

L'Chaim



One of the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov once came to him and asked what profession he should follow. The Besht answered at once that he should become a chazan (a cantor).

"But I have no voice at all," the man protested. "Never mind. I will bless you that your soul will become connected with the heavenly sphere of music." And so it was, that the Chasid became a chazan with the sweetest voice this side of the Garden of Eden.

Once this chazan happened to visit the court of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk. Reb Elimelech and his son couldn't decide whether to give him the honor of leading the prayers to welcome the Shabbat queen, for fear that the beauty of his prayers would distract the congregants and the Rebbe himself.

Finally, they decided to honor him, for after all, wasn't he called "the Baal Shem Tov's chazan"? The chazan's singing was as beautiful as could be.

Reb Elimelech was so moved by the holiness it expressed, that he was afraid that its ethereal sounds would cause him to leave his body and ascend to the supernal realms.

When Shabbat had passed Reb Elimelech summoned the chazan and requested that he tell some stories about the greatness of the Baal Shem Tov, for it is a custom amongst Chasidim to tell stories of tzadikim at the Saturday evening Melave Malka meal. The tales that he told were amazing to hear, and all gathered around to wonder at the holiness of the Besht.

The chazan recounted the Besht's great love and fear of G-d, and his knowledge of every aspect of the Torah. He described the Besht's holy prayer and his conversations with spiritual beings which occurred to him as often as we would converse with a close friend.

Once, the Besht asked the Ari Hakodesh - who had lived hundreds of years previously - why he had revealed the great secrets of Torah so openly. The Ari told him that had he lived another two years, he would have brought the world to perfection.

The Besht was able to converse with spiritual beings as well as understand the speech of the animals.

On Friday afternoons myriads of souls would gather around the Besht awaiting their ultimate purification which could be brought about only by a tzadik.

The holiness of the Besht was so great that he could see from one end of the world to the other.

One day, as the disciples were seated around him, the Besht began laughing for no apparent reason. When he was questioned, he replied that he had just seen the wondrous workings of Providence.

In a far away land, a tzadik was walking to the synagogue to pray when a terrible hail storm blew up. He happened to be passing by a magnificent palace that had been built by a wealthy aristocrat, and he hurried to take shelter within. When the storm subsided the tzadik went on his way. No sooner had he departed, than the entire fabulous structure collapsed. It was reported in the papers that the palace had collapsed with no obvious cause.

The Besht, however, saw that the only reason the structure had existed at all was to shelter that tzadik for a few short moments on one particular day.

The chazan also revealed that the Besht had the ability look at an object and know the thoughts which the craftsman had been thinking when he made it. Reb Elimelech was amazed at all he heard.

They discussed a few more of the wonders of the great master before parting.

The chazan remembered that he was once together with the Besht and his holy disciples while they were learning Torah. The scene was a reflection of the events at the Giving of Torah at Sinai: A heavenly fire surrounded them, while thunder and lightning were revealed and the blasts of the shofar were heard. The holiness that surrounded the holy assembly was so great that they were able to perceive the spiritual emanations that echo through the ages and have never ceased.

Each night after the Maariv prayers, the Besht would return to his room and light two candles, since one is not good for the vision. He would put certain holy books on the table and then he would receive people and hear their requests.

One evening several of his disciples entered into the room at the same time. The Besht spent time with each of them, listening to their problems and giving his advice and blessing.

When they emerged from the room, they discussed amongst themselves what the Besht had told them. But they were amazed when they realized that to each man it had seemed that the Rebbe was addressing him alone, and no one knew what he had told the other.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And it shall be, when you come into the land...and you shall take of all the fruit of the earth...and put it in a basket... and you shall go to the priest (Deut. 26:1-3)

