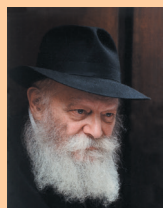


L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

What is the reason for the Jewish people being in exile? What purpose has been served by almost two thousand years of suffering and hardship?

The answer to this age-old question is alluded to in this week's Torah portion, *Mikeitz*, in Joseph's explanation of his choice of name for his son Ephraim.

"The name of the second he called Ephraim," the Torah states, "for G-d has caused me to be fruitful (*"hifrani"* – from the same root as Ephraim) in the land of my affliction."

In other words, it is precisely through exile "in the land of my affliction" that Joseph became stronger. Likewise, the entire purpose of exile is to uncover the Jewish people's hidden strengths, bringing them to a higher level of perfection.

On a personal level, Joseph had attained the highest rungs of spiritual service, standing head and shoulders above his eleven brothers; in a certain sense, he was even superior to his father Jacob. Nonetheless, in order to attain the very highest levels, Joseph had to undergo exile "in the land of my affliction."

The Torah alludes to Joseph's exalted spiritual status in its statement that the brothers "recognized him not." According to Chassidic philosophy, Joseph's involvement in worldly matters was perceived by them as an obstacle to spirituality.

The brothers couldn't understand how a person could be worldly and serve G-d at the same time. Thus they deliberately pursued a life of contemplation; as shepherds, they were cut off from civilization and the demands of society. Never in their wildest dreams could they fathom how Joseph, second-in-command over all of Egypt, could remain connected to G-d and indeed surpass their level of service. The concept itself was too radical for them to grasp.

Joseph's superiority to his father is also reflected in the fact that he was punished for putting his faith in Pharaoh's butler, whereas when Jacob addressed his brother Esau as "my master," it was not considered a sin.

Jacob, despite his great spiritual attainments, was still subject to the limitations of the physical world and thus permitted to work within the natural order; Joseph, however, was above such constraints and therefore held to a much higher standard of behavior, according to which he should have placed his trust in G-d alone.

Nevertheless, we see that it was only through the experience of exile that Joseph was able to attain the very pinnacle of spirituality, paving the way and setting an example for his future descendants.

For just as the Jewish people merited to receive the Torah after the "crucible" of the Egyptian exile, so too will we merit the very highest revelations of G-dliness with the ultimate Redemption.

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

Emphasizing Oil

by David Y.B. Kaufmann *obm*

Everyone surely recognizes that Chanuka has received a renewed emphasis in our times. While celebrated for hundreds of years – since the times of the Maccabees, obviously – and the subject of many miraculous and inspiring stories over the centuries, the emphasis on the spiritual significance and practical observance of Chanuka – and we're not talking about the gift-giving part – is something relatively new.

Most people have had their "Chanuka-consciousness" raised by the large public menorah lighting ceremonies. Hundreds and thousands around the globe gather to participate in local celebrations, celebrities feel honored to be invited, and these celebrations attract the news media (like, well, like moths to a candle).

So, why the sudden emphasis? What's the inner reason our generation has seen a manifold multiplication of "Chanuka-consciousness"?

Well, for starters, Chanuka is the holiday of oil – oil lamps, oil-rich food (*latkas*, *sufganiyot* – using oil from olives, associated especially with Israel) and the oil of Torah. Why oil? Because oil penetrates, it gets absorbed into and becomes part of other substances. Oil never remains superficial; it spreads wide and deep, soaking into layer after layer and permeating the essence.

As matza is the "symbol" – the manifestation – of Passover and the shofar is the "symbol" of Rosh Hashana, so oil is the "symbol"

of Chanuka. And oil, as we just mentioned, indicates both deep penetration and wide distribution – a spreading forth that reaches the essence.

Hence its association with Chassidic philosophy, the inner teachings of the Torah. For Chassidism is like oil – reaching deep and diffusing wide.

The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism, once detailed, in a letter to his brother-in-law, a spiritual encounter with the soul of Moshiach. The Baal Shem Tov asked, when is Moshiach coming? To which came the answer, "When your wellsprings shall spread forth, outward."

And "spreading outward" is one of the primary *mitzvot* (commandments) of Chanuka. We are to light the menorahs at the doors or windows of our house, so that the light shines outward, illuminating the streets. The light from the oil should spread forth – the constant, pure, yet small flame pushing away great darkness. The light of the oil – the physical oil of the olive and the spiritual oil of the Torah – should penetrate and disseminate, publicizing the miracle – the miracle of Chanuka, the miracle of the Jewish people, the miracle of Chassidism, the miracle of people of all nations bringing goodness to the world through small acts, like small olive-oil flames, of goodness and kindness.

