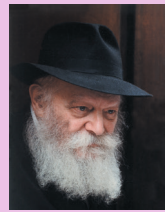


L'Chaim

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"To You I lifted up my eyes, You Who dwell in heaven" (Psalm 123:1)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

This week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, describes the encounter between Jacob and his brother Esau, after Esau had sent 400 armed men announcing his arrival. Their meeting, which threatened to be confrontational, actually turned out amiable--"Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept."

Why this change of Esau's intentions? Rashi explains: Esau's mercy was aroused when he saw Jacob prostrating himself before him so many times. Rashi continues by quoting Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai: Despite the halacha (rule) that Esau hates Jacob, Esau's compassion was stirred at that time and he kissed him with his whole heart.

Rabbi Shimon used the word "halacha," which means religious law, to emphasize something about the nature of Esau's hatred toward Jacob: it is as immutable and timeless as are the practical laws of Torah. Rabbi Shimon wished to teach us that we should not try to rationalize Esau's hatred of Jacob by ascribing various reasons or motives to it; it is a hatred rooted in Esau's very essence. If and when we find an instance of Esau's positive behavior toward Jacob, we should realize that it is an exception to the rule--"his compassion was stirred at that time."

This saying of Rabbi Shimon also found its expression in his own personal life. Rabbi Shimon lived under the yoke of Rome, and suffered under the harsh decrees issued against the Jewish nation. He, in particular, suffered greatly because of his own staunch opposition to the Romans, and was forced to hide in a cave for 13 years, together with his son. Yet it was precisely this same Rabbi Shimon who traveled to Rome to have the anti-Jewish decrees rescinded, and was successful!

The story of Rabbi Shimon illustrates both sides of the coin: the unchangeable nature of Esau's hatred and persecution of the Jews, and the triumph of one who was particularly renowned for his opposition to Roman rule.

We learn from this a valuable lesson in how to relate to our oppressors during this long and bitter Exile:

On the one hand, a Jew must not rely on the mercy of the nations, because we know that Esau's hatred toward Jacob is a given fact. At the same time, it is within the power of every Jew to command respect from the non-Jews by maintaining his pride and adherence to the Jewish way of life.

When a Jew is unbending in his commitment to Torah and mitzvot, it positively influences the nations, so that "Esau's compassion was stirred and he kissed him with his whole heart." Not only does this command respect, but it brings about Esau's cooperation and even assistance in helping the Jew to keep his Torah.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Getting Healthy

By Rabbi Baruch Epstein

A wise woman once said: the difference between a healthy person and an unhealthy person is that the former is working on their issues while the latter has resigned themselves to theirs.

How do Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebeca wind up living such radically different lives? Same parents, same mother's milk, same upbringing and yet they grow up to be so drastically different that they become the paradigm of all literary accounts of "the good and evil twins;" a metaphor for the endless internal struggle of the G-dly Jacob side of our character; pitted against the Esau-like insatiable drive for self-gratification.

Each brother has a burden to bear. Esau is born ruddy and hairy, his twin brother Jacob tugging on his heel. Esau means complete, done, ready nothing more to accomplish. Jacob means heel, the conscience pulling on his brother trying to restrain him.

Jacob grows and blossoms, Esau remains and festers in his identity. Esau sees himself as he is from the day he was born; that's who he is and that is who he will be until he dies, he sees no reason to ever address his other side, ever "work it out" with his brother or even within himself. He is and is satisfied to always be just "Esau".

Jacob is born with his persona as well. Simple, bookish, Mother's favorite. Jacob dares to incorporate his Esau side. Jacob masters his internal Esau, brings it out into the daylight tries it on and smooths out its rough edges.

It's scary; can one "dress up" like Esau and not become Esau?

Jacob succeeds, impresses his father enough to secure the blessing. Then is thrust out of the family nest all alone in the forest left to deal with his newfound self; to encounter the mean street, to survive and thrive in Esau's world. Jacob discovers inner strengths only his mother had imagined and gets strong enough to meet his brother face to face, no more grabbing at his ankles, he stares him down and is not afraid

We all have our "issues" our "places we'd rather not go." The easiest path is to let sleeping dogs lie. "Going there" only seems to unearth fears better left buried. If we don't confront Esau, we surrender to him.

That is the dividing point between them. Both Jacob and Esau had another side to their identity, Jacob harnessed his and became Yisroel, the man who struggled and survived, Esau tip-toed around his Jacob side and it withered.