Fourteen years elapsed after the Jewish people entered the land of Israel until they were able to fulfill the second half of the verse -- the bringing of their first fruits to Jerusalem. Seven years were spent in conquering the entire land from its inhabitants; seven more years were spent dividing the land among the 12 tribes. Our generation, which will very soon enter the promised land with the coming of Moshiach, will not need to wait any period of time before we are able to bring our first fruits to the Holy Temple. Not only will there be no need to conquer and distribute the land, but the fruits themselves will grow with such rapidity that their harvesting will take place simultaneously with their planting. (The Rebbe, Shabbat Parshat Ve'etchanan, 5751)

The L-rd has avouched you this day to be a people for His own possession...that you should keep all His commandments (Deut. 26:18)

The greatness of the Jewish people lies in their having been granted the observance of the commandments. The other nations of the world are not only not required to observe them, but are actually forbidden to do so. (Haketav Vehakabala)

And all people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the L-rd, and they will be afraid of you (Deut. 28:10)

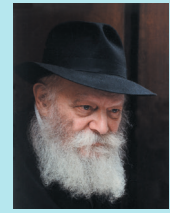
It is through the Jewish people that the nations come to fear G-d. Because "You are called by the name of the L-rd," your influence extends over all the peoples who observe you. (Butzina Din' hora)

And G-d shall make you plentiful for good, in the fruit of your body (Deut. 28:11)

The Torah promises length of days and good years - even beyond what is truly deserved - in the merit of children who are raised and educated according to Torah. (Torat Moshe)



6:51 Candle Lighting Time
NY Metro Area
19 Elul / September 12
Torah Portion Ki Tavo
Ethics Ch 3 & 4
Shabbat ends 7:48 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

This week's Torah portion, Tavo, contains the commandment of bikurim, first fruits.

"And it shall be, when you come into the land...and you shall take of all the fruit of the earth...and put it in a basket...and the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and set it down before the altar of the L-rd your G-d."

The mitzva of first fruits applies only to the "seven kinds by which the land of Israel is praised" -- grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates, wheat and barley.

Whoever cultivated these special fruits on his portion of land was obligated to bring the very first of his harvest to G-d's representative on earth -- the priest who served in the Holy Temple -- thereby thanking G-d for His bounty and joyfully acknowledging the Creator of all things.

A mitzva may be performed in one of two ways: with a minimum of involvement and effort, merely in order to fulfill the requirement, or out of a sense of love and joy, demonstrated by one's desire to observe the mitzva in the most beautiful way possible, utilizing the very best of whatever one possesses.

This principle is best expressed in the mitzva of bikurim, for which the farmer must go against his natural inclination to retain for himself the very best of the fruits of his labor, and hand them over to the priest in Jerusalem.

As we stand now on the very threshold of the Messianic Era, when we will once again be obligated to perform this mitzva, it is fitting that we prepare ourselves for its renewed observance, at least in the spiritual sense.

How?
By thinking of ourselves as the "first fruit" of G-d: every action we take, every thought we have and every word that comes out of our mouths must be not only "for the sake of Heaven," but must be our absolute best we are capable of producing.

Furthermore, this principle should be applied to the myriad details of our everyday, mundane lives, elevating them to the level of "first fruits," as our Sages said, "All of your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven."

Until Moshiach comes, when we will be able to perform the mitzva of first fruits in the physical sense, every Jew must picture himself at all times as if he is standing in the Holy Temple, about to hand over his basket of offerings to the priest.

May our efforts to refine ourselves in this manner bring the Final Redemption speedily in our day, and with it, the opportunity to observe the mitzva of bikurim in the literal sense as well.

Adapted from a talk of the Rebbe on Shabbat Parshat Tavo, 5751

The Biblical Verse on the Liberty Bell



By Rabbi Mendel Rubin

It's well known that the "Proclaim Liberty throughout the Land, to all the inhabitants thereof!" line inscribed on the historic Liberty Bell in Philadelphia -- is a biblical verse from Leviticus.

But it's quite something else to actually see it so bold and in solid weight metal on the big bell in person. Not only does it quote the verse but it spells out the source, Leviticus with the chapter and verse in Roman numerals.

The weightiness of the heavy bell and the solidness of its lettering, along with its current setting (set against the background of a large open glass wall facing Independence Hall) is something to behold and it makes an impression.

