

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

The Hebrew letters of the Torah are written in three sizes: the standard letters with which most of the Torah is written, a smaller size and a larger size. The first word of the Book of Vayikra (Leviticus) is written with an alef that is of the smaller size, both in a Torah scroll and in a printed Chumash (Five Books of Moses).

When the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Chabad Rebbe) was a young boy his grandfather, Rabbi Shneur Zalman (founder of Chabad Chasidism), sent him to learn in cheder. Rabbi Shneur Zalman instructed the teacher to begin with the first chapter of the Book of Leviticus.

When the Tzemach Tzedek returned from school he asked his grandfather why the alef of Vayikra was so little. Rabbi Shneur Zalman pondered the question deeply for some time and then replied:

"In the beginning of Divrei HaYamim (the Book of Chronicles, one of the 24 books of the Bible), Adam's name is written with a large alef. The big letter alludes to the fact that Adam considered himself to be very important. After all, none other than G-d Himself had created him! Adam was aware of his own significance, which was a contributing factor in the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

"By contrast, in the verse 'And [G-d] called to Moses' ['Vayikra'], the alef is small, which alludes to Moses' humility. Even though Moses was aware of his many extraordinary talents, he did not perceive himself as great, nor did he take pride in his abilities. It states in the Torah, 'And the man Moses was very humble.' Moses was modest and unassuming. He felt that if someone else had been blessed with the same abilities as he, the other person would have utilized them better.

"The Torah is written in intermediate-sized letters, for a Jew must always strive to be a beinoni [a Chasidic term meaning a person with complete mastery over his Evil Inclination]. By means of the Torah, every Jew can attain that level."

With this answer the Alter Rebbe taught his grandson, and by extension all of us, an important lesson in the service of G-d: On the one hand, we must learn from Adam and correctly perceive our own qualities: We possess a G-dly soul, and have inherited many positive character traits from our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

On the other hand, we must emulate Moses and not be overly proud of ourselves. For if someone else were blessed with the very same qualities it is possible that he would make use of them to an even greater degree.

Thus we must always have a sense of our own significance, yet temper our pride with humility.

Adapted from *Likutei Sichot, Volume 17*

Self-Centeredness and the Lost Art of Sacrifice

By Rabbi Yosef Y. Jacobson

A successful businessman once met with his new son-in-law. "I love my daughter and welcome you into the family," he said. "To show you how much we care, I'm making you a 50-50 partner in my business. All you must do is manage the factory."

"I hate factories," the young man replied. "Too noisy."

"Fine," said the father-in-law. "Then work in the office."

"I hate office work," he said. "I can't sit behind a desk."

The father-in-law stared at him. "I just made you half-owner of a thriving company, yet you refuse both jobs. What am I supposed to do with you?"

"Easy," the son-in-law said. "Buy me out."

This humorous exchange captures a deeper truth: when a person refuses to give of themselves, even great opportunities become meaningless. A life without sacrifice becomes centered entirely on the self.

In this week's Torah portion, Vayikra, the laws of sacrifices are introduced. Though the Temple has been gone for nearly two thousand years, the message of sacrifice remains relevant. A subtle grammatical oddity in the verse "A man who will sacrifice from among you a sacrifice to G-d" inspired Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi to teach that the primary offering G-d desires is not the animal, but the person. The real sacrifice must come "from among you"—from one's own heart, ego, and inner

resistance.

Today, sacrifice has become an endangered ideal. Many view it as repressive or unhealthy, a threat to self-expression and independence. Certainly, sacrifice that enables abuse or erodes dignity is not virtuous. But in our zeal for personal freedom, have we forgotten that meaningful living requires giving something of ourselves for truth, for another person, for our values, for G-d?

Modern culture encourages kindness and tolerance, but rarely asks us to give up comfort, pleasure, or convenience for a higher purpose. Without sacrifice, how do we discover our depth, strength, and identity? Who calls on young people to fight for something noble, to reach beyond superficial desires?

When no part of life demands sacrifice, we become more fragile, more superficial, and more self-absorbed. The book of Leviticus, centered on offerings, reminds us that to live is to live for something beyond ourselves.

