

L'Chaim



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Rabbi Chanina bar Chama was one of the first generation of great Talmudic Sages who followed the redaction of the Mishna by Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi [Rabbi Judah the Prince]. By the time he came from his native Babylonia, to study under Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, Rabbi Chanina was already a very accomplished scholar and was received with great warmth and friendship. He developed strong ties with his teacher and many of his fellow disciples, particularly with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.

During those turbulent and dangerous times, it was often necessary to send Jewish dignitaries to plead with the Roman government on behalf of the Jewish people. Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Chanina were often chosen to appear before the Roman emperor. When one of the emperor's advisors asked him why he would rise in honor of these Jews, he replied, "They have the appearance of angels."

Rabbi Yehuda passed away and was succeeded by his son, Rabban Gamliel, who, according to his father's instructions, seated Rabbi Chanina in the place of greatest honor at the academy. However, Rabbi Chanina's tremendous modesty prevented him from taking that place. Only when the elderly sage, Rabbi Efes passed away did Rabbi Chanina occupy it.

According to the teaching of our Sages that we should not make the Torah "an ax with which to dig," Rabbi Chanina went into business dealing in honey. When he succeeded, he opened and supported a Torah academy in his town of Tzippori. He never ceased trying to bring the people closer to G-d and would often reprimand them; this, of course, caused some resentment.

Once, there was a severe drought in the northern part of Israel where Tzippori was situated. At the same time, in the southern part, where Rabbi Yehoshua lived, ample rain fell as soon as Rabbi Yehoshua prayed. The people of Tzippori complained, saying that the drought continued only because Rabbi Chanina didn't pray for them enough.

In response, Rabbi Chanina sent for Rabbi Yehoshua. When he arrived, a public fast was declared and prayers were said for rain. When no rain fell, the people finally understood that the fault was not Rabbi Chanina's, but their own, and they resolved to correct their behavior.

Rabbi Chanina was known as a gifted healer who was well-versed in the use of various kinds of herbs and also the antidotes to snake poisons. He frequently advised people to be careful not to catch colds and to take care of themselves and not neglect treating any disorder.

His Torah teachings and the example of his mitzva observance had a profound influence on his generation. He observed the Sabbath in a manner which showed his love and devotion to the mitzva and when the Shabbat departed he marked it with a Melave Malka -- a feast for the departing out the Sabbath Queen.

Although he lived through very difficult and trying times, he accepted all his suffering -- losing a son and a daughter -- with love of G-d and an abiding faith. He lived a long life and even when he was very old he was unusually fit. It is said that at the age of eighty, he was able to put on his shoes while standing on one foot. When asked to what he ascribed his good health, he replied that he was always careful to show respect to Torah scholars as well

as for the elderly, even if they were not learned.

Before Rabbi Chanina passed away, Rabbi Yochanan, his disciple, (who compiled the Jerusalem Talmud) went to visit him. On the way, word reached him that his master had died and he tore his clothes in mourning. Rabbi Chanina was so loved and respected among the Jews of his time that he was given the honorary title, "Rabbi Chanina the Great."

Adapted from Talks and Tales

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

However My Sabbaths you must observe (31:13)

Shabbat is expressed in plural, because according to the Talmud, two angels accompany a person on his way home from the synagogue on Friday night. One angel is good, and the other is evil. When the angels enter the house and find a home filled with the Shabbat atmosphere and a table set with Shabbat candles and challah, the good angel blesses the family that they should merit the same spiritual atmosphere the next Shabbat. Reluctantly, the evil angel answers, "Amen." Thus, the proper observance of one Shabbat is a source of blessing to observe another Shabbat. (Malei Haomer)

When you take a census...every man shall give G-d an atonement for his soul...This they shall give...a half-shekel. (Exod. 30:12-13)

Moshe could not understand how money can accomplish forgiveness for the soul. G-d showed Moshe a fiery coin which weighed a half-shekel, and He explained that a coin by itself cannot atone for a grave sin. However, if one gives with warmth and enthusiasm that comes from the fiery core of the Jewish soul, then a coin can truly become the cause of forgiveness. (Likutei Sichot)