The little light that pushes away great darkness is the light of Redemption and Moshiach. May the revelation of Moshiach take place, NOW!

SLICE OF LIFE

Increase Your Light by Rabbi Levi Welton



Tzvi (Georgy) with Chaim Groisman in 2019

A few years ago, I received a random email from a mother from the former Soviet Union who wanted help to prepare her son for his Bar Mitzva. Her children never went to Hebrew school and they rarely attended Jewish services. But now that it was time for her son's Bar Mitzva, she wanted him to celebrate his special day with his people. Every synagogue she asked turned her down. Apparently, it was "too late" to prepare him. I could feel her pain as she asked me if I would help her.

"It's never too late in the eyes of G-d," I told her. I promised to take him under my wing and become his guide as he claimed his Torah heritage. From that moment on, Tzvi (aka Georgy) began coming to my *shul* on Shabbat.

Tzvi is a tall, lanky boy with a respectful disposition. His first question to me was, "How do you know G-d exists?" Quickly realizing how bright he was, I delved into the subject. We spent over an hour engaged in discussion. I later found out that it was the first time he learned anything about Judaism.

Fast forward a couple of months and we were celebrating his Bar Mitzva. My entire synagogue of Lincoln Park Jewish Center embraced him as one of their own. He had started out not even knowing what an "*aleph*" was and on that special day he recited the Torah blessings with gusto. We showered

him with applause, and lots of candy.

During the *Kiddush* lunch, his father gave a speech, his mother gave a speech, the President of the *shul* gave a speech, and (of course) the Bar Mitzva boy gave a speech. I watched him proudly standing in front of the entire congregation, quoting the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik and a host of other Torah scholars that he weaved into his Bar Mitzva speech.

His parents had raised him to love the pursuit of wisdom. His mind brimmed with curiosity. Over the past months, we had bonded and every time he'd see me, he'd ask, "Rabbi, can I ask you a quick question?" He stumped me on more than one occasion. I felt blessed to be his teacher.

After completing his Bar Mitzva training, having his party, and receiving all his gifts, Tzvi's mother called me. "Rabbi, Georgy asked me if he can still take Torah classes from you. May he, please?" I had never suggested this to him. I had never even thought to suggest it. This all came from him, all on his own. Obviously, I said yes.

Tzvi approached me one Shabbat afternoon during the *Kiddush* lunch. He had a "quick question." In our *shul*, we have a holy Holocaust survivor named Reb Chaim Groisman. Our community calls Reb Chaim Groisman the "Angel of Westchester." He was the subject of a video and article. Tzvi had never met a Holocaust survivor in his life and he wanted to know if I would make the introduction for him.

"Of course," I said. I led Tzvi across the social hall to the table where Reb Chaim was sitting. I made the introduction and left the two of them, sitting across the table from each other, with their plates piled high with delicious food. I returned to my table. A few moments later, I looked across the room and saw Tzvi sitting with Chaim, their foreheads almost touching as they talked with one another.

The image of these two men, one young and one old, sitting across from each other while wearing their *kippot* will stick with me for the rest of my life.

One day Tzvi contacted me and asked me if he could make a short presentation during our *shul* Chanuka party about his "new friend," Reb Chaim Groisman. I sat in my chair and realized this is what the Maccabees would have liked the best.

The Maccabees weren't soldiers or lawyers. They were Torah scholars, the carriers of the educational torch of their people. They knew that when the oppressors of that time wanted us to forget

the Torah, their response was to learn Torah and perform mitzvot with even greater dedication and self-sacrifice. The best response to anti-Jewish hate is an increase in pro-Torah engagement.

The relative safety and security of the Jewish people today is a blip in the context of centuries of persecution, oppression, and exile from our homeland. And yet the Jewish people have persevered. As Mark Twain famously put it, "All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?" The answer is simple. It is our commitment to learn and observe Torah.

Tzvi embodies this lesson of the Maccabees: to never abandon one's identity in the face of overwhelming oppression. It is youth like Tzvi who will ensure that our people always remember who we really are.

On the eighth night of Chanuka, when the menorah shone its greatest light, Tzvi stood up in front of a crowd of people much older and "wiser" than him and gave a presentation about his friend the Holocaust survivor. I heard him speak with passion about the bravery and courage that Chaim represented for him. I watched the smiles and the tears of the people in the audience, who were witnessing a young man not being forced to give such a presentation but deeming it an honor to do so. And I felt Jewish pride soar in my heart as Tzvi expressed that it is modern-day Maccabees like Reb Chaim that give him stronger faith in G-d.