Sacrifice is not about losing; it is about becoming. It is the willingness to give up a piece of comfort for a piece of truth, to exchange ease for purpose. Happiness is not found in protecting ourselves from every discomfort but in giving ourselves to something meaningful. The soul is most at peace when it shares itself.

This week's portion invites a simple but searching question: **When was the last time I made a real sacrifice for something that matters?**

SLICE OF LIFE

Translating the Tanya to Persian



Rabbi Danny Yiftach Hashem receiving a dollar and a blessing from the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Rabbi Dan Halevi Yiftach Hashem, known as Danny, is fifty-nine years old and serves as a Chabad emissary in Marina del Rey, California. Born in Tehran, he was rescued to the United States as a teenager in 1979 in a covert operation led by Chabad Hasidim with the blessing of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Today, decades later, he is engaged in a project that brings his journey full circle: translating the Tanya into Persian.

“I was born into a family that lived Judaism openly and proudly,” he recalls. “My mother was a Hebrew teacher. She taught me to read and write Hebrew fluently and instilled in me a deep love for Jewish tradition.” When Rabbi Yiftach was about thirteen, the Islamic Revolution swept through Iran. Chabad emissaries visited synagogues and presented parents with an urgent opportunity to rescue their children through a secret operation. “My parents signed me up with mixed emotions, fear

alongside hope.”

He was one of approximately two thousand Jewish boys and girls rescued during the operation, which lasted a year and a half. “There were children with us from ages nine to eighteen,” he says. “We stayed in Italy while waiting for visas to the United States. We celebrated Purim there, and just before Passover we arrived in New York.” Chabad families opened their homes to the refugees. “When the Rebbe visited us on Seder night and blessed us, I felt an extraordinary spiritual elevation.”

The transition from Tehran to yeshiva life was not simple. “We studied in a preparatory program in East Flatbush to fill in educational gaps,” he explains. He later attended Camp Gan Israel in Montreal and Camp Mordechai in the Catskills. “On the eve of Yom Kippur, we received honey cake from the Rebbe. It was a moment that warmed the soul and has stayed with me ever since.”

He was then placed in Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon in California, together with about ten other boys. From there, his path continued through yeshivot in Morristown and New Haven, and eventually to the central Chabad yeshiva in New York, in the Rebbe’s study hall. “I was surrounded by support,” he says. “The challenges became a journey of growth, belonging, and connection.”

“In Tehran, I believed that righteous people existed only in biblical times,” he reflects. “When I saw the Rebbe praying and leading gatherings, my heart trembled. I understood that he was a holy man, walking in the footsteps of Moses. He remains engraved in my heart forever.”

Though he never had a private audience with the Rebbe, out of awe for his greatness, he did participate in general audiences and received blessings when

the Rebbe distributed dollars for charity.

For thirty years, Rabbi Yiftach served as director of the Bais Chaya Mushka School in Los Angeles. “I invested my heart and soul,” he says. “The school grew to four hundred students and operated in a beautiful, spacious building. Among them were girls born in Iran, continuing the chain of Jewish education.”

Twenty years ago, he and his wife opened a Chabad house in Marina del Rey. “My wife, Sonia Ita, is my full partner,” he emphasizes. “She manages, encourages, and strengthens everything we do.” Alongside their wide-ranging communal activities, Rabbi Yiftach continues teaching and spreading Judaism in Persian.

Already as a yeshiva student, he dreamed of translating the Tanya into Persian and translated three chapters at the time. About a year ago, he began working seriously on translating the entire work. “This is a very demanding project,” he explains. “The Tanya is the written foundation of Chabad philosophy. Every word must be exact.” The translation is reviewed by Persian-speaking rabbis and accompanied by explanations drawn from classical commentaries. “Our hope is to complete the project and publish the Persian Tanya in the near future.”

In addition, Rabbi Yiftach teaches Chassidic philosophy classes in Persian through digital platforms, reaching three audiences: yeshiva students, young adults, and women. “There are regular Tanya classes, and participants can already receive completed Persian translations of chapters,” he says.