The Israelites shall keep Shabbat, to make the Shabbat an eternal covenant for their generations (Exod. 31:16)

The word for "their generations," "ledorotam," can also be read "ledirotam," which means "their dwelling places." The Torah is teaching us that the Jewish people should strive to make the Shabbat beautiful and majestic in their homes. (Iturei Torah)

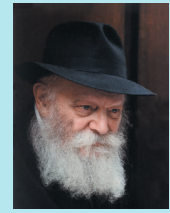
Before all your people I will perform wonders, such as have not been done on all the earth, nor in any nation (Ex. 34:10)

The Hebrew word for "wonder" is related to the word meaning "set apart." G-d promised the Jews that they would be set apart from the rest of the nations of the world, for His Divine Presence would henceforth rest only on them. But what "wonders" were promised? Not merely miracles in the physical world, but wonders in the spiritual sense, a deeper understanding of G-dliness and holiness than is afforded others. That is why the verse specifies "before all your people," for only the Jew can really understand and appreciate the depth of these wonders. (Ohr Hatorah)



5:30 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
21 Adar I / March 1
Torah Portion Ki Tisa
Shabbat ends 6:30 pm



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In the Haftorah which accompanies this week's Torah portion of Ki Tisa we read about Elijah the Prophet and his famous confrontation with the prophets of Baal. Elijah addressed the Jewish nation and said, "How long will you waver between the two? If G-d is truly G-d, then follow Him, and if it is Baal, then go after him."

Elijah told the Jewish People: Your inability to choose between the two alternatives is the worst possible spiritual path. How can anything be worse than idolatry - ascribing G-dly powers to an object? Is it not better to reach some sort of compromise and to maintain a belief in G-d? Why did Elijah say that it is preferable, G-d forbid, to actually worship idols?

Maimonides wrote that the worship of idols arose from human error, from a faulty understanding of the natural world. When some people looked at the physical forces governing the world, they mistakenly believed that those forces themselves should be worshipped, not realizing that it is G-d who causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall.

When a person worships an idol, be it one made of stone, or the planets and stars in the sky, he thinks that by placating these objects he will receive more blessings in his life. This is the difference between a true idolator and a Jew who straddles the fence, never making a choice between idolatry and worship of G-d.

An idol worshipper may one day arrive at the conclusion that idolatry is wrong and return wholeheartedly to G-d, after having admitted his error. But it is far more difficult for a person who is "straddling the fence" to realize the error of his ways and see that he is committing a sin. For his part, he thinks that he is still a good Jew, for he still maintains the outer semblance of Jewish observance.

An idolator, even one who believes in a false god, believes that his god is the source of all life. He seeks spiritual truth, albeit in the wrong direction. But one who professes to believe in G-d yet secretly pledges obedience to an idol seeks not truth, but convenience. He wants to benefit from both worlds, covering all possible bases.

A person who vacillates is also more detrimental to those around him. An idol worshipper is more easily avoided, and not likely to lead others astray, who could be deceived by outward appearances.

Elijah's message holds true for us today. It is far easier to avoid obvious pitfalls in spiritual matters than to stand on guard against finer, less conspicuous compromises. But it is these finer points which ultimately define our intellectual honesty and our faith.

Get There – That's The Goal

By Rabbi Baruch Epstein

Airline travel seems to be an endless money grab. Aisle seat \$35, drink of water \$4, it's enough to make me reach for the motion sickness bag! It is comical: people complaining that they don't get airline food; it wasn't all that good.

Maybe the airlines are greedy, maybe incompetent— or maybe they are actually on to something important.

There was a time when the flight itself was part of the adventure – something to look forward to; people got dressed up to fly. Today most 15 year olds have been on more planes than trains; in fact, an outing on Chicago elevated tracks would be more novel than a flight to Los Angeles.