There are two ruling forces within each of us, when one rises the other falls. When we rock the boat, we emerge stronger, sweep our issues under the rug and they pile up until we trip over them.

We have all been there; something wrong is said or done and there is an awkward silence, we have a choice, we can address it (Jacob) or we can resign ourselves to it (Esau).

When we go where we fear most to tread, we come out the other side as Yisroel, we have struggled, and we have succeeded.

SLICE OF LIFE

Meet Australia's Supreme Court Justice, Rabbi Marcus Solomon



In the vibrant city of Perth, Australia, an unusual figure presides in the halls of justice. Rabbi Mordechai Nathan Solomon, known to many as Marcus, sits on the bench of the Supreme Court, his journey there as remarkable as the rulings he makes.

“The first of my family arrived in Australia about two hundred years ago,” Solomon begins, his eyes twinkling with the weight of history. “He was sent here as part of a group of exiles from London, which included Jews.” This deep-rooted connection to both Australia and Judaism would shape Solomon’s path in unexpected ways. Born in Newcastle, Solomon’s early years were steeped in Jewish tradition, thanks largely to his father’s dedication. “Dad did everything he could to maintain and establish the Jewish community,” he recalls fondly. “He was the president of the community, a member of the Chevra Kadisha (burial

society), and essentially filled every Jewish role he knew how to do.”

At the age of seven, Solomon’s parents made a decision that would alter the course of his life. “My parents decided that for the sake of our Jewish education, they needed to move to a city with suitable educational institutions,” he explains. They chose Perth, where Solomon’s mother, a psychologist, even found great interest in the Tanya, a central text of Chabad philosophy.

It was a visit from Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Groner, the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s emissary in Melbourne, that set young Mordechai on the path to becoming a Chabad Chassid. “When Rabbi Groner saw that my parents cared about our Jewish education, he suggested sending us to study at Chabad institutions in Melbourne,” Solomon recounts. “His warm words greatly influenced my parents, and so we entered the Chabad yeshiva.”

Solomon’s journey took him from Melbourne to Israel, and then to New York, studying in Chabad yeshivas and deepening his connection to Chassidic teachings. But upon returning to Australia, he found himself torn between two worlds: education and law.

“I loved educational work very much, and at one point I thought about completely abandoning the field of law,” Solomon admits. It was a letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe that guided his path forward. “The Rebbe’s response was that I should continue my work as a lawyer, and dedicate my free time to education,” he says, still marveling at the wisdom of that advice.

Years later, when Solomon was

appointed to the Supreme Court, the official announcement bore the headline: “Veteran lawyer and educator appointed judge to the Supreme Court.” Solomon sees this as a fulfillment of the Rebbe’s vision and blessing for success in both fields.

As a judge, Solomon brings a unique perspective to the bench, one informed by both his legal training and his deep faith. “Many principles that are now celebrated and widely promoted as cornerstones of modern legal systems are actually basic concepts in Jewish law, as established in our holy Torah,” he explains.

Yet, Solomon is acutely aware of the potential conflicts between his faith and his duty as a judge. “There’s no contradiction between my being an observant Jew and my work,” he insists. “However, there are certain cases, few and rare, where there is or could be a clash between Torah opinion and state laws like the issue of euthanasia.” In such sensitive situations, Solomon has a clear approach: “The solution is to disqualify myself from participating in the panel dealing with this issue.

This way, I maintain my integrity both as a judge and as an observant Jew.” Rabbi Mordechai Nathan Solomon’s journey from yeshiva student to Supreme Court judge is a testament to the possibility of maintaining one’s faith while serving in the highest echelons of public office. His story serves as an inspiration to those who seek to balance their religious convictions with their professional duties, proving that with wisdom and dedication, one can honor both their faith and their country.

From Sichat Hashavua

Friends to Honor 50 Years of Shluchim to New York Capital



The Capital Region of Northeast NY State will be celebrating 50 years (1974-2024) since the arrival of Rabbi Yisroel and Rochel Rubin as the Rebbe’s Shluchim to Albany, establishing Chabad of NY’s Capital Region.

Since then, a day-school was established and continues to thrive. There are a dozen Shluchim and Chabad Centers in the immediate Capital Region area, and many more Shluchim throughout the Hudson Valley and Eastern NY State.

