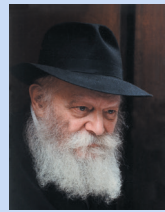


L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

This week's Torah portion, Vayeira, introduces us to the second of our forefathers, Isaac. It also relates that Isaac was occupied with digging wells.

Abraham and Isaac achieved greatness by paving two distinct paths to spirituality. Abraham traveled from place to place, both within the borders of Israel and in other lands, and caused G-d's name to be known everywhere he went. Through his boundless hospitality, as well as through other means, he caused countless wayfarers to thank G-d for His bounty and goodness. Abraham's basic nature was kindness-- giving and favorably influencing his fellow man.

Isaac, on the other hand, had a totally different approach. He never left the Holy Land and his basic nature was the personification of gevura (strength). Isaac's way of bringing holiness into the world involved elevating the lowly and bringing it closer to G-dliness; Abraham's method was to bring G-dliness down into the lower realms.

This path to spirituality is even apparent in Isaac's preoccupation with digging wells. A well is made when one digs and uncovers the water that was always there, albeit in an unrevealed state. Isaac did not bring the water to the well from an outside source; he merely removed the soil and rocks so that the water could flow forth on its own.

Whereas his father Abraham was primarily occupied with bringing holiness down into this world, Isaac spent his life uncovering the inherent holiness that already existed in the world. Isaac taught others that through their own efforts they could uncover the good and arrive at Divine truth.

From Abraham we learn how to elevate the physical world through studying Torah and performing mitzvot, causing the Divine light to descend and illuminate our surroundings. We also learn from him the obligation to spread the knowledge and appreciation of G-d through our own example and influence on others.

But this in itself is not enough. We must also learn from Isaac how to "dig wells"--how to uncover and reveal that spark of goodness and spirituality which exists within ourselves and every Jew. It is not sufficient to merely teach others about G-dliness; we must also know how to dig under the surface and reveal the "pintele Yid"--the inherent faith in G-d and spark of holiness--which is our birthright.

Even if a Jew seems to be nothing but "dust, clay and stones," that is, his Jewish spark seems to be dormant and hidden underground, we can learn from Isaac not be discouraged--this appearance is merely a camouflage. Under the lifeless surface lies a rich source of running water, of goodness, faith and love of G-d. All we have to do is remove the superficial layer of "clay" to reveal the pure Jewish soul within.

And what can we answer a Jew who cries, "But I've tried! I've dug and I've dug, and I can't seem to uncover my Jewish spark!" We must direct him to the example of Isaac, who persevered in his digging and was not discouraged, even when his wells were deliberately stopped up by his enemies, time and time again. For we are promised success if we, too, persevere and are relentless in our quest for G-dliness.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Too Perfect?

By Rabbi Lazer Gurkow

Is "too perfect" a thing? Most of us worry that we aren't perfect enough. But I know of at least one person who worried about being too perfect. Our collective grandfather, Abraham.

The Midrash informs us that when G-d instructed Abraham to be circumcised, he consulted his friends, Aner, Eshkol and Mamre.

Aner advised him against circumcision. Eshkol advised him to circumcise in private lest his enemies attack him. Mamre told him that if G-d told him to circumcise, he should obey. Abraham chose Mamre's home to recover from his circumcision.

Why would Abraham ask his friends whether to circumcise if G-d appeared to him directly and instructed him to do so?

Jewish mystics explained that this was one instruction that Abraham feared more than anything. Essentially, his fear was that he would become too perfect.

ANGELS AND HUMANS

You would think that G-d would prefer angels to humans, but no. G-d wants the imperfect human. Why? G-d wants the imperfect human who is drawn to pleasure and sin, but overcomes and does the right thing.

When G-d gave the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, the angels complained that the Torah should be given to them. G-d told Moses to offer a defense.

Moses replied that the Torah enjoins us not to steal or kill. Do you have an evil inclination, he asked them, that you would need to be told not to succumb to it? The

Torah was meant for imperfect humans.

ABRAHAM'S FEAR

We now return to Abraham's fear. Although Abraham stood ready to obey any of G-d's directives, he was afraid of this one. Circumcision would make Abraham too perfect. Without imperfections, he would have nothing to overcome.