The airlines are dropping the "Queen Mary" mentality, embracing the "public transportation" persona. They are competing with Greyhound and Amtrak – offering to get you there as efficiently as other modes of transport; that's it, no frills. Thirsty, \$4, hungry \$5, bring along luggage, want better seats, like anything in life – the more you want the more it costs – simply want to be in Philadelphia by 6:00 PM – here is the ticket price.

There is a significant lesson here about differentiating between what we are doing and what we

are doing it for. Think about your day – all the steps from point to point – where are we going? Does our destination get lost in the process of the journey? We can get so enwrapped in what we are doing that we forget that it is only the prep before the objective. Couples date interminably, forgetting that they are supposed to be creating a home. Perpetual students, too engrossed to finish their degree.

The Jewish people are susceptible to this attention diverter. We have been in exile for a long time – we are here to enrich the world; like a shaken spice box we spread a delightful aroma when we are dispersed. But "this" – our current world circumstance -- is only a precursor – a warm up for the objective of creation – a time when the world can apply all it has learned – the time of Moshiach. We are so busy stretching we forgot to exercise – so busy getting there we forget where we are going. With Moshiach around the corner we are at the end of the beginning.

So stripped down transportation has a message – get from point A to point B as efficiently as you can – the destination is the objective. World – we are supposed to transform this place we call home into a place in which G-d is at home – don't be distracted by the tiny bags of peanuts.

In Hebrew on face call (718) 778 6000

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SLICE OF LIFE

Jewish Burial in Texas After Some Divine Providence

By Noa Amouyal



Rabbi Wagner and Rabbi Goldstein at Chabad of West Houston

Danny Carson had decided that he was going to be cremated long before he passed away. But an unlikely pair of Rabbis – his nephew from Texas and a stranger from Germany – had convinced him otherwise.

“Danny Carson wasn’t overly observant of Judaism,” Rabbi Dovid Goldstein, co-director of Chabad of West Houston, said. When Goldstein and his wife, Elisa, moved to West Houston, the rabbi made it a point to have a relationship with this side of the family, despite their distance from religion. To that end, Goldstein found ways to respect their wishes but also introduce certain mitzvot into their home.

That’s why he wasn’t surprised and initially didn’t object when he got a call from his aunt saying that Carson had died and the funeral would be a perfunctory service, followed by his body being cremated.

“When my aunt told me about the cremation, I asked if this was a matter up for discussion, and she said ‘no.’ So I decided to drop it,” he said.

The Carson family would have gone through with their plans if it wasn’t for Rabbi Yitzchak Mendel Wagner, Rabbi of the Jewish Community of Krefeld, Germany, who was touring the Houston community. Over lunch, Rabbi Goldstein told him about the cremation, which Rabbi Wagner took as a call to action.

“I always felt that everything we encounter is governed by Hashgachah Pratis, or Divine Providence. We must open our eyes to see it, but it’s important to understand that there are no random coincidences in life,” says Wagner.

Initially, Wagner thought his purpose of being in Houston was to continue his successful tour speaking about the legacy of Kristallnacht and how Jewish life is resurging in Germany despite the efforts of the Nazis. In fact, he had reached out to Rabbi Goldstein a few months before to coordinate a meeting so he could speak to the Houston community about the subject.

The two planned to meet at the International Conference of Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries in New York in November 2023. Given the chaos in meeting a specific person in a sea of thousands, they were not able to connect.

At the closing-night banquet, when Wagner approached the registration desk to ask for his seat, they told him there was none available, although he had made a reservation.

“At that moment, I saw in my mind’s eye a tree from which a leaf slowly sails to earth, and I heard the holy Baal Shem Tov explaining to his students that nothing in life happens by chance, not even a leaf falling from a tree. In the Baal Shem Tov story, a small worm lies on the ground under the leaf and is protected by it from the burning sun,” he recalled.

“OK, surely there is a deeper reason, so please give me another place” he told the person staffing the desk.