My father taught me that the eighth night of Chanuka holds a special power. According to Chassidic teachings, the number eight symbolizes the Divine Energy that is supernatural, the energy of miracles, of being able to accomplish that which you thought impossible.

This is the secret of Jewish survival. You don't have to be a "big light" to accomplish miracles. You can even be a "small light" in the grand scheme of things. All one has to do to reach the level of the eighth night of Chanuka is to keep on increasing their small light, one night at a time.

This is why seeing Tzvi standing next to his friend, Reb Chaim gives me hope for a Jewish tomorrow. For it is the youth, like Tzvi, who show us how we've defeated the darkness of anti-Semitism in the past and how we can do so in the future. Through light.

Rabbi Levi Welton was raised in California. He holds degrees in science, film and education. He is a member of the Rabbinical Council of America, on the board of Elijah's Journey for suicide prevention and rabbi of the Lincoln Park Jewish Center.



Rabbi JJ Hecht

Whatever he was going to be, Rabbi JJ Hecht was going to be among the best. Under the guidance of the Previous Rebbe and the Rebbe, Rabbi Hecht was a pioneer of Jewish outreach and fearless leader of American Jewry for almost 50 years. A powerful, unrelenting force on the front-lines to promote the heritage and future of the Jewish people, his influence and inspiration and their effects still ripple today. *Rabbi JJ Hecht* is also a glimpse of Jewish life in the US in most of the previous century.



Be Like the Moon

Rabbi Levi Welton, a proud American, blends memoir with a joyful cultural peek into his often misunderstood religious community. *Be Like the Moon: A Chassidic Memoir* strengthens your faith in humanity by sharing wisdom that will speak to anyone, of any (or no) faith, who's ever struggled with life's weighty challenges.



Hakhel – Unite!

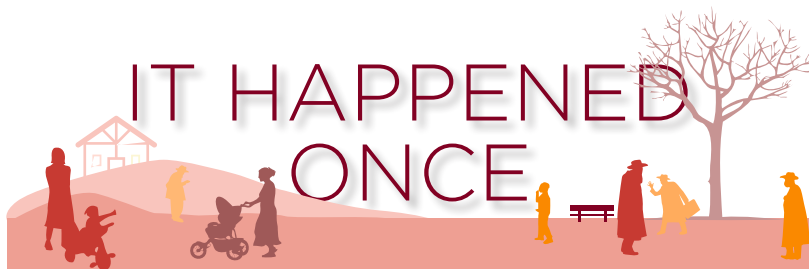
As a true leader, shortly before his passing, Moses "began to explicate this Torah." The Moses inside us all replicates this event each year. We have the special ability to relate the Torah's teachings to ourselves and to others. This Hakhel year is an opportune time to gather everyone, and influence them – beginning with the simple mitzvos and moving steadily forward. As the verse comments when speaking of Hakhel, "They will observe all the words of this Torah." (*Sichot Kodesh* 5741 vol. 2) Learn more at hakhelination.com

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Reb Mordechai Chanzin, a Lubavitcher chasid, was arrested three times in his life. Altogether, he spent 21 in Soviet labor camps and various exiles. Throughout the years in the labor camps he kept Shabbat and ate only kosher, which entailed much hardship.

Reb Mordechai loved to relate stories of his time in Russia. He considered it a sort of will and testament to bequeath to future generations. However, the following story he considered like a mitzva to tell, because of a promise that was made:

As Chanuka approached, a group of young Jewish men in the Siberian labor camp met to come up with a plan. How would they light the menorah despite the danger involved? Someone promised margarine; threads were plucked from clothing for wicks, and a receptacle to put the margarine and wicks in was found somewhere.

Mordechai was the oldest of the 18 young Jewish men in that camp. They decided that in the middle of the night they would gather to secretly light the Chanuka lights. Mordechai was honored with the lighting and in an emotion-laden voice he recited the blessings.

As he stood and looked at the flame, the door suddenly burst open and NKVD officers barged in. They roughly pushed the 18 young men into a small, dark cell. The first to be put on trial was the oldest of the group, Mordechai. The "trial" was nothing but a sham, a performance, with the sentence determined beforehand. Even though Mordechai was familiar with the hypocracies of the communist system, he was surprised to hear the judge announce that he was accused of planning a rebellion. The basis for the accusation was the kindling of lights in order to signal their location to the enemy.

The courthouse was not large. On one side of the room was the judge's chair and the accused was seated facing the judge. In a severe tone, the judge read the accusation. He concluded by saying that the sentence for these crimes was death. Did Mordechai want to defend himself?