To fulfill the Mitzvah of Bris Milah correctly, we must not only circumcise ourselves, but also treat it as a covenant between us and G-d.

For most of us, circumcision is mostly about the milah, not so much about the brit--the covenant. Abraham was different. For him, circumcision would be a complete covenant. A complete break with his human inclinations.

Abraham could already see that he would circumcise and he would become perfectly righteous. He would have only one passion: to fulfill G-d's will.

ABRAHAM'S QUESTION

So, Abraham asked his friends, should he follow this one Mitzvah and lose out on a lifetime of pleasing G-d by struggling and overcoming? Mamre put him on the right track. Life is not about being the one to bring pleasure to G-d. Life is about obeying G-d.

There are two morals here. First, don't worry about our imperfections. G-d loves our struggles, He loves our triumphs, and He views our occasional failures as opportunities to rebound. Second, never worry about becoming too perfect. A perfect G-d loves it when imperfect humans strive for perfection.

SLICE OF LIFE

Behind The Iron Curtain

By Rabbi Dovid Olidort



It was the mid-1960s, and my family lived in a village outside of Moscow. I was the only religious Jewish kid in my class — a perfect target for bullies. “Abramchik,” my classmates called me.

My parents devised ways of always staying one step ahead of the authorities. Things like getting matzah for Passover, convening with a group of Jews for a minyan, shofar blowing on Rosh Hashanah, and even keeping Shabbos required covert, strategic planning, always dangerous.

For as long as it was possible, my parents kept me home, and my grandfather taught me the Hebrew Aleph Bet, Chumash, Mishnah, and Talmud. By the time I got to second grade, my parents had to enroll me in the local public school. But first, because Shabbos was a regular school day, my father took me to a doctor and somehow convinced him to write a note to the school that I needed

to have a second day off every week in addition to Sunday. “Keep him home on Wednesdays,” the communists said. My father insisted that it had to be Saturdays and managed, somehow, to get his way.

When Shabbos came in early on Fridays during the winter months, and school wasn’t out until 4:00, I had to come up with different excuses for leaving school early. That worked for a while, but on one particular Friday, I ran out of excuses and couldn’t get permission to leave. I thought I would just sit out the rest of the day, listening to the teacher as she spoke. To my terrible dismay, the last class was a drawing class.

I just sat there without touching the crayons.

My teacher began to scold me. I don’t remember exactly what happened. She may have forced the crayons into my hand, or threatened me in some way. I was an eight-year-old kid, and I became very distraught by the pressure. But I wouldn’t draw on Shabbos so she finally got someone from an older grade to fulfill the assignment on my behalf.

Afterwards, she went on a long tirade, lecturing me in front of the class about the stupidity of religion. Yuri Gagarin, the Russian cosmonaut — the first human to travel to space — was a national hero. “Gagarin didn’t find G-d when he was up in the heavens,” she quipped. Then she began to mock religion. I soon realized that she had no idea that Christianity and Judaism were different religions, and I remember being amused that in her ignorance, she thought she was punishing me by railing against Christianity.

After the incident, my father was called to a meeting with communist authorities

who threatened to remove me from my family if this continued. This was terrifying for all of us, and my father was desperate to get us out of Russia. He fought his way with a lot of chutzpah through an intimidating communist bureaucracy. Miraculously, a few months later, we got our exit visas.

We left in a hurry without saying a word to our neighbors or the school. My aunt told me later that when the school learned that we emigrated, they declared me a traitor to the USSR. They threw my bookbag and whatever else I had left in my locker into a bonfire they’d made for the occasion.

In the winter of 1967, we arrived in Israel. It seemed like a different planet. That first Shabbos, my mother was shocked that the family hosting us didn’t draw the curtains when they lit candles. And on Shabbos morning, when our host put on his tallis as he got ready to go to shul, my father couldn’t relate — to wear a tallis out in the street?

It took us all time to shed the fear, to stop looking over our shoulders. But for me, having grown up afraid simply because I was Jewish, the sight of kids being overtly and unself-consciously Jewish out in the streets was incredibly exciting.