A 50 Year Jubilee celebration will take place on Sunday (December 8th) between Vayeitzei and Vayishlach. The date is significant as the Rebbe sent a special letter, in honor of the 5th year celebration, that describes the difference of Yaakov “leaving his parental home... heart full of apprehension” in Vayeitzei, but returning home in Vayishlach blessed “complete, whole and perfect in every respect, spiritually, physically, and materially”.

The Rebbe applies this to the Chabad emissaries as “the spirit of our father Jacob is very much alive in Chabad-Lubavitch institutions and animates the Lubavitch activists with exemplary dedication...”

Rabbi Rubin is also known beyond Albany for his many creative articles and mitzvah promotions as well as his love of Torah study and unique scholarship.

CUSTOMS

What is Birkat HaGomel?

A person who has safely returned from a hazardous voyage, recovered from a serious illness, or been released from unjust imprisonment, must offer thanks to G-d in the form of a benediction recited when the Torah is read publicly. This benediction is called Birkat HaGomel.





The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

21 Shevat, 5718 (1958)

I was pleased to receive your letter of January 30, in which you wrote about your spending your vacation at home, after which you plan to return to your studies in New York. I am gratified to note that you do not content yourself with your own progress in Hebrew studies, but you are trying to use your good influence with your friends in that direction. This kind of benevolent effort expresses in the best possible way the commandment of "Love thy fellow-Jew," which is the great principle of our Torah. For, if helping a fellow-Jew in material things is so great a mitzva, how much more so helping one spiritually, in matters of Torah and mitzvot, which are eternal.

Moreover, the mitzva of Sabbath observance, that you write about, is one of the most fundamental ones and as the Rabbis state in the Talmud (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 3:9) that the Sabbath equals in importance all the other mitzvot combined. By the same token Sabbath transgression is one of the greatest transgressions, so that the Rabbis have ruled that he who publicly desecrates the Sabbath is regarded as if he was desecrating the entire Torah.

I mention this particularly in reference to your inquiry regarding the Sabbath desecration which is perpetrated by the Jewish ocean liners. The claim that everything is done automatically during the 24 hours of the Sabbath is absurd, and I state it with the fullest authority, being an engineer myself and having studied marine mechanics. For one thing, certain machinery can not be operated automatically, especially those connected with the steering, radio communications, services and similar functions.

Secondly, even if those machines can operate automatically, they are required by their very operation as well as by international law, to be checked every few hours, which involves direct Sabbath desecration a corresponding number of times during the 24-hour period of the Sabbath.

Thirdly, certain so-called automatic machines, including some of the boilers, require a change of parts periodically, approximately every six hours, when the affected sections of these machines are stopped and restarted for the said purpose, diminishing or starting it again.

In addition to the above, there are so many instances on a ship plying the high seas which involve Sabbath desecration, as any one who is familiar with the technical aspects of modern shipping will know. For instance, the water which is supplied for drinking, and even running water in

the cabinets, is derived from the sea by a process of distillation, which, as you no doubt know, means the boiling and the evaporation of the water and converting it back to distilled water by cooling. The water supply is not stored for days ahead, not even for 24 hours, because of the storage space it would require, but is produced continually by process of distillation. In other words, even if the entire crew consisted of non-Jews, the water could not be used several hours after the Sabbath has begun, because the water supply from before Shabbat would have been exhausted and the crew should be providing fresh water on the Sabbath, specifically for the Jewish passengers, the use of which Jewish law forbids until several hours have elapsed after the termination of the Sabbath. The same is true of the lighting system. The law would apply even if only the majority of the passengers were Jews, how much more so if it is as in this case of the Jewish ships which carry almost exclusively Jewish passengers, for it is on their behalf that the ship is operated and the machines are regulated, involving a flagrant violation of the Sabbath. Only one who has no conception of how such machines are operated can be made to believe the absurd claim that an ocean liner can be operated automatically, without any Sabbath desecration.

The question has been asked, if the operation of the Jewish ships involves such a violation of the Jewish law, why is there no storm raised in protest in the Holy Land to stop it? The answer will become self-evident from the following instance:

For some ten years the supply and distribution of milk in the Holy Land has been in the hands of the cooperatives and farms, many of whom have been known to raise pigs, and under very strong suspicion of mixing pigs' milk with the cows' milk (for economic reasons) which therefore made it treifa [non-kosher]. Yet, until late last summer, nothing was done about it, until finally, Rabbi Nissim [one of Israel's chief rabbis at the time this letter was written] stepped in and banned such milk, inducing the farmers to give up their pig breeding, since they would not want to give up the more lucrative milk business. No doubt you have read about it in the papers. Surely no one would declare cow-milk mixed with pig-milk kosher, yet this went on for this disgraceful amount of years.

