בס"ד

L'Chaim

1943

28 Tishrei, 5787

October 9, 2026

The Weekly Publication for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תוך ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"Jerusalem has mountains around it, and the L-rd is around His people from now and to eternity" (Psalms 125:2)

LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

The Midrash recounts the sequence of events that led to Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of Knowledge, as narrated in this week's Torah portion, Bereishit: First the serpent approached Eve, and asked if G-d had forbidden them to eat all the fruit in the Garden of Eden. She replied that they were permitted to eat any fruit, except for those growing on the Tree of Knowledge: "G-d has said, 'You shall not eat of it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die.' " When the serpent heard this reply, he pushed Eve towards the Tree and told her, "Surely you will not die."

The Midrash explains that Eve's mistake was adding on to G-d's command. The prohibition was only against eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, yet Eve added that they weren't allowed to touch it. It was this initial digression that enabled the serpent to lead her astray, and later, for her to cause Adam to sin.

Our Sages tell us that the reason Eve made this mistake was that she didn't hear the command directly from G-d; it was transmitted only second-hand, through Adam. Had she heard it directly from G-d, not only would she not have sinned and led her husband to sin, she would have kept Adam from transgressing.

This is why, at the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, G-d commanded Moses to give the Torah first to the Jewish women, then to the men. "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob," G-d told him, referring to the Jewish women; "and tell the people of Israel," referring to the Jewish men. In this manner, G-d ensured that the Jewish women would always be on the forefront of Torah observance throughout the generations, and from their perspective, "correct" the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

The special advantage of Jewish women - the ability to extend a protective and positive influence on their husbands - is derived from the way Eve was created, which was different from Adam. Adam was created from the earth, from a base substance, whereas Eve was created from Adam's rib, from the body of a human being.

Our Sages also interpret the verse "G-d built (vayiven) the rib" as relating to the "extra measure of wisdom (bina) G-d has given women over men." Because women are on a higher spiritual level, they possess this ability to guard them.

This underscores how crucial it is to provide Jewish girls with a Torah-true education, instilling in them pride and a sense of joy in their Judaism. For the Jewish woman is the foundation of the home, and the positive influence she wields is very powerful.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot vol. 3 of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

The Human Upgrade

In the age of artificial intelligence, becoming more human may matter most. Almost overnight, things that seemed futuristic have become ordinary. Machines can write, analyze, organize, design, calculate and generate ideas in seconds.

Naturally, much of the conversation is about what AI can do.

But perhaps the more interesting question is what AI is causing us to do: to look again at ourselves.

When technology can perform more tasks once considered distinctly human, we are pushed to ask deeper questions. What do I contribute? Where does my real value lie? What qualities do I possess that cannot simply be measured by speed, productivity or output?

Those aren't technological questions. They're human ones.

For a long time, we have tended to define ability by accomplishment: what someone knows, creates, produces or gets done.

AI challenges that definition.

If a machine can produce an impressive report, image or analysis in seconds, perhaps the finished product was never the full measure of the person producing it.

Human value runs deeper.

Judgment matters. Sensitivity matters. Character, imagination, relationships, values and purpose matter. So do empathy, responsibility and the ability to understand not only what can be done, but what should be done.

Technology may become extraordinarily sophisticated, but sophistication and humanity are not the same thing.

In fact, the more capable our technology becomes, the more clearly we may recognize qualities in ourselves that we previously took for granted.

There is a beautiful idea in Chassidic thought that genuine growth isn't primarily about manufacturing a new personality. Much of what we are searching for is already present within us, sometimes hidden or underdeveloped. The challenge is to uncover it, strengthen it and allow it greater expression.

Progress, then, isn't always about adding more. Sometimes it's about revealing more of who we already are capable of becoming.

AI can be an extraordinary partner, but it shouldn't replace our own thinking.

Let technology polish your work, challenge your ideas and expand your possibilities. But bring something of your own to the process—your perspective, judgment, curiosity and voice.

The best technology should amplify individuality, not replace it.

There is another fascinating lesson in this technological moment: AI refuses to stand still.

What looks revolutionary today may seem primitive surprisingly soon. Every breakthrough becomes the foundation for another. The entire field operates on the assumption that improvement is never finished.