Sure enough, they found a table. Once he got himself situated, a rabbi from London asked him if he would mind switching so he could sit with his family. Wagner agreed and sat at his new table. Once seated, he glanced at the name tag of the man beside him, and saw that it was Goldstein.

“More than 6,000 thousand people from all over the world attended this banquet, and of all people, I was sitting next to Rabbi Goldstein. There is no such thing as a coincidence.” He said.

While traveling to Houston, he assumed the moment of Divine intervention stopped and ended with his meeting Goldstein at the

banquet.

“But when I overheard this conversation, the leaf landed. I realized that there was no reason for my visit to Texas other than to stop this cremation.

The argument that drove the point home was a key component in Wagner’s lecture about what Nazis did to the bodies of dead Jews. “They burned us. Just like the terrorist did on Oct. 7. We can’t allow our fellow Jews to inflict the same brutality our enemies did to us.”

It was that argument that Goldstein believes may have swayed his aunt to change her mind.

“I texted my aunt and said I’m sitting next to a German rabbi who is an expert on Kristallnacht and the Holocaust. He is devastated every day that Jews were cremated in the ovens. He is pleading with you to not do what the Nazis did,” Goldstein recalled.

“That morning, she texted me saying she’ll ask the funeral director to delay the cremation and that I should try to make arrangements for a Jewish burial if I could help get the community to assist with the cost.”

It took a few hours, but Goldstein was able to secure a proper Jewish burial through the generosity of the Jewish Family Services of Houston.

“In all honesty, if Rabbi Wagner didn’t nudge me, I would have let the matter go. I’ve stopped cremations before, of course, but I didn’t want to fight with my own family.” “At the end of the funeral, my aunt came up to me and said she was so happy we did this for him. She didn’t have the money. She revealed that when I first messaged her, she was upset and talking about the Holocaust touched a nerve. But she took the time to process what I told her and realized it was the right thing to do.”

“Ultimately, this is what the Lubavitcher Rebbe empowered the shluchim to do. We’re here to serve every Jew”.

As for Wagner, “I knew we’d be successful because Hashem put me here for this. The lesson here is that if a message comes to you, it is your obligation to take action.”

From Chabad.org

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

SERVE G-D WITH JOY

14th of Cheshvan, 5736 (1976)

.... Your question is surprising, inasmuch as you surely know that one of the basics of our Torah -- called Torat Emet because it tells the truth -- is that everything happens by Divine Providence. Hence you certainly have your mission in this world, that is to say, you have also been given the ability and capacity to carry it out. For it is logical that G-d would not give one a task which is impossible to carry out. Furthermore, it is possible and necessary to carry out one’s mission with joy, as it is written, “Serve G-d with joy”; also, for this the necessary capacity has been given.

One of the ways to stimulate such joy is to reflect, first of all, upon the fact that G-d has chosen the Jewish people, and you in particular, to carry out a mission for Him. Imagine if a human king would come from his city and residence to visit your home and entrust you with a special task how welcome this would be; how much more so in regard to the King of Kings.

Our Sages state that “It is a pleasure, so to speak, for G-d that He has given a commandment, and His Will has been done.” Surely it is most gratifying to be able to please G-d, especially as G-d has also promised a generous reward both in this world and in the World to Come.

Carrying the illustration a little further, one should consider that in the case of a human king, one can never be certain that the task he assigns is all for good, or that it can be carried out fully, or that he can fully keep his promise of reward. All this, of course, does not apply in the case of a mitzva.

It is also clear that when a person goes about his tasks with joy and confidence, he is likely to have greater success, and also more likely to overcome any

discouragement or difficulty that might arise.

If you reflect on the above in some depth you will surely find a great deal of strength and encouragement, and you will see how easy it is to carry it out without any doubts in this regard.