I want to mention that last year, a group of girls who were planning go to the Holy Land on one of these ships, when learning of the Sabbath desecration it involved, changed their plans and went by air instead. These girls certainly deserve credit. Actually, it would be ridiculous were it not for the grave issue involved, for a person desirous to go to the land which is regarded as holy, even by the non-Jews, that he choose a way of transportation which involves an open violation of one of the Ten Commandments, namely, the commandment of "Keep the Sabbath day Holy," which, as we noted before equals all the Commandments combined.

I trust that you surely know the Code of Jewish Law begins with the admonition, "Do not be influenced by the scoffers." I sincerely hope that this will be so in your case, and may G-d help you to save others from open desecration of the Sabbath.

expression: action, emotion, intellect and will. The fifth level--yechida--represents the soul's very essence. While every Jew possesses a soul comprising all five levels, it is Moshiach, the yechida of the Jewish people, who makes it possible for the essence of every Jewish soul to be revealed.

(Rabbi H. Greenberg in Di Yiddische Heim)

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

"It'll happen when it happens," some people say, concerning the ultimate Redemption.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 98a), in fact, does discuss the possibility of Moshiach coming at a preordained time, regardless of the worthiness of the generation. This is referred to as "b'ito"--in its time.

However, in the very same discussion, the Talmud also says that G-d declares, "I will hasten it--achishena." This means that the Redemption can come before the ultimate, preordained time.

The idea that we should hope for, pray for and even do something about hastening the Redemption is based, in part, on one of Maimonides' 13 Principles of Jewish Faith: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach, and even if he tarries, every day I await his coming." This means that each day we await his coming that very day. Thus, to say, "It'll happen when it happens" contradicts this foundation of Judaism.

Additionally, in the silent "Shemona Esrei," the central prayer of the three daily prayer services, we state: "We hope for Your salvation all day long." It would be more than a little bit ridiculous for us to hope all day long for the Redemption if we knew for a fact that it was not going to happen for many years or maybe even within our lifetime.

Maimonides, in his Laws of Repentance, declares that through repentance (teshuva) we can bring Moshiach immediately. Peppered throughout the teachings of our Sages are various other ways to hasten the redemption, such as giving charity, Torah study, keeping Shabbat, unity of the Jewish people.

In future issues we will discuss these more in detail.

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.



Published by Lubavitch Youth Organization 1408 President St, Brooklyn, NY, 11213 phone 718 778 6000

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MOSHIACH MATTERS

The soul of every Jew is comprised of five distinct levels, ranging from the lowest aspect of the soul to the highest. The first four levels represent the soul's different modes of

IT HAPPENED ONCE



As the Chasidic Movement grew in popularity and expanded, opposition to its teachings and practices increased. Particularly in the scholarly circles of Lithuania, opposition became fierce and eventually involved the secular authorities. Some of the leaders of Chasidism even left for the Holy Land. Rabbi Shneur Zalman prepared to do likewise, but instead returned to Lithuania to spread the Baal Shem Tov's doctrines there.

The battle continued over the next twenty years. After the passing of the saintly Gaon of Vilna, the strongest oppositional figure, strife erupted again more fiercely than ever. This time the focus of opposition was Rabbi Shneur Zalman, due in part to the great strength the movement had gathered under his leadership. But perhaps the strongest reason for the violent feelings was the publication of his seminal work, the Tanya. A special committee was formed with the express purpose of destroying Chasidism. It was decided to use the power of the central government in St. Petersburg to this end, and the Rebbe was accused of treason. Since the Rebbe had established a fund for aiding the indigent of the Holy Land, which was then under the sovereignty of Turkey and an enemy of Russia, the opponents accused him of disbursing funds to a foreign power. They also added the charge that in his teachings he denigrated the importance of kingship.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman was arrested and driven in the dreaded "Black Mary," a special vehicle reserved for the transport of the worst criminals, to the frightful Fortress of Petropavlovsk where he was detained for fifty-two days. He was endlessly interrogated regarding the charges and other matters of the Jewish faith in which the government interested itself.

