



IT HAPPENED ONCE

The physical body of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, was incarcerated in the infamous Spalerno prison, but his indomitable spirit was completely unfettered. In spite of severe tortures inflicted upon him by his cruel and coarse jailers, he never wavered in his belief in G-d and devotion to Judaism.

On 15 Sivan, after an endless night of torture he demanded that he be given his tefillin. "Forget about it!" laughed his torturers. "You'll never get them as long as you're here!"

"If that is so, I declare that I am undertaking a hunger strike. Until you give me my tefillin, I will neither eat nor drink, and the prisoners in my cell will be witness to my fast." The Rebbe stood in the dark cell praying in a loud voice, while his cell-mates stood in silent awe of the scene. Neither the terrifying surroundings nor the screamed profanities of the guards could penetrate the Rebbe's profound meditations.

The Rebbe continued his hunger strike throughout the next two days and nights. At ten o'clock that night he was taken to be interrogated. There were three interrogators: two Jews – Lulov and Nachmanson – and one non-Jew, Dachtriov. The room was large and the marble walls were lined with large tubes which enabled the GPU agents in the adjacent room to hear and transcribe the interrogation.

When the Rebbe entered the room he turned to his interrogators and remarked, "This is the first time that I have come into a room and not a single person has risen from his place!"

"Do you know where you are?" they asked him.

"Of course. I know that this is a place where it is NOT required to put a mezuzah. There are several such places, for example, a stable and a bathroom."

The Rebbe refused to be intimidated and declared angrily, "You have no right to accuse me! Return my possessions to me!"

But they proceeded to read the charges against the Rebbe:

Abetting the reactionary forces of the USSR; counter-revolution; exerting an influence on Russian Jews; spreading religion; corresponding with foreigners and relaying information about the Soviet Union, etc. The Rebbe explained that he didn't impose his will on anyone; it is the way of Chasidut to influence by example, not by force or power.

One hundred and eighty years before, his ancestor, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, had been forced to explain the tenets of Chasidut to the interrogators of the Czar; now Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak had to do the same to Soviet interrogators.

The Rebbe responded to all of their accusations, and then lashed out against Lulov, saying: "Listen to me. Maybe you think you will start a new Beilis case [the infamous blood-libel charge], but remember how that attempt failed." And the Rebbe continued in this manner to refute all their words.

At that time, Nachmanson entered the room and related the following anecdote: "Lulov, do you know that my parents were childless until they went to the Lubavitcher Rebbe for a blessing? This is the man right here...and I am the child who was born." The interrogators laughed hilariously at this irony.

The interrogation lasted late into the night. At the end, Lulov angrily blurted out, "In another 24 hours you will be shot dead!" This was a real possibility at the time.

Suffering excruciating pain from the beatings he had received, the Rebbe continued his hunger strike until Friday, when his tefillin and books were returned to him. At that time, the Rebbe announced that he would eat only food brought from his home. That Shabbat, he was brought three whole challas baked in his home (an example of the new deferential treatment he was to receive).

The guard who had previously been so gratuitously cruel, now went out of his way to accommodate the Rebbe. As the Rebbe had requested, the guard would knock on his cell door to indicate the time for evening prayer, and at the conclusion of that Shabbat, the Rebbe was given two matches with which to make *Havdala* (the prayer marking the

separation between Shabbat and the week).
On the 12th of Tammuz, Rebbe Yosef Yitzchok was released from prison and sure death. Thirteen years later, the Rebbe arrived in the United States. His arrival marked the inception of a new era in Jewish America. It had been assumed that Torah could never flourish in America as it had in Europe, but with his famous pronouncement, "America is not different," the Rebbe opened the way for a dramatic growth of Torah observance on these shores.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

This is the statute of the Torah... and they shall take to you a completely red heifer (Num. 19:2)
In speaking of the laws of the red heifer, the Torah states, "This the statute of the Torah," not just the statute of the red heifer. The red heifer has the power to purify one who was defiled, yet those who partake in the preparation of the red heifer become defiled. The verse is teaching us one of the basic lessons of the Torah, that we are obligated to help our fellow Jew, even if it requires sacrifice. (*The Rebbe*)