7 Adar II, 5717 (1957)

I received your letter of the 5th of Adar I. With regard to the inclination toward a feeling of sadness, a good remedy for it is to have it firmly engraved on your mind that G-d, the Creator of the world, watches over everyone individually and, being the essence of goodness, there is therefore no room for sadness or worry, as has been explained at length in various parts of the Tanya (see Index). It would especially be good for you to learn by heart from the beginning of Chapter 41 (on page 56) until the next page second line; whenever you feel sad or depressed you should review that section in your mind or recite it orally to dispel the unwelcome feeling.

With regard to the question of a beard, since, as you write, you spend most of the day in the yeshiva, it would be the right thing to let it grow. In addition to all the reasons you mention in your letter, there is one fundamental reason in accordance with the Tzemach Tzedek -- Yoreh De’ah, paragraph 93.

It should also be added that when a Jew does something beyond the call of duty, G-d sends extra special blessings, as is explained in the Zohar and also in the commentary of the Tzemach Tzedek on the verse in Psalms, “And He is merciful” (see supplement to Tehilim Yosef Yitzchak HaShalem). May G-d grant that your example will be emulated by your friends at the yeshiva, and thus you will have the additional satisfaction of having been a pioneer for a good cause.

As requested, I will remember you and all those mentioned in your letter when visiting the holy resting place of my father-in-law, of saintly memory, and may G-d grant that you will have good news to report in all of the above and will be successful in your studies and in your conduct, both of which are based on “serve G-d with joy.”

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel (the third Chabad Rebbe), once

said that Moshiach will delight in the company of unscholarly, self-sacrificing Jews. A unique chamber will be set aside for them, and they will be envied by the greatest intellectuals.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

We are currently in the month of Adar I. This year especially, as it is a leap year, and we have two months of Adar -- a total of 60 days of increased enthusiasm and joy -- it is appropriate to consider Chasidic teachings on the subject of joy.

At a Chasidic gathering nearly 20 years ago, the Rebbe told the following story:

One of the tzadikim of Poland, when still a little boy, asked his father for an apple. His father, however, refused to give it to him. I

The enterprising youngster proceeded to recite a blessing over the apple: “Baruch atah... borei pri haetz -- Blessed are You... who created fruit of the trees!”

The father could not possibly allow the blessing to have been recited in vain. And so, he promptly handed the youngster the apple. The Rebbe used this story to illustrate the following point:

In our situation today, if the Jewish people begin now to rejoice in the Redemption, out of absolute trust that G-d will speedily send us Moshiach, this joy in itself will (as it were) compel our Father in heaven to fulfill His children’s wish and to redeem them from exile.

Needless to say, the Rebbe was not suggesting the use of mystical incantations or the like to “force” the premature advent of the end of the exile. “We are simply speaking of serving G-d with exuberant joy,” the Rebbe explained.

The month of Adar brings with it not only the injunction to increase in joy, but with every command we are also given the power and energy to fulfill that command.

So, right from the start of the month, let us increase in our happiness, do mitzvot with more enthusiasm, and rejoice NOW in the imminent Redemption.

Shmuel Beiman

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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435 Chabad Shluchim Gathered In Southern France For A Special Convention

France boasts, 435 Chabad Shluchim-Emissaries, across 200 Chabad houses, spreading throughout the country. This year, the gathering of French shluchim took place in Toulon, Southern France. Despite the challenge of traveling to Toulon, every shliach made an effort to attend this year’s special gathering.

The French police, upon learning about the gathering, ensured every detail was covered, providing escort and security for the shluchim.

The conference hall, located by the sea, was adorned with signs welcoming and honoring the shluchim. The gathering offered fully booked workshops on topics including teaching Torah online, emotional health, working with authorities, and a variety of relevant community and personal topics.

The Shluchim expressed their gratitude to the conference committee who worked tirelessly to ensure every detail was taken care of in a spirit of remarkable unity. As one shliach put it, “During these two days, we felt as if we were experiencing a foretaste of the unity of the times of Moshiach.”

A Call To Action

Influence others to give Tzedaka - Charity:

In addition to giving charity oneself, one should encourage family members to give charity as well. As the commandment of giving charity also applies to non-Jews, one should encourage them, as well, to give charity.