The interrogators were greatly impressed by the strength of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, who preserved his composure in the most trying of circumstances, and answered their inquiries with extraordinary wisdom. Even in matters totally divorced from the trial proceedings, the gentile prison officials were able to see the great saintliness of their prisoner. Once, the Rebbe was interred in a room which was pitch black, as dark in the day as in the night. His only source of light was a small lamp. One day, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, the Rebbe was told that the time was already past midnight and he should go to sleep. "Right now," the Rebbe retorted, "the time is two hours and five minutes past noon."

The astonished jailers asked him how he could possibly know that, to which he replied: "Every day is illuminated by the twelve forms of the letters of the Ineffable Name (Tetragrammaton), while the night is illuminated by the twelve forms of the Name denoting G-d's Lordship. By experiencing these various forms I know how to distinguish between the day and night, and between one hour and the other."

During the term of the Rebbe's imprisonment, the Chief of Police had discussed the case with the Czar, telling him that he perceived the prisoner to be a saintly individual who was the victim of false charges stemming from jealousy and hatred. The Czar became curious to meet such an extraordinary person and decided to draw his own conclusions. He disguised himself as an ordinary clerk of the court and went to see the Rebbe for himself. But as soon as he entered the cell, the Rebbe rose and uttered the blessing which is recited before royalty. The disguised Czar asked him in surprise why he stood and appeared to accord him such great honor, as he was a mere clerk.

The Rebbe replied, "For you must be the Czar! Our Sages teach us that 'sovereignty on earth is similar to the sovereignty of the Heavens.' Just as the fear of G-d is great, so too, did I experience an unusual sense of awe when you entered, such as I have never felt before any other official. I therefore concluded that you must be the Czar." The Czar left convinced of both his saintliness and innocence.

Throughout his terrible ordeal the Rebbe never doubted his salvation. When the time came for the Rebbe to be brought to court for an important interrogation, he

was led from his underground cell out into the cold night air. He was seated on the deck of a ferry which was to bring him across the river to the Imperial Court. The Rebbe suddenly saw emerging from behind a cloud the sliver of a new moon. He turned to the officer who was escorting him and requested that the boat be stopped so that he might utter a brief prayer--the Kiddush Levana--which is said when the new moon is sighted. The officer replied that it would be impossible, but the words had hardly left his lips when the boat stopped of its own accord. The Rebbe recited the Psalm which precedes the blessing, and the boat continued across the river. A few seconds later the Rebbe repeated his request to halt the boat. The officer replied that he would heed the request, but wished that the saintly rabbi give him a blessing. This the Rebbe did, writing the blessing on a piece of paper, and the attendant stopped the boat while the Rebbe completed the blessing on the new moon. The court officer rose to a prominent position and kept the note inscribed with the blessing in an ornate golden frame which was passed as an inheritance to his descendants.

On the nineteenth of Kislev in the year 1799, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was vindicated, declared innocent of all charges and released from prison.

THOUGHTS

THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion



The remaining camp which is left may escape (Gen. 32:9)

This episode of Jacob and Esau in the Torah hints to the future wanderings of the Jewish people in exile. "The remaining camp which is left may escape"--G-d will never allow Esau to destroy the entire Jewish nation. When one king issues a harsh decree against the Jews, another king, in a different part of the world, will open his country's doors and allow the Jews refuge. ((Ramban)

And Jacob came whole to the city of Shechem (33:18)

Rashi explains this to mean that Jacob was sound in body, his wealth was intact, and his Torah-observance was uncompromised. We learn from Jacob to always strive for excellence in all areas of our lives. Even a person whose primary path in the worship of G-d is through practical mitzvot--charity and good deeds--should also strive to be perfect in study. (Likutei Sichot)

Save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau (32:12)

Jacob feared two things: The "hand of Esau"--Esau's sword, and "the hand of my brother"--the hand of friendship Esau would extend toward him. Fraternizing with Esau more than necessary worried Jacob even more than the physical threat he posed. Esau's might threatened Jacob's body, but the other put Jacob's soul in danger. (Rabbi Yosef-Ber of Brisk)



4:11 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area

12 Kislev / December 13

Torah Portion Vayishlach

Shabbat ends 5:15 pm

Dedicated in memory of a dear friend of the
Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Martin Zimet, OBM