He views the project as part of a larger vision. “Translating the Tanya into Persian is another step in preparing the world for the complete redemption.”

Adapted from Sichat Shavua Magazine



200-Year-Old Miniature Megillah Gifted to Russia’s Chief Rabbi by 95-Year-Old Guest

This past Purim night, a historic moment took place at the central “Marina Roscha” Shul in Moscow. Alexander Gorodetsky, a beloved 95-year-old Jew, arrived and presented Chief Rabbi of Russia Rabbi Berel Lazar with an antique miniature Megillah, written on klaf and housed in a decorated silver case.

With emotion, Alexander shared its story. He received the Megillah 75 years ago. His grandfather, had inherited it from his own father, indicating it is over two centuries old. “When my grandfather gave it to me, he asked me to guard it my entire life,” Alexander said. “I decided the best protection now is to entrust it to our Rabbi.”

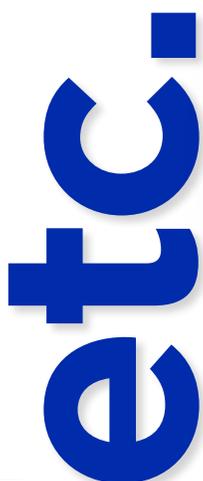
Rabbi Lazar replied: “If you want to rejoice in a long life like Alexander Gorodetsky, keep a Megillas Esther in your home and follow our heritage, guarding Torah and Mitzvos. Our ancestors drew strength from this Megillah, which shows that the Jewish people cannot be defeated.”

FROM THE TALMUD

No two minds are alike, [just as] no two faces are alike (Berachot 58a).

A person’s true character is ascertained by three parameters: his cup (i.e., his behavior when he drinks), his pocket (i.e., his financial dealings), and his anger (Rabbi Ilai, Eruvin 65b).

Do not say something that should never be heard, because ultimately it will be heard (Hillel the Elder, Avot 4:2).





The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Erev Rosh Chodesh

Adar 1, 5733 (1973)

To All Participants in the Annual Mid-Winter Convention of N'Shei Ubnos Chabad

Blessing and Greeting:

The Annual Mid-Winter convention is taking place in this Leap Year between the two Purims. This lends added significance to the role of the Jewish woman in Jewish life as it is reflected in the festival of Purim; while the Leap Year factor presents the conference with a special challenge.

It has been pointed out before that the Leap Year offers a basic general lesson to all of us. The additional month which characterizes our Leap Year makes up for the accumulated deficiency between the Lunar Year-the basis of our Hebrew Calendar-and the Solar Year, which determines the four seasons. For the Torah requires that our festivals occur in their due season (Pesach in the spring, etc.). Herein also lies the meaningful lesson that it is never too late to make up for a deficiency in the past. Moreover, as in the case of the added month of the Leap Year, which not only fully makes up for the past deficiency, but also makes an "advance" for the future, so it is not enough to merely make up for the past deficiency in terms of achievement for Torah and Yiddishkeit, but an extra effort is called for as an "advance" on future achievement.

As for Purim, one of its well-known and oft substantiated is that of the Jewish

people, by virtue of being a people of the Torah, is not subject to the conditions and laws of Nature which govern the fate and destiny of other peoples. For, while the elements which gave rise to the Purim festival seem to have followed a "natural" course, the truth is that Purim came about in a supernatural way, by Divine intervention. This is why it is described as Ness-Purim, the miracle of Purim. And what brought about the Miracle of Purim was the fact that not a single Jew attempted to save his life, under Haman's threat of annihilation, by compromising Yiddishkeit [Judaism]. This could have been an easy way out, as our Sages tell us, since Haman's decree only applied to Jews as Jews. It is because of this extraordinary Mesirat Nefesh [self-sacrifice], reversing a previous attitude, that the miraculous reversal of events took place.

The woman's role in the miracle of Purim is pointedly emphasized by the fact that the Megilah [scroll] of Purim is named after Esther alone. It is an eternal credit to Jewish womanhood, for it is inconceivable that the whole Jewish people at that time could have maintained such a high level of Mesirat Nefesh for such a long time without the women's encouragement and inspiration.