Why this verse on a bell?

The obvious answer is that

a large public bell tolls, it exclaims, it proclaims! Even the UAlbany bell-tower announces and proclaims!

But maybe there's also something here about a bell's design. A bell is only able to make noise because it has that empty open space within. The clapper only makes that sound because it has room to swing, and room for the sound to resonate. Empty space alone wont make sound. Solidly filled space doesn't make sound either. It's that blend of enclosed emptiness, an encased void, that makes sound.

Freedom isn't just open emptiness. Even the structural architecture of the setting where the bell is now houses -- is a wide open glass wall, opening up from a closed concrete space. But it doesn't open to the empty field -- instead it opens to the backdrop of Independence Hall.

This is a secret of the Chassidic concept of Bittul, a selfless surrender, a trusting receptive openness, but not to nothingness. It opens to an embrace! (Like a bell does).

The implications of this in terms of freedom and liberty in relationships and in terms of religious striving -- are very profound.

In Hebrew on page call (718) 778 6000

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SLICE OF LIFE

The Accidental Eavesdropper

By Simcha Kassner as told to Tzvi Jacobs

One summer afternoon, I was out doing errands when I decided to visit Rabbi Brown, an acquaintance who is a school administrator at a local yeshiva. A friend had recently given a talk to the students at the yeshiva about his career as a surgeon, and it occurred to me I could give a talk about being a successful business owner and entrepreneur. Rabbi Brown invited me into his office. "Hi Simcha, shalom aleichem, have a seat. I'd love to talk to you. I just first must return a call."



Rabbi Brown dialed the number, using the "hands-free" feature that put the call on speaker so he could take notes during the conversation. Rabbi Brown thought it was going to be a perfunctory phone call about the cost of the school and other quick questions.

"May I speak with Mrs. Kay Shainowitz? This is Rabbi Brown of Yeshiva of the Valley."

"Rabbi, I am looking for a yeshiva that would help my 16-year-old son. His father suffered a heart attack and died. Daniel is our only child. It's been very hard for him."

"I'm so sorry" were the only words Rabbi Berkowitz could muster. He was not prepared to hear a mother spilling her heart.

"My son is very angry with G-d," Kay said. "A friend said your school might be able to help my son bounce back from this tragic loss."

After a brief discussion, it was clear to both Kay and Rabbi Brown that the school would not be a good fit for her son. The yeshiva only accepted students who boarded, which is something Kay

and her son did not want.

Rabbi Brown did not expect any private matters were going to be presented in the call. However, that was not the case and I became an unintentional eavesdropper. Detour!

"Rabbi, it seems to me that I had to hear Kay's story for a reason, and the reason, I surmise, is because a few years ago I helped a friend whose two teenage boys likewise lost their father suddenly. My friend was struggling to find a way to help her sons cope with the tragedy."

"So, I gave the boys a powerful book that my friend, George Brown, wrote about his life: Survived the Nazis Hell. In 1945, when George was 16 years old, American soldiers liberated him from a Nazi concentration camp in Austria. Both parents and all three of his siblings died, in concentration camps or in Russia.

"Rabbi, if there was ever a teenage boy who had a right to feel sorry for himself, it was George. Even though George lacked a high school education, he didn't let that stand in his way. He learned the fur-cutting trade, and moved to the United States. In America, he got married, had children, went into the clothing manufacturing industry, and became a successful husband, father, businessman, and a generous philanthropist."

"The two teenaged boys read the book and later thanked me. I think George's story showed them that they too could recover and enjoy life again. Maybe the book will help Kay's son, too."

I spoke to my wife Lisa when I came home. "I can't ask the Rabbi for her number. How am I going to get it into his hands. I feel like I heard her story for an important reason."

Lisa did not respond for a while. "Kay's last name is the same as your high school friend. Perhaps they are related."

I searched online for obituaries for the name "Shainowitz." I was shocked to find that Sam had passed away and Kay was his widow. Sam was only 62 years old.