Why does the Torah refer to the laws of the red heifer as the "statute of the Torah" rather than "the statute of the red heifer," which would seem more logical? To teach us that the concept of purity is central to Judaism, the very foundation of a Torah-true life. Rather than constituting only one of the Torah's 613 mitzvot, it is the basis and starting point for all the others. (*Peninei Torah*)

And he shall put running water (literally "living waters") into a vessel (Num. 19:17)
Just as water has the ability to move mountains, make arid deserts flourish and overcome all boundaries and obstacles, so too is the Jewish people blessed with this ability – provided, of course, that the water is flowing and not frozen into ice. When a Jew is enthusiastic and spirited in his service of G-d, anything is possible. But if he is cold and apathetic, he will achieve nothing. (*Rabbi M. Shapiro of Lublin*)

By the king's highway we will go (Num. 20:17)
In our Divine service there is only one road for the Jew to follow: the "highway" of G-d, the King of the universe. As the Previous Rebbe put it, "When it comes to our religion – the Torah, its commandments and Jewish customs – no one can rule over or control us." (*Likutei Sichot*)

8:11 Candle Lighting Time
NY Metro Area
9 Tammuz/July 8
Torah Portion *Chukat*
Ethics Ch 5
Shabbat ends 9:18 PM

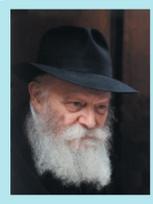


L'Chaim

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The Weekly Publication for Every Jewish Person
נסד תוד ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"My help comes from G-d, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, *Chukat*, we read about the passing of Miriam, and the well of Miriam drying up. We read how the Jewish people were thirsty, Moses hit the rock and water came out once again. We were so close to the Holy Land, but couldn't get in because Edom wouldn't allow us passage through their land. Then, Aaron's passing, the second war against Amalek, and finally we were forced to turn back and take the long way around the land of Edom.

Disheartened, the Jewish people turned against G-d and Moses: "Why did you bring us up from Egypt to die in the desert..." G-d sent snakes that bit them, and many died. Realizing that they were wrong, they asked for forgiveness, and that Moses pray for them, which he did immediately. G-d told Moses to make a copper snake and put it on a staff. Anyone bitten, would look at the snake and live. This is followed by miracles and victories.

Even though life was getting more and more difficult for the Jewish people, the expectation was that we remain loyal to G-d and to Moses.

Why is so much expected from us? Why did Moses forgive them so quickly? What is the idea of looking at the snake, that saved them?

The first lesson found here, is that we are different and special. We have been chosen by G-d for a reason, because G-d sees the amazing qualities we have over all other nations of the world. The world sees that we are special as well, and they expect us to keep to higher standards. This is why when a Jew does something wrong, it is a bigger deal than when a non-Jew does the same act.

When our faith is tested over and over again, through struggles, suffering and letdowns, we have it in us to remain strong in our faith and belief. We know that G-d is in control and that He knows what He is doing. We understand that every setback is really a stepping stone to something much better. We need to rise above in every situation, and when we don't, we disappoint G-d, the world and ourselves.

The second lesson is that when we realize that we are wrong, we ask for forgiveness. And when we are asked for forgiveness sincerely, we should forgive immediately.

The copper snake was placed on a staff, so that one had to look up to it, and so, you were looking up to our Father in heaven. This is the key to being the special people we are, is that we are connected to G-d and we realize that everything is from Him. When we realize that, the miracles and victories begin.

This portion is the story of our lives, the struggles, the suffering, the miracles and the victories. The main thing is to keep our focus on G-d.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitz Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzhurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

If Not Now, When?

The great Rabbi Hillel was known to say, "If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

Though stated more than 20 centuries ago, Hillel's words sound as relevant to today's world as they did back then.

Basically, it sounds like Hillel is telling us, "You have to look out for number one, but make sure not to forget that there are other people in the world, too."

Sounds pretty sane, doesn't it?

Actually, though, Hillel wasn't talking about our typical pursuits; he was giving us a deep insight into how we should view our involvement in spiritual pursuits and lofty goals.

Hillel was talking about taking responsibility for ourselves spiritually and building up our own cache of *mitzvot* (commandments). Thus, we shouldn't expect to fall back on the good deeds, mitzva observance, or the piety of our ancestors.

On a more personal level, it is a statement about how we must be self-motivated when it comes to Judaism. I can't expect anyone else to take me by the hand and lead me, step by step, toward growth and advancement. I have to do it myself. I can't sit back, relax, and wait to be inspired by an amazing teacher or encouraged by a friend. It's up to me: If I am not for myself, who is for me?

