

L'Chaim



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Moshe the fisherman peered into the water. "What has happened to the fish? I was counting on fish for our Purim feast." Moshe cast his nets again and pulled them in--nothing at all. Dusk was falling and Moshe began to pull in his nets for the final time when he saw something silver shimmering in his net. Why, it was as fine a fish as he could have hoped for.

Just then, a thought caught him. According to his contract, half of every catch belonged to the landlord. So by right, this fish was the landlord's. Moshe was caught in a quandary. He couldn't give up this fish, for he desperately wanted it to honor the festival, but to withhold it from the poretz (landlord) was equally impossible. Finally he came to a decision. This fish he would keep; tomorrow's catch would go entirely to the poretz.

Moshe set off for home in a happy mood, the silvery fish tucked under his arm. But, he was not alone. Piotr, the gardener, was standing behind the hedges. "This Moshe, who the poretz thinks is so trustworthy, is making off with the poretz's fish. These Jews always think they can outsmart everyone, but now, I'll have the last laugh."

Piotr was trimming the hedges in front of the manor house when the poretz came out for his afternoon stroll. He pretended to be murmuring to himself, but made sure the poretz overheard: "Imagine, Moshe keeping that huge fish for himself, and giving nothing to the poretz."

"What's that you say?" said the poretz. "Moshe didn't bring me any fish today, but I thought he just didn't catch anything." "Well, I saw him carrying home a nice one just about an hour or so ago," said Piotr, hiding his glee.

"If that's so, I'll soon know about it," said the angry poretz, dispatching a servant to bring Moshe to him immediately.

"What happened to my fish, Moshe? Is this how you repay my trust?" "Please, sire, I can explain," stammered the frightened fisherman. "Today is our festival of Purim and I had to have a fish for our meal. I never intended to steal from you for I am planning tomorrow to bring you my entire catch and keep nothing for myself."

"I don't care about your holidays! It's my fish!" The poretz was furious.

"Please let me explain. Every month has a celestial sign and this month's sign is the fish. It reminds us that just as fish never close their eyes, G-d never closes His eyes--He always watches His people to protect them from harm. Long ago on Purim He saved us from the wicked Haman. Please forgive me this once and let me keep the fish. I will make it up to you."

The poretz allowed himself to be persuaded. "You may keep the fish, but if it ever happens again, I'll hang you," he said, pointing to a huge oak.

Some days later was a meeting of all the landowners of the district. Each had some complaint: one had lost a fortune gambling and was now in debt; another was having trouble paying for the redecoration of his mansion; a third couldn't meet the payment on his gilded carriage. One of them spoke out: "Who is to blame for all our troubles? The Jews, of course. They are the managers of our estates, inns, finances. They're ruining us!"

Another landowner piped up, "My Jews are just like that! They are so lazy, they never work!" Then the poretz spoke up, "My Moshe even kept all the fish for himself because it was some holiday or other for him!"

"Let's get rid of those parasites for once and for all! I'll draft a proclamation expelling them from our territories, and you all sign," said one of the leading nobles. There was general agreement all around, as the Russian gentry anticipated the end of all their woes.

Suddenly all gazes were drawn to the doorway. There, unexpectedly, stood the royal prince himself, resplendent in his sapphire blue robes. "Sire," began a duke, "won't you sign our document about the Jews?"

The prince read the document. "Surely you jest," he said. "For these so-called

'offences' you want to banish the Jews? You must be mad. On whom do you propose to rely, on the Poles who hate you, or on your servants who rob you blind? My friends, you will be doing yourself a great disservice, for you will never find servants more loyal and capable than the Jews."

A buzz passed through the hall. "With your permission," the prince said, and tore the paper into pieces. Then he left the room without another word, leaving the embarrassed nobles to stare at one another in wonder.

The poretz returned home full of confusion. How could the prince have appeared and then vanished so fast? It could only have come from Above.

When he arrived home he sent for Moshe. "I saw your G-d today. He came to protect you at our meeting."

"What are you saying, Sire?" The poretz told him about the decree and the strange appearance of the prince. "Oh, no, Sire," replied Moshe, "You cannot see G-d. Perhaps Mordechai came to save us, just as he did on Purim so long ago," he added hesitantly.