I trust that the above points, which are so relevant and timely for this year's conference, will receive full expression at the convention in general, and in each and every participant in particular, to be carried further by each to her group and circle.

May this year's conference, and each participant in it, produce a real "advance" in terms of achievement, and may it be carried out in the spirit of Purim, with real and abundant joy, to help bring about for all Jews-in the words of Megilat Esther- "light, joy, gladness, and honor." With blessing for hatzlacha [success] and happy tidings.

rebuild the Second Holy Temple. We commemorate this freedom by serving G-d with unparalleled joy. During this period, the entire Jewish nation prays that the celebration of Purim will mark the beginning of the rebuilding of the Thrid Holy Temple.

(Talmud Yerushalmi Megila)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'Chaim Publication.

From the Archives

It is a Jewish custom that, when bringing a young child to school for the first time, we begin his Torah studies with the third book of the Torah, Vayikra - Leviticus. The book of Vayikra, the first portion of which we read this Shabbat, is also known as Torat Kohanim, for it mainly deals with the responsibilities of the Priests.

One might think that it would be more proper to begin a child's formal Jewish education "in the beginning," with the book of Genesis. Or, at least, to start out with the history of our people and thus, commence with the portion that discusses Abraham.

This, however, is not the case. The Midrash states that children are "pure" and the sacrifices (which the priests offered) are 'pure.' "Let the pure occupy themselves with the pure," says the Midrash.

It is interesting to note here at what age the child is considered "pure." For, in truth, there are three stages in the spiritual life of every Jew: 1) after the age of Bar/Bat Mitzva when the person is obligated to perform mitzvot (commandments); 2) when one is educated in the ways of Torah and mitzvot and begins observing them. (Though under no obligation, this prepares and trains the child for the time when he will be obligated to perform them); and 3) when the child is still so young that, though learning about Torah and mitzvot, he cannot be expected to conduct himself in accordance with them.

It is at this last and youngest stage, particularly, that the child is referred to as "pure." And, it is at precisely at this early, precious and pure stage that one needs begin a child's Jewish education. Though he cannot fully comprehend what he is learning, and isn't even required to put his studies into action, his/her pure neshama (soul) should be involved in the "pure" Torah.

Shmuel Butman

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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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MOSHIACH MATTERS

Purim was a breakthrough in exile. After the great miracles celebrated during this festival, the Persian ruler granted us permission to

IT HAPPENED ONCE



There was once a city in Tunisia with a large Jewish population. One year, a few months before Purim, the price of fish suddenly skyrocketed. The problem wasn't a scarcity of fish; the rivers swarmed with them. Rather, the trouble was that the government-appointed head of the fishing industry had arbitrarily decided to hike the prices.

His reasoning was simple: Knowing how important it was for Jews to eat fish on the Sabbath and holidays, he figured that they would pay any price for the commodity. And indeed he was right. Most of the Jews sighed as they dug a little deeper into their pockets. But for the poor, it was a delicacy that was completely beyond reach.

When the month of Adar (whose celestial sign is fish) arrived, the poor Jews went to their Rabbi to complain. It wasn't fair that they would be unable to buy fish for Purim. The elderly Rabbi was a venerated Kabbalist, who was also the mohel of the community.

The poor Jews' grievance touched the old man's heart, and he promised to help them. That night, the candle in the Rabbi's study shone till dawn. He was very busy consulting his holy books.

Early the next morning the Rabbi summoned his attendant. Handing him a small slip of folded parchment he said, "I have an important mission for you, but it must be kept secret. Go to the river now, before any of the fishermen arrive. When you are sure that no one is watching, throw this parchment into the water." The attendant did as he was told.

That day began as usual on the waterfront as the fishermen cast their rods and spread their nets. But as morning turned into afternoon their faces fell. Not one fisherman had had even a nibble. Their nets were completely empty.

At first the fishermen assumed that for some reason, the fish were avoiding the coastline. But when the fishing boats returned from the deeper waters and reported that they too had had no luck, they realized that something was amiss. "Oh well," they consoled each other, "it was just a bad day for fishing."

