



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Devora Leah was the aunt of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, known as the Alter Rebbe. Her mother, Rachel, was a very unusual woman for her time. Educated secretly by her unconventional father, Rachel eventually mastered not only the Bible, but the Talmud and the writings of Maimonides, and was especially expert in the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law.

Her erudition in Jewish legal matters is illustrated by an incident in which her husband and father were walking on Shabbat. Suddenly, someone came running to tell them that the city's "eiruv" (the marker which delineates the area where carrying is permitted on the Shabbat) had broken.

The two rabbis stood still, unable to remember the law under such circumstances. Rachel's father asked her what they should do. At first she didn't want to reply, since it was frowned upon in those days for a woman to be learned and she didn't want to alienate her new husband. But when her father pressed her, she answered and everyone abided by her instructions.

Upon returning home they consulted the Shulchan Aruch and verified that Rachel's pronouncement had been correct. When Rachel had her own daughter, it was only natural that she educate her in the same manner in which she had learned from her father.

Rachel began teaching Devora Leah regularly and systematically. In the course of time, Devora Leah also became quite a scholar. She grew up with the wonderful qualities so exemplified by her mother: fond of her fellow-beings, always interested in her neighbors, ready to help everyone. Her brother, Baruch, on the other hand, was cold and reserved, preferring his own company to that of others.

Because of Baruch's cold nature, there was no bond between the two siblings. Devora Leah was grieved at her brother's attitude. Her mother saw it and realized it was wrong, but it was beyond her comprehension. She was pained by Baruch's behavior and thought it might do him good to hear something of the family history that she had already told Devora Leah. But he seemed so unapproachable that she kept putting it off. Unfortunately, Rachel waited too long. She became gravely ill and passed away.

At the time of the death of her beloved mother Devora Leah was only sixteen years old. She found some consolation for her loss by immersing herself in the care of her father, brother and household.

Not long after the passing of her mother, Devora Leah's father succumbed to his emotional travail, and after a protracted illness, he too passed away. Devora Leah, now an orphan, went to live with her aunt and uncle. Her brother Baruch disappeared without telling anyone of his destination.

One day, Devora Leah's aunt and uncle announced that they had located a suitable match for her -- a young Torah scholar named Yosef Yitzchak.

The young girl immediately ran to the graves of her parents and poured out her heart, asking for their blessings only if the match was one which would be successful. Afterward, she agreed to meet the young man.

Devora Leah was very frank with him, explaining that she was inclined to follow the ways of her mother's family, who followed the teaching of Kabala and Chasidism. The young man listened attentively, and then, to Devora Leah's happy surprise, he told her that he had long ago made the acquaintance of a certain disciple of the Baal Shem Tov and was thoroughly knowledgeable with his teachings. In fact, he was entirely in sympathy with the Baal Shem Tov's path of Divine service.

Even more astonishing, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak told her that he had himself met the Baal Shem Tov. The tzadik had told him that he would meet his intended in Vitebsk -- an orphan girl from a fine family.

Devora Leah was thrilled with all he told her and saw Divine Providence in their meeting. She had no doubt that this fine young man was her Divinely-chosen mate.

The two went together to Devora Leah's parents' graves and secretly agreed to marry on the following conditions: Yosef Yitzchak was to learn Torah with her two or three

Dedicated to
Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
wife of the Rebbe, daughter of the Previous Rebbe
on her yartzeit, 22 Shevat
Sponsored by Zalman and Devorah Vishedsky

times a week; He was not to object to her continuing with her sewing and allow her to contribute monetarily to their household; They were to share equally in all they did relating to Torah and mitzvot; They were to keep the fact that she was studying Torah a secret; They were to live as followers of the Baal Shem Tov; From all their earnings they would put aside a tenth part for charity; They were to raise their children in the Chasidic way; If they had daughters they would teach them Torah.

After their marriage, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was appointed as head of the Vitebsk Yeshiva, and Devora Leah was very happy with the life she and her husband had undertaken.

Adapted and excerpted from *Memoirs of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe*



On the weekly Torah Portion

And Yitro heard (Exodus 18:1)

Yitro was not the only person to hear of the miracles G-d had wrought for the Jewish people, as it states, "The nations heard it and trembled." Yitro, however, was the only one who acted upon what he heard and became a Jew. (The Kotzker Rebbe)

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8)

Explains Rashi, the great Torah commentator: Take heed to remember the Sabbath at all times, so that if you happen to find something special, set it aside for Shabbat. Likewise, our Sages state that we are not to give special names to the weekdays, but to refer to them in the context of Shabbat ("first day to Shabbat, second day to Shabbat," etc.). Thus we are constantly conscious of the upcoming Shabbat and prepare for it every day.