"Well, whatever it was, it seems you have had some good fortune from your festival...and your Purim fish!"

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

Command the Children of Israel that they bring you pure olive oil, pounded, for the lighting, to cause a light to burn always (Ex. 27:20)

The First and Second Holy Temples illuminated the world with their light for a specific and limited period of time. The Third Holy Temple, however, which will be rebuilt when Moshiach comes, will be in fulfillment of the latter half of the verse, "to cause a light to burn always." Its light will never be extinguished. (Rabbi Yitzchak Kara)

You shall command--ve'ata tetzave (Ex. 27:30)

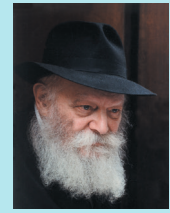
Chasidic thought interprets this verse to mean, "You shall connect yourself to..." Moses was commanded to establish a connection between his essence and the Jewish people. In an extended sense, this command can be understood as having been directed to every Jew, for each Jew has a spark of Moses in him. "You" refers to the essence of the soul, the fundamental core of every Jew's being. This is revealed by the establishment of a bond with G-d's essence. (Lubavitcher Rebbe, shliita)

One who reads the Megila backwards has not fulfilled his obligation (Mishna, Megila)

The Baal Shem Tov offered a Chasidic interpretation of this law: A person must not view the story of Purim as just a historical narrative, something that happened long ago in another time and place. The purpose of reading the Megilla on Purim is to ensure that "these days are remembered and kept throughout the generations." The events of Purim are not only relevant to the present time, but each detail of the story contains lessons to be applied in our daily lives.



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NY Metro Area
7 Adar / March 7
Torah Portion Tetzaveh / Parshas Zachor
Shabbat ends 6:36 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

This week's Torah reading, Tetzave, is the only portion in the entire Torah following Moses' birth, in which Moses' name does not appear. (It is also, incidentally, the portion usually read during the week in which the anniversary of Moses' passing, the seventh of Adar, falls.)

Our Sages explain that the reason for this omission was Moses' own request, made of G-d after the Children of Israel sinned with the Golden Calf: "And if not (if You will not forgive them), blot me out, I pray you, from Your book which You have written." The words of a tzadik, a holy and righteous person, are always fulfilled, even if spoken conditionally. Thus, we find that Moses' wish was granted in this week's Torah portion, for his name never appears in the entire portion.

However, when we delve into the text itself, we find an interesting phenomenon: This chapter, which specifically does not mention Moses, begins with a direct address to the very person whose name it omits! "And you shall command (ve'ata tetzave)."

A name is of lesser importance than a person's essential nature. It is a means of identification and a way of being known to others. But one does not really need a name in order to live. A newborn baby exists as an independent being from the moment it is born, and only receives its name after several days. From this we learn that the use of the grammatical second person, "you," expresses an even higher level of relationship than calling a person by his given name, which was only bestowed on him secondarily. If such is the case, then it follows that the omission of Moses' name only serves to underscore the very special essence of Moses, which was even higher than the mention of his name could express.

Moses' whole life was Torah, to the extent that we refer to the Torah as "The Five Books of Moses." But his greatness was best illustrated when the lowest elements among the Children of Israel sinned with the Golden Calf, explicitly expressing their desire to separate themselves from the Torah. Yet, Moses was willing to sacrifice that which he held most dear on their behalf. "Blot out my name from Your book," Moses pleaded with G-d, if You will not forgive them even this grave sin.

Moses and the Jews formed one entity, each of whose existence was dependent upon the other. The commentator Rashi explains; "Moses is Israel, and Israel is Moses." When even some Jews sinned, Moses suffered a spiritual blow. Even though Moses was up on Mount Sinai when the Golden Calf was actually made, he was still affected by the actions of the others.

It was Moses' self-sacrifice and his desire to forgo that which was most important to him that express a unity that is beyond mere names. It is therefore precisely the portion Tetzave, in which Moses is not mentioned, that reveals his strength and his greatness. The willingness to sacrifice oneself for every fellow Jew, even one who sins, is the mark of every true leader of the Jewish People.