Mordechai got up. His heart was pounding. "Does the sentence apply only to me or also to the rest of the group?"

The judge gave him a withering look. "On the entire counter-revolutionary band," he replied.

Mordechai looked around him. Until now, he had tried to look indifferent but now he knew that not only his fate was on the scale, but also the fate of his fellow Jews. He burst into tears. He felt that it was because of him that this happened since he was the oldest and had taken responsibility for all of them.

Mordechai stood there and sobbed while the judge sat and looked at him. Mordechai, who was emotional by nature, could not restrain himself. All the pain that had been bottled up in him burst forth.

"Come here," said the judge. Mordechai approached the judge's desk. The judge began asking him about his family, their names and occupations and other personal details. Mordechai answered all the questions while he continued to cry.

When the judge finished asking his questions he got up and began pacing. He repeated all the names he had just heard. "What do you have to say in your defense?" asked the judge as he suddenly stopped his pacing.

Mordechai mustered his courage and said, "We are Jews and we lit the lights to fulfill the mitzva of lighting Chanuka lights. That is why we gathered together."

"You lit Chanuka lights?" the judge asked in surprise. He seemed to be moved by this. "What do you say ... Chanuka lights?" He asked this again and again. He looked very moved and seemed to be struggling internally.

After a moment, he motioned to the two soldiers who were in the room to step outside. After they left, he said, "If you lit Chanuka lights, then I will show you how Chanuka lights are really lit." The judge lit the oil lamp on his desk and began to burn all the prosecution's files that were on his desk. His hands trembled. "Here, this is the way to light the Chanuka lights. See? This is the way to light Chanuka lights!" He did not stop until every last paper was consumed.

Then he took the ashes and threw them out the window. The Siberian wind scattered them. Very quickly, nothing remained of the files. Then the judge pressed on a button and the door opened and the soldiers came back in. "Take all the young men," he said authoritatively, "and disperse them wherever you see fit so that they don't encounter one another. They are despicable enemies. Don't shoot them because they aren't even worth a bullet."

After the soldiers left, the judge said to Mordechai in a tremulous voice, "I am a Jew and I

ask you to tell future generations how I lit the Chanuka lights."

In 1956, after Khrushchev rose to power, hundreds of thousands of prisoners were pardoned. Mordechai Chanzin's name was also cleared of all wrongdoing and he was allowed to return home.

by Menachem Zeigelbaum Reprinted from Beis Moshiaich Magazine



It came to pass at the end of two full years.... (Gen. 41:1)

Joseph's confinement in prison was only physical. Even in jail he retained and guarded his spiritual heritage, the teachings absorbed from his father, and this light overcame the darkness of prison and filled him with hope. The prison-house of Joseph is an allusion to this world (especially during the exile), into which the souls of Israel are made to descend in order to observe Torah and mitzvot. Yet the very idea of confinement to the Jew is alien, because Jewish life is essentially unrestricted. The present era of restraints is only temporary, and is merely a step toward the ultimate goal which will be realized with Moshiaich. (*The Rebbe, Shabbat Parshat Mikeitz, 5751*)

"Suddenly, seven fat, handsome cows emerged from the Nile... Then, just as suddenly, seven other cows emerged, very badly formed and emaciated." (Gen. 41:18-19)

Pharaoh's dream, in which he dreamt of two opposites, is like the exile. In exile we are faced with opposites all the time. One minute we pursue eternal, spiritual goals and the next minute we want things that are mundane and transitory. When the Redemption comes we will no longer feel this dichotomy. We will see how the purpose of everything in the world is purely for G-dliness. (*The Rebbe*)

Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years (Gen. 47:28)

When the Tzemach Tzedek was a child, he learned a commentary on this verse that these 17 years were the best years of Jacob's life. This surprised the boy, and he went to his grandfather, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, to find out how it was possible that the years spent in such a spiritually corrupt and abominable land could have been Jacob's best. Rabbi Shneur Zalman replied: Before Jacob descended into Egypt, he sent an emissary to establish places of Torah learning. Whenever and wherever a Jew learns Torah, he comes close to G-d and achieves a meaningful life. Furthermore, precisely because Egypt was such an abominable place, the holiness and spirituality Jacob attained there shone much brighter against the dark and evil background of his surroundings. (*Likutei Sichot*)



4:15 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
29 Kislev/Dec. 23
Rosh Chodesh Tevet
Torah Portion Mikeitz
Shabbat ends 5:19 PM

Dedicated in honor of a dear friend
of the Lubavitch Youth Organization
Dr. Warren J. Wexelman