My childhood years in Russia didn’t give me the light, joyful Jewish experience we want for our children. But they gave me perspective. My parents’ and my grandparents’ commitment to Yiddishkeit was defining.

Rabbi Dovid Olidort is the Senior Editor at Kehot, the Chabad Publishing House.

This article appeared in the Fall 2021 issue of the Lubavitch International magazine.

This Year’s Young Professionals Shabbaton Set to Be Largest Ever



Young Jewish professionals around the globe are marking their calendars as registration opens for the CYP Encounter Shabbaton. Anticipated to be the largest gathering yet, this year’s event comes at a time when being a young Jewish professional comes with a whole new set of challenges, making the lessons and impact of this annual weekend more needed and impactful than ever.

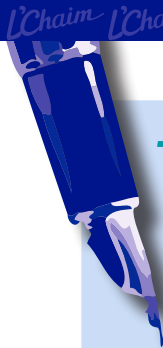
Hosted in the heart of Crown Heights. The Shabbaton has been wholly revamped to meet the evolving needs of today’s young Jews, drawing on insights from shluchim and their communities. The program will focus on fostering meaningful relationships, offering workshops on dating, and helping participants feel part of a broader community. It’s an opportunity for like-minded young Jews from around the world to come together, share experiences, and inspire one another.

“Throughout the past year, we’ve seen young Jews step up in their Jewish identity, pride, and activism,” notes Rabbi Mendy Kotlarsky, Executive Director of Merkos 302. “Being a young Jewish professional today carries different challenges and responsibilities than it did just a year ago. This is set to be a weekend of global impact, as young Jewish leaders from communities across the globe inspire each other to take meaningful action.”

CUSTOMS

Why the special name--challah--for the bread we eat on Shabbat?

Challah is the Hebrew word for the portion of dough given to the kohens (priests) in the times of the Holy Temple. Today, a small amount of dough is burnt in remembrance. By using the word "challah" we are reminded of this ancient obligation. Also, the word "challah" is almost identical with the Hebrew word "kallah"--bride. Since Shabbat is called our "bride," the bread that we eat on Shabbat is called challah.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

By the Grace of G-d
1st day of the Week of Vayero 5730
[November 2, 1969]
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

It is a Jewish custom to relate the events of the week to the weekly portion of the Torah, and thereby to derive true instruction from the Torah of Truth ("Torah" means "Instruction").

This week's Sedra tells us of the birth and upbringing of the first Jewish boy, born of Jewish parents, namely Yitzchok, the son of Abraham and Sarah, the first ancestor of our Jewish people.

The circumstances surrounding Yitzchok's birth were supernatural and miraculous. His Bris (circumcision) took place when he was eight days old, and his upbringing was fraught with difficulties and trials.

Quite different was the case of Abraham's son Ishmael, whose birth was quite normal, and who was circumcised when he was thirteen years old, i.e., at a mature age. Yet it was Yitzchok whom G-d chose to be Abraham's true heir, from whom the Jewish people would descend.

Thus, the Torah teaches us that when new generations are to be born who are to ensure the Jewish continuity and future, the approach must not be based on natural considerations and human calculations. For Jewish existence is not dependent upon natural forces, but upon G-d's direct intervention and providence.

Similarly, the education and upbringing of Jewish children is not to be determined by the same considerations and criteria as in the non-Jewish world. Jewish parents do not wait until the child becomes mature enough to determine his behavior and find his own way to Yiddishkeit. He is given the strongest and fullest possible measure of Jewish training from infancy. Only in this way is it possible to ensure the "everlasting covenant" with G-d, to come through all difficulties and trials with strength, and endowed with G-d's blessings materially and spiritually.

With Blessing,



By the Grace of G-d
12 Nissan, 5741
[April 16, 1981]
Brooklyn, N.Y.

President Ronald Reagan
The White House
Washington

Greeting and Blessing:

Thank you very much, dear Mr. President, for your good wishes on the occasion of my birthday.

As I noted in my remarks at the annual celebration last night, your kind and thoughtful congratulatory message is doubly reassuring. While all of us are still under impact of the recent trying days for you and the Nation, in connection with the demented attempt on your life (Heaven forbid!), it is remarkable, and most gratifying, that the President has been able to give personal attention also to matters which, under the circumstances, might have justifiably been postponed, or overlooked.