Jews and Oil

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

In this week's Parshah we read about the pure olive oil which Moses was instructed to obtain for the kindling of the menorah in the Mishkan, the sanctuary built in the desert as the forerunner of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that oil holds the secret formula for how to successfully live a proud Jewish life in an environment which may be far from Jewishly conducive.

Oil, you see, is a paradox. On the one hand, it spreads quickly and easily, seeping through and permeating the substances with which it comes in contact.

On the other hand, when mixed with other liquids, oil stubbornly rises to the surface and refuses to be absorbed by anything else.

Like oil, Jews, too, will often find themselves mixing in a wide variety of circles -- social, business, civic, communal or political. And there's nothing necessarily wrong with that. At the very same time, though, we need to remember never to lose our own identity. We should never mix to the point of allowing our own Jewish persona to be swallowed or diluted.

We often feel a strong pressure, whether real or imagined, to conform to the norms around us. Few among us enjoy sticking out like a sore thumb. The fact is, however, that others respect us more when we respect

ourselves. If we are cavalier in our commitment to our own principles, then our non-Jewish associates might worry whether we might not betray them next.

A friend of mine was a young doctor when he was called up for a stint of national military service. He was very obviously religious from his yarmulke and beard. In fact, the beard didn't exactly meet army regulations and it was only with great difficulty that he managed to obtain special permission to keep it. Far from being a nuisance, he conducted himself with dedication and integrity, and at the end of his tour of duty walked away with the Surgeon General's top award for excellence. That was a Kiddush Hashem -- a public sanctification of G-d by a proud, practicing Jew who found himself in a decidedly unJewish environment.

Compromising our values and principles is a sure way to lose the respect we crave from the world around us. Dignity, pride and self-respect earn us the esteem and admiration of those around us, whether Jews or non-Jews. It is a time-tested and well-proven method.

Just learn from the oil. By all means, spread around and interact with the rest of the world. But remember your uniqueness. Be distinctive and proud and know where to draw the line.

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SLICE OF LIFE

Seeing the Voice of the Shofar



Avraham Aryeh Leventhal

In the mystical city of Safed, nestled in the hills of northern Israel, visitors to Avraham Aryeh Leventhal's studio often find themselves momentarily bewildered. The walls are adorned not with traditional landscapes or portraits, but with vibrant, abstract representations of something seemingly impossible to capture visually: sound.

"People usually need a moment to understand what they're seeing," Leventhal, now 50, says with a gentle smile. "But once they do, their eyes light up with wonder."

Leventhal's journey to this unique form of artistic expression began far from the winding alleys of Safed. Born to a religious family in Detroit, his path took an unexpected turn during his college years in Michigan.

"A book on Kabbalah fell into my hands," he recalls, his eyes brightening at the memory. "From that moment, my life changed completely. The book drew me in deeply, and I found myself fascinated by the worlds it revealed."

This chance encounter set Leventhal on a path of spiritual and artistic exploration. While he went on to study at the prestigious Art Institute of Chicago, the fire ignited by that first encounter with Kabbalah continued to burn bright.

"I knew I had to follow this calling," Leventhal says. "It led me to make aliyah to Israel."

Initially settling in Arad, Leventhal found himself drawn to Safed after just six months. Known as the city of Kabbalah, Safed seemed the perfect place for him to continue his spiritual journey while developing his art.

In his Safed studio, Leventhal has created a unique fusion of technology and spirituality. Using digital software, he transforms the sounds of the shofar – the ram's horn blown on Rosh Hashanah – into visual patterns. To these, he adds his own artistic interpretations, infused with Kabbalistic symbolism.

"On Rosh Hashanah, we stand in awe and listen to the shofar blasts," Leventhal explains. "I try not just to hear these sounds, but to see them, to capture their essence on canvas."

His fascination with the shofar goes beyond its auditory impact. "There's a midrash that says three days before the coming of the Moshiach, Elijah the Prophet will blow a shofar on the mountaintops to announce the news of redemption," he says, his voice filled with reverence. "The Ba'al HaSulam, whose teachings I study, explains the inner connection between Elijah and the shofar blast. These ideas captivated me and became a central theme in my work."