Perhaps human beings can borrow something from that mindset. We easily become comfortable with our own definitions: This is who I am. This is what I'm good at. This is simply how I operate.

But people aren't finished products either.

There are abilities we haven't developed, ideas we haven't explored, habits we can change and strengths we haven't yet discovered. Growth doesn't require rejecting who we were yesterday. It means refusing to assume that yesterday represents our limits.

Yesterday's achievement doesn't have to become today's ceiling. It can become tomorrow's starting point.

And perhaps that is one of the unexpected gifts of the AI revolution.

While everyone is asking how intelligent our machines can become, we have an opportunity to ask a far more important and personal question:

How much more can we become?

The greatest upgrade ahead may not be artificial at all.

It may be human.

SLICE OF LIFE

'They Danced With This Torah Before the Nazis. We're Dancing With It After'

By Yisrael Eliashiv / Chabad.org

Lennard Hammerschlag helps the scribe complete the final letters at the dedication of the Hammerschlag Torah at Chabad of the Shore.

The dancing at Chabad-Lubavitch at the Shore in Ventnor, N.J., was already underway on Simchat Torah 2023 when the horrific news from Israel of the Oct. 7 massacre began to spread through the room. It came in fragments, each update worse than the last. Congregants turned to Rabbi Avrohom Rapoport, the center's director, and asked whether they could still dance.

"Now we have to dance for ourselves and for all those who can't dance anymore," Rapoport told them.

So they kept going. Rapoport remembers dancing and crying simultaneously, the joy of the holiday pressing against what they were hearing from the Holy Land.

"It was as if the Torahs were dancing for us," Rapoport said. "We were just holding on."

With the congregation watching him, he pointed to one of the scrolls. "You see this Torah? They danced with this Torah before the Nazis, and we're dancing with this Torah after the Nazis."

THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR

The Hammerschlag Torah's story begins in Lauenau, Germany, where the family had deep roots. Lennard Hammerschlag, whose grandfather Adolf Hammerschlag brought it out of Germany, says the family believes the scroll is about 200 years old.

When the family fled to Bulawayo, in what was then Southern Rhodesia, they were forced to give up nearly everything they owned. Adolf made certain the Torah was not among the losses. It remained in the family for nearly 80 years.

In 2018, Lennard, his brother Marc, and a group from Stockton University brought the scroll back to Lauenau, into the room on the old Hammerschlag property that had once served as the town's Jewish prayer space. The Torah had once been spirited away under terrible circumstances. This time it came and went in peace.

"It was significant that I didn't have to bring it in through the back door," Hammerschlag said. "I brought it in through the front door."

In Ventnor, the scroll served for years as the centerpiece of the Chabad center's Holocaust exhibit. Hammerschlag wanted more for it than a display, and he and Rapoport had spoken about restoring it for years. When a sofer, a ritual scribe, finally gave them an estimate, the figure exceeded the cost of a new Torah.

"Value-wise, you could buy a Torah for less than it costs to fix this one," Rapoport said. "For us it wasn't a money thing. This Torah has a story."

The two were discussing the cost at a Shabbat dinner hosted by Rapoport when a guest, Craig Beresin, moved from the far end of the table and found himself within earshot.

"I'm meant to hear this," he recalls thinking, "and I'm not meant just to hear it and do nothing."

His parents were elderly and in poor health, and he had been looking for meaningful ways to honor them. He pledged toward the restoration and began bringing others into the project.

When the scribe, Gad Sebbag, examined the scroll, he found fine parchment and lettering. The text on the entire Torah, however, was red. Jewish law requires the letters of a Torah to be black, and over the decades the ink had faded through shades of brown to a reddish hue, a condition known as chaludah. All 304,805 letters needed attention.

Restoring them meant tracing the hand of the original scribe, whose strokes, spacing and layout remained visible in the faded ink.

On August 30, 2026, the community gathered to complete the restoration. They screened the documentary "Saved from the Shoah: The Hammerschlag Family Torah Returns," Hammerschlag filled in the final letter, and the congregation sang, danced and raised the scroll high in the Jewish tradition of hagbah. Its first formal reading came on Rosh Hashanah, when Hammerschlag was called for the third aliyah.