Your message, particularly in reference to the importance of emphasizing moral and ethical values in education, is as meaningful as it is timely. It is heartening to know that you, Mr. President, and your administration are committed to upgrading the education of all the citizens of this country.

Please be assured that we in the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, along with all good citizens of this country, continue to pray for your rapid and complete recovery, and for your robust health consistently thereafter, so that you can carry out the awesome responsibilities of the President of this great and leading Nation in the world. In keeping with our basic belief that everything is by Divine Providence, how much more so being elected to the highest office in the land, we are convinced that G-d has endowed you with the capabilities and strength to carry out your G-d-given responsibilities in the fullest measure, with joy and gladness of heart.

There is no better way in which I can reciprocate your good wishes than by reiterating the Divine promise to our Patriarch Abraham, "I will bless them that bless thee" (Gen. 12:3). May you and the First Lady and all your family be blessed with all good from the Source of all blessings.

With utmost esteem and blessing,
Cordially,
M. Schneerson

MOSHIACH MATTERS

Though Moshiach will come first and foremost to Israel, all the nations will

recognize his wisdom and sublimity and submit to his rule. He will guide and instruct them as well.

(Midrash Tehilim and Beraishit Rabba)

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

On this coming Monday, the 20th of Cheshvan, we mark the birthday of Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch, (known as the Rebbe Rashab), the fifth Chabad Rebbe.

Rabbi Sholom Ber was a great tzadik and a person of tremendous insight. This can be illustrated by the following incident.

Rabbi Sholom Ber founded, in 1897, the Tomchei Temimim Yeshiva in the city of Lubavitch. The Rebbe Rashab was an honorary member of the council which was formed to help establish the new government's policy toward the Jews after the deposition of the Czar. In 1918 he traveled to Petersburg to participate in a council meeting. At one of the stops on the journey, he sent his attendant to buy a newspaper. Returning with the newspaper, the attendant read to the Rebbe Rashab: "The Communists have taken over, and the council has been abolished."

The Rebbe Rashab responded, "We must now establish yeshivos in every city. I do not see their [the Communists'] end, but ultimately, their end too, will come..."

In the (former) Soviet Union, as the Communist arm stretched forth with ever increasing strength, the yeshivos went underground. Today, there are hundreds of people living all over the world who were educated in those underground yeshivos. In the last few years, yeshivos have been started in 11 cities including Tbilisi, Moscow, Minsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Kishinev, and Kharkov.

Dozens of Tomchei Temimim Yeshivos continue to educate young Jews in Canada, Australia, Israel, Venezuela, and throughout the United States.

How visionary were the Rebbe Rashab's words concerning the ultimate demise of Communism.

Shmuel Butman

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.



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IT HAPPENED ONCE

In a small corner of the vast expanse of Russia there lived a Jewish innkeeper. In appearance, there was nothing special about him. He dressed like a peasant and spoke like a peasant. But this simple, earthy man was admired and respected by villagers all over his district. It was known to one and all that he was in reality a holy man, a miracle worker. Whomever he blessed, was sure that the blessing would be fulfilled.

So, after a time, the reputation of the innkeeper wonder-worker spread, until word of him reached the Rebbe of Apta, who then lived in Medzibuzh. The Rebbe became curious to meet this man and learn his secret. If the man was, indeed, as simple as they all said, then whence his mystical power?

The Apter Rebbe harnessed his horses and went to the tavern. When he arrived, he looked the tavern-keeper up and down, but could perceive no nuance of greatness in him. He studied his movements, but saw nothing remarkable in anything the innkeeper did. Finally, the Rebbe approached the man and questioned him, "Tell me, please, from where are your special powers? Why does Heaven grant all of Your blessings?"

The man smiled, and replied straightforwardly, "My powers come from my faith in G-d which is as strong as a mighty oak.

"Since my youth, I have always trusted in G-d, and no matter what ever happened to me I was always certain that it would be ultimately for the best, since it came from G-d. I never despaired and I always gave tzedaka generously, particularly when times were tough. As for guests, I have always kept an open house and treated passersby with the greatest hospitality."