To be more specific, we can't expect

G-d to be the one to push us, either. I can't say, "If G-d really wanted me to give lots of charity, have time to pursue Jewish studies, and not work on Shabbat, He'd arrange for me to win the lottery." Or, "If G-d wants me to do this particular mitzva, He'll remove all obstacles from my path."



On the other hand, if I am only for myself, if I am so caught up with and involved in my own personal growth and advancement, that I'm not around to help or guide others, what am I? Just because I can't expect or wait for someone else to hold my hand or inspire me, doesn't exempt me from extending my hand to someone else. It doesn't absolve me from reaching out to another person, from teaching someone else the Hebrew alphabet if I know it and he doesn't – even if the *alef-bet* is all I know!

The only remaining question one might have after considering Hillel's statements in this light would be, "When should I start getting serious about learning, growing, advancing? And when do I have to begin reaching out to others?" To this, Hillel has a ready reply, actually the closing words of his statement: "If not now, when?"

Dedicated to our loving parents
Rabbi Shmuel and Bashie Lowenbein
in honor of their wedding anniversary

SLICE OF LIFE

Starting Again at 44

by Rabbi Micha Peled



This story is from *Here's My Story* and is presented with permission from JEM's *My Encounter with the Rebbe* oral history project, which is dedicated to recording first-person testimonies documenting the life and guidance of the Rebbe. MyEncounterBlog.com

I was born in Fez, Morocco, to the Turgeman clan, a deeply religious family. After the founding of the State of Israel, our family immigrated there and settled in Tiberias.

The '50s were years of poverty and famine. This allowed the kibbutz movement to recruit new immigrant children with promises of food, education and economic stability, which is what happened with my family. Times were tough, my parents were naive about kibbutz life, and had several children to care for. So when a couple of young men came from a nearby kibbutz and spoke with them, they were persuaded, and reluctantly gave their permission for me to go to a kibbutz. When we separated, my father gave me a prayer book, a *Chumash*, and his blessings.

In the kibbutz, I was the only one leading a religious lifestyle. Gradually, I gave up wearing *tzitzit*, and then my weekday prayers, but I still tried to keep kosher and Shabbat to the best of my ability. When I reached my Bar Mitzvah, and my parents came to the kibbutz for the celebration, my father was shocked to find nary a trace of Jewish practice – there was no synagogue and I had no *tefillin*. He took me straight back to Tiberias with him and for the next two months, from morning till night, he had me shadow our community rabbi, who gave me all

the Bar Mitzvah classes I had missed.

Still, after I'd spent two years becoming socially integrated into kibbutz life, my older brother told my parents that it would be unhealthy to tear me away from it now, so they let me return. I changed my name from Machluf to Micha, and I adopted the last name Peled.

After the army, I was sent by the Jewish Agency to Vancouver, Canada, which is where I met and married my wife, Bracha. Later, we were asked once again to serve as emissaries to western Canada, this time in Calgary, for the JNF (Jewish National Fund).

One evening during our mission there, two young men knocked on our door.

"Shalom Aleichem!" they announced. "We heard that you are emissaries from Israel."

They introduced themselves as Chabad chasidim who had come to Calgary that summer on a mission of their own, looking for fellow Jews, and we ended up spending the afternoon in conversation. It was the first time I had seen a Chabad chasid up close.

Not long after returning to Israel, I was diagnosed with a severe melanoma that had spread to my lymph nodes. I was advised to travel to the United States, since the treatment I needed wasn't available in Israel. Already then, we had some devoted friends who wrote to the Rebbe for a blessing.

Since we still had Canadian health insurance, we preferred to first seek treatment back in Vancouver. We spent a few months with Rabbi Yitzchok and Henia Wineberg, the Chabad emissaries to the city. That is how I got to know his father, Rabbi Yosef Wineberg, a well-known lecturer and fund-raiser. From time to time, he would come to visit and I would go back to New York with him to receive a dollar and a blessing from the Rebbe.

In 1989, my doctor in Vancouver recommended that I go to the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, which specialized in treating my illness. When I met Rabbi Avrohom Korf, the director of Chabad in Florida, he offered to hire me to work at the local yeshivah. In addition to providing me a job, this meant that I would be medically insured. "Please G-d," he said, "once you're feeling better, I'm sure you will help the yeshivah where you can."