The same applies to the Messianic Era, the "day that is entirely Shabbat and rest for life everlasting." Throughout the present "weekday" of exile we must constantly remember and remain conscious of the "Shabbat day" that is coming, preparing ourselves and everything around us for the arrival of Moshiach. (The Rebbe, 11 Sivan, 5744)

For by the very thing in which they sinned was punishment brought upon them (Exodus 18:11)

A person's punishment is determined by his own judgment of others: When a Jew sees someone transgressing and immediately "sentences" that person in his heart, he is thereby fixing his own sentence, as the sin most certainly exists in him as well. (Baal Shem Tov)

Thus you shall say to the House of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel (Exodus 19:3)

Our Sages state that the "House of Jacob" refers to the Jewish women, and the "Children of Israel" to the men; when G-d gave the Torah to Israel, He told Moses to first approach the women and the men only thereafter. Because the exodus from Egypt occurred by virtue of the pious women of that generation, when it came to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, the women were given preference. The Messianic Redemption, too, will be by virtue of the righteous women of Israel, as the Midrash states: "All generations are redeemed by virtue of the pious women of their generation." Thus the women will again be first to receive the wondrous teachings to be heard by Moshiach. (The Rebbe, Parshat Yitro, 5749)

5:02 PM Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
19 Shevat / February 6
Torah Portion Yitro
Shabbat ends 6:03 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE



from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In the Torah portion of Yitro, we read the Ten Commandments, which begins, "And G-d spoke (Vayedaber) all these words, to say (laimor)." What does "to say" add here? The Maggid of Mezritch explains that it teaches us to put the Ten Commandments ("Dibrot," from the same root as "vayedaber") into the "Ten Sayings" through which G-d created the world.

In other words, the Torah and the world are not separate. One should not think, "When I do Jewish things—lighting Shabbat candles, putting on tefilin, affixing a mezuzah—I will follow the Torah, but in worldly matters like eating or business, I will act as the world dictates." G-d wants Torah to guide all aspects of life; even our speech should reflect it.

This is evident in the Ten Commandments themselves. Of all 613 commandments, G-d chose to give these ten personally to every Jew. One might expect only the most spiritually sublime ideas, and indeed, the first two—"I am the L-rd your G-d" and "You shall not have any god before Me"—are profound. Yet G-d also commands, "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," which are basic ethical rules understood even without divine instruction.

Juxtaposing the oneness of G-d with prohibitions against murder and theft shows that G-d wants us to fuse the holy and the physical. We shouldn't keep these commandments just because they make sense or align with our nature; we keep them because they express G-d's will. This principle applies to all Torah laws—fulfilling them draws holiness into the mundane.

The Sages teach that a name reflects the nature of the individual. It is a window into the soul, revealing the measure of the person.

This is especially true of a soul of unparalleled sanctity—Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, whose yartzeit we observe this week, the 22nd of Shevat, February 9. Her name, radiant in meaning, illuminates her life and inspires the way we might aspire to live.

On her first yartzeit, the Rebbe explained the deeper significance of her name and her

passing:

"Chaya" means "life." The Rebbetzin's days were filled with mitzvot, charitable deeds, and acts of kindness. Her influence reached every corner of existence, even the humble and overlooked, reflected in her second name, "Mushka," foreign yet imbued with holiness. In this way, she elevated the lowliest aspects of the world.

The numerical value of her full name, 470, corresponds to the Hebrew word for "time." Fleeting moments gain eternity when devoted to Torah study, sincere prayer, and acts of goodness.

The day of her passing, the 22nd of Shevat, is itself symbolic. The number 22 recalls the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, through which God created the world. Within them lies the potential for all goodness, a sacred order of the universe.

From the Rebbetzin's name and yartzeit, we learn a profound lesson: our days should be filled with acts of kindness, charity, and goodness—not shallow gestures, but deeds that touch even the hidden and lowly corners of the world.

When each person embraces this path, the Divine presence fills our world, bringing us closer to the revelation of Moshiach and the long-awaited Redemption.