Leventhal's studio is filled with shofar-inspired paintings, each one an attempt to illustrate the hundred sounds blown on Rosh Hashanah and their spiritual significance. When asked how many such

paintings he's created, he chuckles and admits, "I have no idea. I just keep feeling drawn to create more."

His unique approach has garnered attention beyond the art world. Tourists visiting his studio often find themselves drawn into conversations about Kabbalah and spirituality.

"It's amazing to see," Leventhal says. "People who initially understand nothing about the subject suddenly become enthusiastic about the inner dimensions of the Torah. They look at the paintings with completely different eyes after our discussions."

Recently, Leventhal's work was featured in an exhibition in Jerusalem. One particularly moving piece depicted the shofar sounds of Rabbi Shlomo Goren, former Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Army, at the Western Wall during its liberation in the Six-Day War.

"I was deeply moved myself, seeing all these works together," Leventhal admits, a broad smile spreading across his face. "But what touched me most were the reactions. People told me that after seeing the paintings and talking about the ideas behind them, they felt inspired to study Torah."

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, Leventhal reflects on his own experience of hearing the shofar. "I forget everything and try to concentrate entirely on the blasts," he says. "In that moment, sound and sight, the physical and the spiritual, all become one."

Through his art, Leventhal invites others to share in this profound experience, offering a unique window into the mystical dimensions of Jewish tradition. In the process, he continues his own journey of spiritual discovery, one brushstroke at a time.

From *Sichat Hashavua*

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

From a letter of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

With the approach of Purim, I take this opportunity of extending to you prayerful wishes for a joyous and inspiring Purim, and to send you this timely message in lieu of Mishloach Manot.

One of the most inspiring lessons of Purim is the extraordinary courage of Mordechai Hayehudi [the "Jew"], who "would not kneel nor bow down," despite the physical vulnerability of our people being "spread and scattered among the nations"--a tiny minority against an overwhelming majority. Yet it is this uncompromising stance that brought triumph over all adversaries, so that "for the Jews there was light, joy, gladness, and honor." And the awesome respect of their erstwhile detractors.

The teachings of our Torah (Torah meaning "instruction"), like the Torah itself, are eternal, including the lessons of Purim; particularly since we are still "spread and scattered among the nations," including our brethren in the Holy Land, for they, too, are surrounded and besieged by numerically overwhelming hostile nations. But Purim teaches us that the strength of our Jewish people, as of every Jew individually, is in our G-d-given capacity of "not kneeling nor bowing down" to any force that is contrary to our Jewish essence, which is rooted in the Torah and mitzvot. Indeed, yielding to any influence that is alien to our Jewish spirit and way of life, far from winning goodwill and respect, must necessarily bring forth contempt, be it overt or covert. For, what is one to think of a cringing Jew who is willing to compromise his true Jewish identity and noble traditions going back to the time when the world was steeped in barbarism. Needless to say, the true Jewish spirit,

as exemplified by Mordechai and Esther, must not remain in the abstract, but must be translated into concrete behavior in one's daily life, in keeping with the basic principle of our Torah that "action is the essential thing."

Certainly this is to be expected of young people, who are generally blessed with a greater sense of urgency and doing. Especially young couples who start out on their own, establishing a home on the foundations of the Torah and mitzvot, to raise a family in the true tradition, and make it a binyan adei-ad [an everlasting edifice] in the fullest sense.

And here, of course, a great deal depends on the akaret habayit [the foundation of the home, i.e., the woman], in whose hands G-d has entrusted the major responsibilities for the character and actual conduct of the home, such as kashrut, Shabbat observance, taharat hamishpacha [laws of purity of Jewish family life], raising the children, and so forth. This in no way diminishes the husband's full share of responsibility in this G-d-blessed partnership, and they must consistently encourage each other to upgrade all things of goodness and holiness, Torah and mitzvot; but there is no getting away from the fact that the wife and mother bears the noble calling of "the foundation of the home."

It is also self-evident that together with the G-d-given task comes the G-d-given capacity to carry it out to perfection. Thus it is basically a matter of one's own will and determination.