And so, between treatments, I began visiting the yeshivah, where I was received with warmth and affection. The head of the yeshivah, Rabbi Leibel Schapiro, introduced me to the students, had me learn with them, and made sure that I truly became a part of the environment.

Having settled in Miami, I made a trip to New

York with my wife, so that I could again pass by the Rebbe as he gave out dollars for charity and to receive his blessings ahead of my next course of treatment. As my condition had become increasingly complicated, this was expected to take five years.

When I told the Rebbe about my association with the Miami yeshivah, he remarked, "Do you think you came to Miami only for medical reasons? The real reason you came is to strengthen the yeshivah, to have a good influence on the young students, and to strengthen them with your love for life, your passion, your positive spirit, and your optimism."

The Rebbe gave me a blessing that I would come out of my life-threatening condition in good health.

My meeting with the Rebbe only lasted a few moments. But, despite the long line of people waiting behind me and the pressure from the organizers to keep moving along, as I stood before this tzaddik whose eyes penetrated straight into my heart, time seemed to stand still. I felt as though the Rebbe had spoken to me for an hour.

The Rebbe also told me that my treatment wouldn't take the full five years, as a result of my being "busy with the spiritual affairs of the yeshivah." In the discharge letter my doctor wrote four and a half years later, he noted that my positive attitude had saved my life.

Over the years I spent in the yeshivah, I made tremendous progress in my Torah studies. A few years later, with Rabbi Schapiro's encouragement, I traveled to Israel to be tested for, and then to receive, rabbinical ordination. At one stage, once I had already begun to regain my strength, the Moroccan Jewish community of North Miami Beach asked if I would come to take the place of their rabbi, who had recently left. I was no great Torah scholar, but they wanted my energy and attitude, so I accepted the responsibility and stepped into the role.

After that, and through my contact with Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Israel's Chief Sephardi Rabbi at the time, I took up a position in the Israeli rabbinate. I spent six years as the rabbi of Netiv Hashayara, a coastal agricultural village of Mizrahi Jews, before moving to the hills of Mateh Binyamin, where I have served as the rabbi of Beit Horon ever since.

It was the Rebbe who set me on the path toward the rabbinate when he encouraged me to go back to yeshivah at the age of forty-four. On account of my visits to the Rebbe, I came to feel a very close, profound bond with him, and the impact he had on me is indescribable.

Rabbi Micha Peled is the rabbi of Beit Horon in Israel.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Blessing and Greeting:

... I duly received your letter in which you describe your views and feelings in relation to Judaism, your encounters and conflicts, etc.

It is not completely clear to me from your letter on what particular matter you seek my advice, if at all. However, since we are taught by our Sages that every Jew is duty-bound to take an interest in his fellow-Jew, even a complete stranger, how much more so in this case, where you have written to me and have opened your heart to me – I therefore consider it my duty, indeed privilege, to reply to you in the same spirit, which you may, if you wish, accept as advice or suggestion or simply regard as my own "thinking aloud."

By way of general introduction, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of where certain movements stand in relation to authentic Judaism. A closer look at their tenets confirm without a doubt, that these movements are based on compromise, and the surrender of principle in favor of convenience, for an easier "adjustment" to a particular time and place.

The consequence of this attitude is, first of all, that once one begins making concessions, holding no more to the principle of the inviolability of the pure faith and Divine Law, there is no telling how far one will go. Human nature is such that once one accepts the principle of compromise in matters of faith, there is bound to be a steady erosion, every time with a lighter mind and less qualms. Secondly, it is bound to undermine one's respect for one's religion, knowing that anyone can "do business" with it; trim it a bit here, a bit there; and whatever is left – what real value can be attached to it, and what binding force can it have? Moreover, one, at the same time, loses also one's self-respect, recognizing one's lack of courage and personal weakness to hold on to one's own belief, or the beliefs of his people, and taking instead the line of least resistance.

Young people, filled with energy and determination and unsullied faith are not naturally inclined to compromise in any field, much less in the higher values of life. This explains why most of the "conformists" in social and conventional aspects of life are to be found among older people. Consequently, young people take their

personal convictions much more seriously and are bound to be more affected.

Has the present young generation been prepared to cope with the real aspects of life?