I called Sam's mom (Kay's mother-in-law) and expressed my sadness at hearing the news. "A friend wrote a book that I gave to two other teenaged boys who also suddenly lost their father. May I bring you the book to give to your grandson?"

Kay's mother-in-law introduced me to Kay and her son Daniel, and we spent an evening together and got to know them. I shared some stories about my friend George and other uplifting stories. Kay and I stayed in touch. One day, Kay called, "Daniel finished reading your book. He said it really helped him!"

About a year and a half later, my wife Lisa made a shiva visit to an elderly friend and her family. Her friend had lost her dear husband, the patriarch of the family. Naturally, she and her children were sad, but her son Elliot, was doubly sad: his wife also had passed away. "

Lisa knew that Elliot's wife had passed more than a year before. Lisa had heard that happily married men often want to remarry. "Elliot, I'm so sorry about the loss of your wife," my wife said. "Have you thought about remarrying?"

Elliot's mood suddenly changed. He excitedly asked, "Do you have someone in mind for me?" "No," my wife said, "but maybe my husband would know someone."

Lisa asked Elliot about what he appreciated about his wife and what he was looking for. Lisa came home and told me that Elliot was ready for a shidduch.

It occurred to me that Kay, who had been widowed for over two years, might be a good match for Elliot.

The next day I called Kay, "Have you had any thoughts about dating?"

"You wouldn't believe it," Kay said. "I plan to search a Jewish dating website tonight. For the first time since I lost my husband, I feel ready to start dating."

"Fantastic. I have someone in mind who might be a good match for you. Would you like to meet someone... his spouse also passed away? Like you, he keeps Shabbos and has a kosher home."

Their coffee date went well. And so did subsequent dates. Before asking Kay to marry him, Elliot asked her son if he was okay with his mother marrying him. Daniel said he was fine with it and Kay said yes. And so it happened, Kay and Elliot were married a short while later under a chuppah!

Two years after accidentally eavesdropping on a phone call.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

The following is a freely-translated excerpt of a public letter by the Rebbe written the week before Rosh Hashanah of 5729 (1968):

By the Grace of G-d
In the Days of Selichos 5728 [September, 1968]
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Blessing and Greeting:

A basic theme of Rosh Hashanah is that it effects the coronation of G-d as king of Israel and king of the universe, as expressed in our heartfelt prayer and request: "Reign over the entire world!"

Such a request implies the readiness to set oneself in full conformity with the divine sovereignty; that one is prepared to utterly submit to the divine king, to the point that one's entire being, and all that one has, is the king's alone. This is the meaning of kabalat ol—"the acceptance of the yoke" of the divine sovereignty, which finds expression in all areas of daily life.

In truth, every day must bring an acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, particularly when one recites the Shema. But there exists a most basic difference: on the daily level, kabalat ol, while being the inaugural and fundamental act of the day, is merely the basis upon which one's behavior throughout the day is predicated. Rosh Hashanah, however, is a time when submission to the sovereignty of Heaven is also the quality and content of the day, pervading the entire person and manifesting itself in everything he does.

Every period and every locality has its special qualities and its specific difficulties. In our time, there is a prevailing trend

in many circles toward increased self-sufficiency and independence, not only in regard to material matters, but in ideological matters as well; an increasing unwillingness to submit to the established order, to accept things before they are fully understood by one's own mind, and so on. This, it would seem, represents a challenge to the concept of kabalat ol.

This is particularly the case in countries that are (relatively) young and which were established upon a foundation of self-initiative and youthful energy, and where this spirit characterizes the entire structure of personal and communal life—all of which make it more difficult to conform with the criteria of kabalat ol.

Notwithstanding the above, we have the axiom that G-d does not demand from a person something that is beyond his capacity. Since the submission to the sovereignty of G-d is the essence of Rosh Hashanah (and the foundation of all our deeds throughout the year), this is obviously applicable to all times and places. Certainly, it is possible and incumbent upon us to achieve a full acceptance of the divine kingship also in our time, and also in the above-mentioned circumstances.