It should be noted, in conclusion, that there is no greater emphasis on the historic role of the Jewish life than in the events that brought about the Miracle of Purim, as related in the Megila--which is named not after Mordechai, nor Mordechai and Esther jointly, but solely after Esther-Megilat Esther!

Wishing you, in the midst of all our people, in the words of the Megila, "Light, joy, gladness, and honor," in the fullest sense of these terms, including their inner meaning, "Light--this is Torah," etc.

most basic of all basics" is the belief in the coming of Moshiach, for it is then, that G-d will reign over all the lands, and everyone will recognize his Kingdom. Although he tarries, nevertheless we are obligated to await, expect, beg and demand, "When will You reign in Zion?"

MOSHIACH MATTERS

In Pesikta D'Rav Kahane, it is stated, the Holy One Blessed Be He said, "You loved my Torah but did not actively await my Kingdom." "The

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 week we celebrate Purim, commemorating the time when the Jews were delivered from Haman's terrible decree. Once Haman's plot to destroy the Jews became known, Mordechai sent a messenger to Queen Esther, asking her to go to the King on behalf of her people.

Esther hesitated; anyone who approached the king without being summoned and did not meet with his favor forfeited his life. When Esther relayed this message to Mordechai, the Megila tells us he responded:

"Think not of yourself... For if you hold your peace at this time, then the deliverance will come to the Jews from another place... And who knows whether you came to the kingdom for just such a time as this."

Esther understood Mordechai's message. As a tzadik and the leader of the Jewish people of that generation, Mordechai knew, through Divine inspiration, that the Jewish people would be delivered. Their deliverance was certain; it would come from somewhere. The only question was who would help actualize this Divinely inspired promise?

Esther capitulated and asked Mordechai to tell the Jews to fast and pray for three days so she should be successful in her mission of finding favor in the king's eyes and finally saving the Jewish people. That is what happened and the Jews were ultimately delivered.

Every generation has its Mordechai--a tzadik and great leader who is the physical embodiment of G-dliness in this world. The Mordechai of our generation stated nearly two years ago the Divinely inspired words, "The time of your Redemption has arrived." The Rebbe said that to prepare ourselves for the Redemption we should learn about Moshiach and the Redemption. Now, as then, the Rebbe's message was that the deliverance is coming, the Redemption will take place, it's happening

The only questions are, "Who will help actualize this Divinely inspired promise? Who will be prepared and help others prepare?"

The responsibility lies with each of us. We must do everything possible to spread the Rebbe's message of the imminence of the Redemption and the importance of learning about it. Then we will surely merit the total fulfillment of one of the last verses of the Megila that, "there was light and joy, gladness and honor;" so may it be with us.

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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Amid Heavy Snow, Toronto Honors Late Rov with New Torah



Despite heavy snowfall, the Toronto community gathered to complete a new sefer Torah written in memory of longtime rov, Harav Dovid Schochet A"H. The event was held on his first yahrtzeit, Monday, 18 Shvat, 5785. Shortly after their wedding, Harav Schochet and his wife moved to Toronto to serve as the Rebbe's shluchim. More than two decades later and after having presided over a boom in the entire city's Jewish community, the Schochets packed their bags and moved north to the relatively undeveloped area of Thornhill. They established the Chabad-Lubavitch Community Center there and spearheaded a mass migration north. Over the next decades, Harav Schochet served in Toronto as rov and mara d'asra of the Chabad community, as well as a posek for the wider Toronto community. The Toronto community showed up en masse to the siyum to participate in writing the final letters. They then danced joyously through the snowy streets to the shul at Chabad Gate where Harav Schochet led the community in recent decades.

Biography

Esther (known in Hebrew as Hadassah), was orphaned and raised by her relative, Mordechai. She became Queen of Persia after the execution of Queen Vashti, and, because of her great self-sacrifice, became the primary figure responsible for saving the Jews from annihilation during the Purim plot. She wrote the Megilat Esther which was accepted by the Sages to be included in the Jewish canon. Her son, Darius II, embarked on the rebuilding of the Second Holy Temple following the death of Ahasuerus.