TORAH RESCUED AFTER 80 YEARS

In May 2015, Dr. George Leventon and his wife, Marge, traveled to Russia to help recover and restore Torah scrolls that had been kept out of Jewish communal ownership since the early years of Soviet persecution. In their Moscow hotel, Marge unrolled the one that would eventually reach the Jewish community of Bellaire, Texas.

An initial restoration followed in 2016, with further work in 2024 to prepare it for regular synagogue use. George restored the badly dried wooden rollers himself, Marge designed its mantle, and friends contributed two crowns and a yad.

On Oct. 27, 2024, as the community marked a year since Oct. 7, the congregation formally dedicated it as the Am Yisrael Chai Torah. Rabbi Yossi Zaklikofsky, co-director of the Chabad center, recalled the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones.

"This Torah, like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, seemed lifeless for decades," he said, before being restored "word by word, letter by letter."

Esty Zaklikofsky, who co-directs the center with her husband, said the name reflected what the community was living through.

"At the time, everybody was very focused on the hostages," she said. "It really felt like this Torah had itself been held hostage for approximately 80 years. It wasn't being used as a Torah is meant to be used, and here we were, decades later, with the Torah restored and everybody celebrating."

etc.

Cyprus Jewish Community Celebrates Answered Prayer

Deputy Israeli Ambassador Kobi Waller, with Chief Rabbi of Cyprus and Head Shliach Rabbi Aryeh Zev Raskin.

Mirav Leshem Gonen, mother of captivity survivor Romi Gonen and a prominent advocate for the return of the hostages, paid a moving visit to the Jewish Community Center of Cyprus.

Mirav visited the community's large "Sukkah of Unity," where she met with Chief Rabbi of Cyprus and Head Shliach Rabbi Aryeh Zev Raskin.

Mirav described the visit as a deeply emotional closing of a circle: returning to the place where she had once stood with hope and tefillah for her daughter, this time to bentch lulav and esrog with gratitude for her return.

WHAT IS GEMATRIA?

Torah can generally be interpreted on four levels: literal, allegorical, homiletic and esoteric. Gematria, which involves each Hebrew letter having a numerical value, is allegorical. When Hebrew words or phrases have the same Gematria, this alludes to the inner connection between the two. For instance, one of G-d's names, "Elokim," has the same Gematria as "hateva," meaing nature. When "Elokim" is used in Scripture, it represents G-d's presence within nature.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Freely translated and adapted

Rosh Chodesh, Marcheshvan, 5743 [1982]

To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel, Everywhere,

G-d bless you all!

Greeting and Blessing:

Coming from the month of Tishrei ... and taking into consideration the familiar saying to the effect that "as one prepares himself for the journey, so one proceeds," which is associated with the well known customs of proclaiming as Simchas Torah ends, "and Jacob went his way,"

Meaning that inasmuch as a Jew, every Jew, is, of course, a member of Kehilas Yaakov (the Community of Jacob), is now about to set out on "his way," going into the "ordinary" months of the year that are not "abundant with festivals," but are largely taken up with matters of earning a livelihood and mundane affairs, this is the time to remind him that "his way" is the way of Yaakov as it has been designated by G-d, namely, the way of G-d, the way of "All your actions should be for the sake of Heaven," as behooves a descendant of Yaakov;

Considering further that although all Jews have the same task and purpose in life - complete dedication to the service of G-d, as our Sages expressed it: "I was created to serve my Creator," yet, coming down to actual conduct they are divided into three categories: men, women, and children (of pre-Bar-Mitzvah and pre-Bas Mitzvah age). Hence, this is reflected in the resolutions which have been adopted by them respectively, during Tishrei for the entire new year.

In light of all above, and also in view of the fact that a resolution made jointly by several persons, and more so by many people, in congregation, is more certain to be carried out with greater hatzlocho [suc-cess] and in the fullest measure by each one, man and woman, I take the liberty of making the following suggestion and request, hoping that it will be acted upon:

It would surely be "right and proper and good and fitting" that "the heads of the people together with the tribes of Israel" everywhere gather together as soon as possible - men separately, as well as women and children separately (the children under their respective counselors, of course) in order to reaffirm and, especially, to decide upon the proper ways and means of carrying out in actual reality and in the fullest measure, the good resolutions which each had made during the auspicious month of Tishrei, beginning with Rosh Hashono and in the propitious subsequent days, as well as to supple-ment those resolutions, if necessary,

The resolutions relating to speech, thought (these "too" are known to G-d), and certainly actions, since action is the essential thing: the resolutions made for the entire year, may it bring good and blessing to us and all our Jewish people.

