]

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to receive regards from you through Rabbi Yitzchok Dubov, who also brought me your letter.

As requested, I will remember you in prayer when visiting the holy resting place of my father-in-law of saintly memory, for the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good in all the matters about which you write. May G-d grant that you should have good news to report.

While we are at this time in the period of the Three Weeks, it has always been the Jewish fervent hope, in accordance with prophetic promise, that these days will be turned into days of gladness and joy. Hence they already carry the seeds of auspicious promise.

Needless to say, the way to hasten the fulfillment of the said promise is to do everything possible to remove the causes which brought about the period of the Three Weeks, namely "because of our sins we have been exiled from our land." Consequently the effort on the part of every Jew to spread the Torah and Mitzvoth [commandments] helps to clear the way, and to hasten, the end of the Golus [exile] and the beginning of the true Geulo [Redemption]. This is particularly important in the case of one whose field is Jewish education, as in your case, in accordance with your writing.

With blessing of Hatzlocho [success] in Beth-Hillel,

Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av, 5724 [1964]

Blessing and Greeting:

As we are now commemorating the sad

events which led to the Destruction of the Beth Hamikdash [Holy Temple] and the beginning of the present Exile, it should be remembered that the purpose of this commemoration is not just to inflict a sad period upon ourselves, but rather that we should be reminded and inspired to do all we can to lessen, and eventually remove altogether, the cause which brought about the sad events which we are now commemorating.

For, as we declare in our prayers, "Because of our sins we have been exiled from our land." It was the neglect of the Torah and Mitzvoth, in the daily life and practice, which resulted in the Destruction and Exile. Therefore efforts to strengthen and spread the observance of the Torah and Mitzvoth in the daily life will hasten the complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach and, as promised, these sad days will be transformed into days of joy.

With blessing,

8th of Menachem Av, 5724 [1964]

Greeting and Blessing:

As we are now commemorating the sad events which led to the Destruction of the Beth Hamikdash and the beginning of the present Exile, it should be remembered that the purpose of this commemoration is not just to inflict a sad period upon ourselves, but rather that we should be reminded and inspired to do all we can to lessen, and eventually remove altogether, the cause which brought about the sad events which we are now commemorating.

For, as we declare in our prayers, "Because of our sins we have been exiled from our land." It was the neglect of the Torah and Mitzvoth, in the daily life and practice, which resulted in the Destruction and Exile. Therefore, efforts to strengthen and spread the observance of the Torah and Mitzvoth in the daily life will hasten the complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach and, as promised, those sad days will be transferred into days of Joy.

With blessing,

principal of kashrut: how to make vessels kosher. According to some authorities, this passage is also the source for the Torah's laws of Family Purity. During these last few moments of exile we must be particularly vigilant with respect to these two commandments. For aside from their intrinsic significance as basic and perpetual principles of Judaism, they are also a special preparation and catalyst for our anticipated entry into the land of Israel with Moshiach. (Living With Moshiach)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

The rebuilding of the Third Holy Temple is central to the Redemption.

Maimonides states that the rebuilding of the Temple will actually confirm that the Redemption has begun.

Here, too, however, we have differences of opinion as to who will build the Temple.

According to the Zohar: G-d Himself will build the Temple.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba and Midrash Rabba) states that man will build the eternal Holy Temple.

Maimonides' ruling agrees with the Midrash, saying that rebuilding the Temple is a commandment incumbent upon the Jewish people.

Although these opinions may seem at variance, they are, in fact, not contradictory.

The Rebbe explains that the Jewish people will build part of the Temple, as commanded, and that the Divine features of the Temple – those aspects which will ensure its eternity – will be built by G-d Himself.

Maimonides does not mention Divine participation because his work is a work of halacha, Jewish law; he writes only about that which is incumbent upon the Jewish people.

The man-made and the G-dly components will be combined in the Holy Temple.

Chasidic thought teaches that this combination of man's effort "from below," united with G-d's effort "from above," is the true meaning of Redemption.

For, with the Redemption, the material and the spiritual will be eternally and fully bound.

One explanation of how they will be combined is brought from the verse in Lamentations, "Her gates sank into the ground..."

The Midrash asserts that the gates of the Holy Temple are buried on the Temple Mount.

When the Third Temple descends from heaven, the gates will rise up – but only with man's help.

As the one who fixes the gates is considered to have built entire house, so too, in this case, the Jews will thus fulfill the commandment to build the Holy Temple by fixing its gates in place.

May it happen in the immediate future.

Shmuel Beilman

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.



Published by
Lubavitch Youth Organization
1408 President St, Brooklyn, NY, 11213
phone 718 778 6000

Chairman
Director
Program director
Secretary
Administrator
Editor
Associate Editor
Chairman Editorial Comm.
Rebbe photo

Rabbi David Raskin י"ד
Rabbi Shmuel Butman
Rabbi Kasriel Kastel
Rabbi Moshe P. Goldman
Rabbi Shlomo Friedman
Yehudis Cohen
David Y. B. Kaufmann י"ד
Rabbi Nissen Mangel
S. Roumani

L'Chaim contains words from sacred literature. Please do not deface or discard.

All contents © 2022 by L.Y.O. ISSN 1050 0480

L'Chaim Subscriptions

For a one year subscription send \$47, payable to LYO (\$60 outside of USA) to:
L'Chaim, 1408 President St., Bklyn, NY, 11213

L'Chaim on the Internet

Current issues and archives: lchaimweekkly.org

Learn about Moshiach

Visit www.moshiach.com or call (718) 953 6100

MOSHIACH MATTERS

Matot and Masei deal with the time when the Jewish people were about to enter the Promised Land, receiving final instructions before starting their new life. One basic law contained in this Torah reading relates to the fundamental