Unfortunately, in America at any rate, most parents, however well-intentioned, have been more concerned about their children's material, rather than spiritual, well-being. The reason for this is not hard to find. Having themselves had to face economic hardships, as immigrants or the children of immigrants, and having found that religious conviction and principles not infrequently proved "restrictive" in a materialistic society, they decided to do their utmost to shelter their children from the economic hardships which they had experienced. They were thus primarily interested in providing their children with careers and professions and other means of economic security, leaving it to their children to find their own way, eventually, in regard to such things as religion and a world outlook. However well-meaning the parents may have been, the result is the same: It fostered a way of life where principles have been sacrificed to expediency, and time-honored traditions have been relinquished for material gains, actual or imaginary.

Under these circumstances, it is small wonder that the tremendous upheavals which shook the world in general, and the Jewish world in particular, in our generation, have found young men and women almost totally unprepared. World wars on an unprecedented scale, followed by economic booms and busts, have made a shambles of hopes and aspirations even in the material sphere.

As for the world of the spirit, the bankruptcy of ideas and ideologies have left many young people terribly disillusioned morally and spiritually. A void has been created in their hearts and minds which they did not know how to fill. The widespread disillusionment and frustration among the young generation, and even among the not so young, with the resultant ethical, moral and social ills, are too well known, and too painful, to be elaborated here.

Fortunately, one has been able to clearly discern a new trend among our young Jewish men and women, especially academic youth, who come closer to the world of ideas and thought. Being children of The People of the Book, of essentially spiritual and holy people, they are by nature and heredity inclined, subconsciously at least, towards the spiritual. Their disillusionment and dissatisfaction have prompted them to search for a new way of life which would give them a slice of terra firma under their feet, make their life meaningful and put their mind at peace with themselves....

continued in next issue

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This upcoming week, on Monday – the 12th of Tammuz (July 11), we celebrate the birthday of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn. This day, and the one that follows, is also the anniversary of the release of the Previous Rebbe from Bolshevik imprisonment.

The Previous Rebbe's redemption from prison is related to the ultimate Redemption through Moshiach and the personal redemption of every single Jew.

How can this be so? The Previous Rebbe was the leader of the Jewish people of his generation. The great commentator, Rashi, explains: "The leader includes the entire people." Therefore, the redemption of the leader of the generation affects the entire generation.

The Previous Rebbe himself emphasized this point in a letter that he wrote to his chasidim on the first anniversary of his release:

"It was not myself, alone, that the Holy One, blessed be He, redeemed on Yud-Beis Tammuz, but also those who love the Torah and mitzvot, and so to all those who bear the name 'Jew.'"

Our Sages have taught that on a person's birthday his mazal – luck, or strength – is stronger than at other times. This is true even after the person's passing. In addition, Judaism also teaches that the spiritual influences and energy which were present on a specific date in Jewish history repeat themselves and return on that same date throughout the ages.

Thus, on the 12th of Tammuz, the birthday and anniversary of deliverance of the Previous Rebbe, all of these additional spiritual powers are in place. Let us hook into them and use this auspicious day for Torah study, additional good deeds and charity, and a special, heartfelt request from each of us to the Alm-ghty to bring the Final Redemption immediately.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה' י מושקה

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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Today Is...

10 Tammuz

Rabbi Shneur Zalman taught: "The footsteps of man are directed by G-d." When a Jew comes to a particular place it is for an (inner Divine) intent and purpose – to perform a mitzva. A Jew is G-d's messenger. Wherever a messenger may be, he represents the power of the one who sent him. The superior quality that souls possess, higher than the angels (who are also "messengers"), is that souls are messengers by virtue of Torah.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

"This is the Torah's decree... have them bring you a completely red cow which has no blemish" (Num 19:2) There is a profound link between the precept of the "red heifer" and the principle of the Redemption: Mitzvot signify life. When one follows the com-

mandments one attaches himself to the Al-mighty and draws spiritual vitality from the Source of All Life. Sin signifies death. Violating G-d's will disrupts attachment to the Creator, thus bringing about the "impurity of death." Both the red cow and the Redemption effect purification. For just as the ashes of the red cow are used for removing a legal state of impurity, the Final Redemption with Moshiah will purify the entire people of Israel from any trace of deficiency in their bond with G-d. (Peninei HaGeula)