But the next day the same thing happened, and the day after that. It was very strange how all the fish seemed to have simply disappeared.

Of all the people in the city the governor, who loved to eat fish, was particularly affected by the shortage. In the very beginning he instructed his servants to prepare dishes of smoked and dried fish, but eventually his supply was depleted. "Why are there no fresh fish?!" he demanded one day. "There simply aren't any," the servants explained. The governor decided to go down to the river to see for himself.

At the governor's command the fishing boats set sail, and nets were spread up and down the length of the river. But no one caught even one specimen. The whole day's efforts were wasted.

At that point the governor gathered all the fishermen together and asked them for an explanation. "Esteemed governor," a short little fisherman piped up, "I'm not certain that the two are related, but on the same morning the fish disappeared, I noticed a Jew throwing something into the water. He was very careful to make sure that no one was looking. From that day on we haven't seen even one fish."

The finger of suspicion was clearly pointed at the Jews. The governor announced that if the fish didn't return within one week, a heavy tax would be imposed on the Jewish community.

The Jews were distraught at the libelous accusation, and their leaders declared a day of fasting and prayer. The entire community assembled in the synagogue and implored G-d to have mercy on their innocent souls.

Suddenly, the elderly Rabbi stood up to speak. "My brothers," he said, "the governor is right. We are the reason that there are no fish. But an evil decree has not befallen us; on the contrary, it is G-d Who is fighting our battle. When the price of fish was unfairly raised beyond the ability of the poor, I prayed to G-d to make the fish disappear."

The people were shocked. No one could believe that such a thing had happened. But the elderly Rabbi encouraged them to keep on praying. "Don't worry," he reassured them. "I will go now to meet with the governor."

The Rabbi went to the royal residence and was granted an audience. He explained to the governor why the fish had vanished. "If our esteemed governor will promise that the price of fish will go down, I will make sure that they return to our waters."

The governor was astounded by the story, and amazed at the power of the holy Rabbi. On the spot he promised to appoint someone else as head of the fishing industry. The Rabbi smiled, and invited the governor to go with him to the riverbank. At the Rabbi's command the fishermen spread their nets. They were quickly filled with fish of all varieties, shapes and colors.

That Purim, "there was light and joy to the Jews, and gladness and honor." And of course, lots of fish on their tables.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion



You shall burn no leaven-chametz, nor any honey, in any offering of the L-rd made by fire (Lev. 2:11)

"Leaven" is symbolic of the kind of person who is angry at the world. Morning or evening, Shabbat or a regular weekday, he is always sour - "chamutz," (from the same Hebrew root as chametz). "Honey," by contrast, alludes to a person who is affable by nature. No matter what happens, he remains buoyant. The Torah teaches, however, that a person must learn to control his emotions, even positive ones. For there are times when it is appropriate to be "leaven," and times when it is appropriate to be "honey." (Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch)

Purim

Purim is a Persian word meaning "lottery." It refers to Haman's lottery in choosing a date for the annihilation of the Jewish people, G-d forbid. Purim is the only Jewish holiday whose name is not in the holy tongue. That the name of this festival is in Persian teaches us that even in the darkest moments of exile, we must never surrender and we possess the strength to transform darkness into light. Further, that even in the face of a seemingly all-powerful tyrant, G-d is Almighty and will rescue us. (Time and Transcendence by Rabbi Fivish Dalfin)

Parshat Zachor

When the Torah commands us to "Remember what Amalek did to you," you is in the singular form. From this we learn that Amalek, symbolic of the Evil Inclination, attacks a person who holds himself apart from the Jewish community. By contrast, a person who is active in communal affairs and identifies with his brethren will be impervious to Amalek's assault. (Shmuat VeSipurim)

The numerical equivalent of Amalek is 240, the same as the Hebrew word "safeik," meaning doubt. Amalek dampens a Jew's enthusiasm for Torah and mitzvot by injecting doubt about matters of holiness. There is no "cure" for Amalek's "coldness"; the only way to deal with him is by crushing him completely. This is why it is a mitzva to "erase" Amalek, rather than engaging him in arguments. (Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim)



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