It is surely unnecessary to underscore that in regard to good resolutions and good intentions there is always the assurance that G-d helps carry them out, and, indeed, even better and sooner than one expected -

Especially if these gatherings will be associated with, and continuous to, one of the daily prayers, together with words of Torah at the opening of the gathering, and with a donation to Tzedoko [charity] during the proceedings or at the conclusion:

For then will be "brought into" the gathering the "three things on which the world stands Torah, prayer and acts of benevolence; beginning with one's self, the so-called "small world," and on to the "world" in the ordinary sense, the world in which one lives, which is in need of a very, very strong blessing from the Creator and Master of the world that it should be a world that stands firmly, and not, G-d forbid, a world that shakes and stumbles etc., particularly as of recent times.

To conclude with blessings: May G-d grant Hatzlocho that the "writing and sealing for good" and the "sealing for good" which everyone received in the month of Tishrei, should materialize in the fullest measure, in the kind of good that is revealed and obvious, throughout the coming months and days, bringing good and blessing to us and all our people, to the extent of "open wide your mouth, (state all your desires), and I shall fulfill them,"

And soon indeed bring the realization of the main and essential blessing - the true and complete Geulo (Redemption) through Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

With esteem and blessing for Hatzlocho and for good tidings, in all above -

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The birth of a Jewish child brings joy not only to his parents and extended family but to the entire Jewish people, for it signifies a step closer to the coming of Moshiach. The Talmud states that Moshiach will not arrive until "all the souls in guf" (the storehouse in which they await their descent into the physical world) have been born. The birth of a Jewish baby therefore hastens the Redemption and brings closer the blessings of the Messianic Era.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 25 Iyar, 5743-1983)

"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

The Chabad Rebbes taught that Shabbat Bereishit is a special day that has an influence on the entire year. In fact, a Jew's conduct on Shabbat Bereishit determines his conduct throughout the entire year to come.

Why Shabbat Bereishit? Because the foundation of a Jew's service the whole year long is the perpetual remembrance of "In the beginning G-d created."

G-d created the world from absolute nothingness, and continues to create it every second anew. The miracle of creation wasn't a one-time event, but an ongoing miracle by which each individual creation is constantly being sustained.

The world doesn't exist by virtue of its own right. The only reason it continues to exist is that G-d chooses to recreate it every minute.

A Jew may sometimes feel that keeping Torah and mitzvot is difficult. So many problems and obstacles threaten to hinder his Divine service! But when he reminds himself that "In the beginning G-d created," that G-d is perpetually creating the world and preventing it from falling back into nothingness this very minute, he will come to understand that nothing can deter him from serving the Creator. As every creature receives its vitality directly from G-d, nothing has the power to prevent him from observing G-d's commandments.

When a Jew thinks about "In the beginning G-d created," his personal concerns will soon be forgotten. He will realize that G-d is the one true Source of everything, and that only good can come from Him. And in that way he will merit to receive G-d's blessings in all of his endeavors."

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA

לזכרון חי"ה י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.

Published by
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ISSN 1050 0480
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Once there lived a wealthy Jewish butcher in a town on the seaside. In his youth he had been quite poor, and had worked very hard to amass his wealth. Unfortunately, he had never had the opportunity to learn Torah, but he took great pleasure in praying and saying Psalms. He never forgot what it meant to be needy, and he constantly went out of his way to help his fellow Jews. Every Friday afternoon before Shabbat he would distribute meat and money to all the poor families in the town.

His good nature made him a favorite among not only the Jews, but also the gentiles of the town. His reputation even spread to the governor who favored him with an important appointment as the chief customs officer of the port. As such, he would collect taxes on imports and also collect a fee for his services. As one of the benefits of his job, he was also permitted to take any one item from amongst the goods. It was in the capacity of customs collector that he amassed an even greater fortune.