The innkeeper paused and then continued. "One night, when I had a house full of guests, there came a knock at my door. It was a messenger from the poretz [landowner] saying that I was to appear before him at once or else he would have me thrown into prison.

"Now, I had a problem, for I had a lot of hungry people to feed. If I left at once, they would probably go to bed hungry. I stayed and took care of my guests, putting my trust in G-d that no harm would come to me.

"Only hours later, after my guests were comfortably in their rooms did I venture out to meet my landlord. When I arrived, he was brimming with goodwill; apparently he had had a change of heart. Not only didn't he throw me into jail, but he greeted me like an old friend. Everything worked out all right.

"Whenever I put my trust in G-d, I have nothing to worry about. Two years ago I lost all my money. I had no trouble maintaining my faith, but it was a different thing for my family. They were desperate and begged me to go and find a partner. They could see no other solution.

"This was against my own ideas. Why should I suddenly begin to rely on flesh and blood when all my life I had trusted only in G-d, and He had never let me down? In the end, I couldn't hold out against them, and so, I set out to find a business partner.

"I walked through the green countryside, bursting with G-d's goodness and bounty, red apples here, luscious grapes to the other side, contented cows grazing lazily, and I stopped in my tracks. My heart was almost bursting with my love of G-d, and my trust in Him had never been greater. Could not the One Who created all of the beautiful greenery and sustained it eternally also care for me and my little family? Why was I seeking out some human being to lift me up from all my troubles. I raised my eyes to the heavens and prayed, 'G-d, You are the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, please grant my prayer. I have lost all my money, and I cannot operate my inn. My family tells me to get myself a partner, a mere mortal of flesh and blood. Why can't You become my partner? We'll split everything down the middle. Your half, I'll distribute to the poor, and my half, I'll use to support my family.

"No sooner had I finished, when I felt something in my pocket. I reached for it, and

to my astonishment it was a silver coin of such value that I had never owned one like it. And I knew that G-d had accepted my proposition; we were partners, and this was the first profit.

"With this coin I replenished my stock and resumed my trade. When the first profits came in, I put one half aside for my 'partner' in a box which I keep behind the counter. I am scrupulously careful with these funds, even more so than with my own money. This is my whole story."

The Apter Rebbe, who had been listening with rapt attention, rose, thanked the tavern-keeper, and left. When he returned to his own shul in Medzibuzh he told the entire tale to his chasidim, and concluded "When one enters a partnership with G-d, and is completely honest in his business dealings, G-d enables him to perform wonders."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah Portion



"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him." (Gen. 18:19)

Rashi comments that the phrase "for I know him" implies love and affection for Abraham. G-d loved Abraham because He knew that Abraham would teach his children to follow in his footsteps. As great and impressive as Abraham's worship of G-d was, more worthy of merit was the fact that he could be counted on to instruct others. (Hayom Yom)

To do righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19)

When G-d bestows wealth and abundance on a Jew, he must honestly judge himself and ask: "Am I really worthy of all this goodness? What have I done to deserve these blessings?" When a person is thus honest with himself, it will cause him to realize that the sharing of his wealth with those less fortunate is truly tzedaka--righteousness. (Sefer HaMaamarim)

And the two angels came to Sodom (Gen. 19:1)

When Abraham was paid a visit by angels, they appeared as human beings. Why, when they presented themselves to Lot, did they appear in their form as angels? Abraham, known as he was for his hospitality, treated everyone he came into contact with in the same equal manner; simple people were honored as much as those more "important." Had Lot, however, seen mere humans at his door, he would have never allowed them to cross the threshold of his home. (Rabbi Leib Sarah's)

In all that Sarah may say to you--hearken unto her voice (Gen. 21:12)

The Talmud states: Three tzadikim were given a taste of the World to Come in this world--Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the World to Come, the prophecy--"the female will surround and encompass the male," and "a woman of valor is the crown of her husband" (Proverbs) will be fulfilled. Abraham was given a glimpse of this when G-d told him to heed the words of Sarah, who was an even greater prophet than he. (Likutei Torah)



4:20 Candle Lighting Time

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Dedicated In Honor of a dear friend of the
 Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Victor Braha

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