Indeed, there is a special quality to our kabalat ol particularly in our time and in this part of the world. A person who is not conditioned to complete self-sufficiency but is accustomed to independence in certain areas but not in others—when such a person accepts something unquestioningly, this does not constitute a thorough and unequivocal acceptance. For such a person is accustomed to being told what to do and is often compelled to yield his will and modify his opinions. On the other hand, when a person who, as a rule, does not surrender his independence and his convictions is convinced that he must recognize and submit to a higher authority, this decision is made on a much deeper and more fundamental level and is substantiated by a total and immutable commitment.

scholars. However, with the advent of Moshiach, there is no way to truly cleave unto G-d and to convert darkness into light, except through a corresponding category of action, namely the act of charity.

(Igeret HaKodesh 9, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi)

Ethics of the Fathers

Rabbi Yossei would say: Whoever honors the Torah, is himself honored by the people; whoever degrades the Torah, is himself degraded by the people.

His son, Rabbi Ishmael would say: One who refrains from serving as a judge avoids hatred, thievery and false oaths. One who frivolously hands down rulings is a fool, wicked and arrogant.

He would also say: Do not judge on your own, for there is none qualified to judge alone, only the One. And do not say, "You must accept my view," for this is their [the majority's] right, not yours.

Historic Groundbreaking Marks New Chapter for South Dakota's Jewish Community



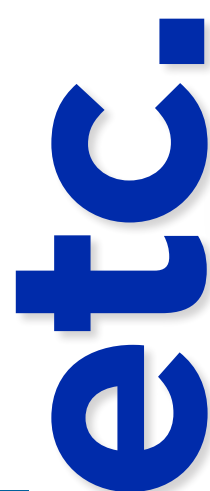
The groundbreaking marked an exciting start to a new chapter of Jewish life

In a ceremony that made history for the state of South Dakota, the Chabad Jewish Community Center broke ground on Aug. 12, marking the construction of the first center of its kind in the Mount Rushmore State.

U.S. Sen. John Thune, Gov. Larry Rhoden, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and Sioux Falls

Mayor Paul TenHaken joined Rabbi Mendel and Mussie Alperowitz and community members as ceremonial dirt was turned at the future site of what will become a beacon for Jewish life across the state's vast prairies.

"The Rebbe taught that we were created to make this world a place that G-d can call home. We hope that this center becomes such a home: a welcoming place for all and a place that lifts us up and brings us together," the rabbi told the gathered crowd.



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

This coming Wednesday is Chai Elul, the 18th of Elul. Chai Elul was the date of birth of the Baal Shem Tov -- founder of Chasidut in general, and also of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chasidut.

The Rebbe Rayatz described Chai Elul by saying that it introduces chayot -- life energy -- into the service of the month of Elul. The service of Elul includes Torah study, prayer and deeds of kindness as well as teshuva and redemption. The Baal Shem Tov taught that at each moment, creation is renewed.

When G-d created the world from total nothingness, the first moment of existence that He created included within it every moment that would follow.

Similarly, at every moment, as G-d totally recreates the world anew, every moment includes all previous and all subsequent moments, just as the first moment of creation included all time.

This concept helps us understand teshuva -- return and repentance. It is explained that in one moment of true repentance a person can compensate for inadequacies in his behavior over many years.

Indeed, with one turn of sincere teshuva, one can compensate for all the transgressions committed during one's lifetime and even those committed in previous incarnations.

How is that possible? Because each moment contains within it the totality of time and can thus alter the nature of the events which occurred previously.

This concept, although true at all times, receives greater emphasis during the month of Elul. And Chai Elul contributes the dimension of chayot - life energy - to all of this.

On this basis, we can understand the uniqueness of Chai Elul. As explained above, Elul is a month of general significance which includes all the service of the Jewish people.

Chai Elul emphasizes the chayot -- "life energy" -- of that service, the bond between the Jews and G-d. And the stock-taking which takes place from Chai Elul onwards is of a more essential nature than that which took place from the beginning of Elul.

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.



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