One day a ship arrived in port, and he went to inspect the goods on board. After he performed his duties, the captain approached him saying, "I have some especially good merchandise on board today. Something totally unique, but I am not at liberty to divulge to you the nature of this merchandise unless you want to buy it."

The butcher was very curious and asked what it was, but he always received the same reply: "I will tell you only if you agree to buy it."

"How much do you want for it?" he inquired.

"Ten thousand gold coins!" was the astonishing answer.

"You expect me to make the purchase without knowing what I'm buying?"

"That's the stipulation. I assure you, you won't be disappointed."

The butcher was all but hooked, but the captain was enjoying his power over the butcher. He was no longer satisfied with ten thousand; he raised the price to twenty thousand coins, and then forty thousand gold coins!

Finally the butcher agreed. "I will pay your price. Just show me the merchandise!

"Only after you have brought all the money," the captain answered with a grin, and off went the butcher to fetch the treasure of coins.

Even as he went to collect the coins, the butcher was doubting his sanity. He returned and laid the money on the table. The captain turned on his heel and in a few minutes he returned with the "merchandise" - Jewish men, women and children in tow - bound hand and foot.

The evil captain couldn't restrain himself, and broke out into laughter: "Aren't you happy now? What a bargain you got yourself! If you hadn't bought them, they would have been food for sharks - I certainly have no use for them!"

The butcher took the hapless people with him and left the ship as fast as his feet could carry him, lest the wicked captain have a change of heart. He kept thinking over and over again how G-d had inspired him to spend a fortune on unknown goods in order to save these Jews.

The butcher fed and clothed the former prisoners and treated them with the utmost kindness. One day he noticed a young girl from among them and thought, "This girl would be perfect for my son." The two young people agreed and preparations were made for the wedding.

On the eve of the great affair, the butcher circulated among the guests, offering a drink here, a dainty there, when he saw a young man sitting in a corner weeping.

"What is wrong? Everyone is rejoicing, why are you so sad?"

The poor boy replied, "The girl who is about to marry your son was betrothed to me before we were abducted by the pirates."

"Why did no one tell me?" the butcher asked.

"We are all so grateful to you, that no one dared disturb your happiness," the boy responded.

The butcher thought for a while, and then called his son to him. After recounting the entire story to the groom, he asked, "What do you want to do about it?"

"There is no question. Let the couple be married today as they had planned so many months ago. I will not stand in their way."

And so it was, that the entire village celebrated the marriage that very day. The butcher not only made them the wedding, but furnished them with a house and furnishing and enough money to begin a new life.

The Sages said of this man that with his forty thousand gold coins he purchased a place in the World to Come equaled only to that of the most righteous.

Dedicated in honor of dear friends of the
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THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And G-d created the great sea-monsters (Gen. 1:21)
As Rashi notes, these were "the Leviathan (livyatan) and its mate." As explained by Chasidut, the Hebrew word "livyatan" means connection or joining. It refers to the very highest spiritual level, at which a person's attachment to G-d is constant and uninterrupted. Nonetheless, even on this superior level, every individual still needs a "mate," a good friend and supporter to help him in his service of G-d. *(Likutei Sichot)*

And G-d saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen. 1:31)
Our Sages commented: " 'Good' - refers to the good inclination; 'very good' refers to the evil inclination.' " The phenomenon of teshuva, repentance, could not exist without the creation of an evil inclination. Teshuva enables man to attain an even higher spiritual level and completeness than before he sinned; thus, G-d declared the creation "very good" only after Adam was created with this potential. *(Sefer HaSichot 5749, Vol. 1)*

By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread (Gen. 3:19)
Rabbi Yosef of Novhorodok used to say: If a person has to work night and day just to fulfill the curse of "By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread," how much more so should he expend time and effort to attain the blessing of "Blessed is the man who trusts in G-d!"

My sin is greater than I can bear (Gen. 4:13)
When a person sins and afterwards does teshuva, sincerely regretting his misdeed and returning to G-d with a whole heart, he refines and purifies the life-force he misused in committing the sin and elevates it to its higher spiritual source. When Cain declared, "My sin is greater than I can bear," he was saying that he felt incapable of elevating his terrible sin and transforming it into holiness. *(Tzava'at HaRibash)*

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