

L'Chaim



The great Sage and leader of the Jewish people, Rabbi Akiva was going on a long journey. In order to make his travels easier, he took with him a donkey, a rooster and a candle. The donkey would carry his meager possessions and afford him a ride when he was too weary to walk. The rooster would wake him at dawn and the candle would allow him to study Torah at night when the sun had long set.

Early one morning, Rabbi Akiva rose, prayed, and went on his way. He traveled the whole day, stopping only to eat and say the afternoon prayers.

At nightfall, Rabbi Akiva was very close to a town and he decided he would spend the night there. But there was no hostel for wayfarers. When Rabbi Akiva inquired as to whether he could perhaps stay in someone's home, he was rudely told by the townspeople, "We have no room. Keep on traveling."

Rabbi Akiva remained outside, late into the night, hoping that someone would notice his quandary. But no one invited him in. Despite the lateness of the hour and the coldness in the air, Rabbi Akiva said, "Whatever G-d does is for the best."

The Sage did not want to remain in a city where the inhabitants were so evil that they could not even find a place for a weary traveler. Thus, Rabbi Akiva found a comfortable spot in a nearby field, lit his candle, fed his donkey and rooster, and then began to study Torah.

So absorbed was he in his studies, that Rabbi Akiva forgot that it was the middle of the night and he was in a field, vulnerable to the dangers of the outdoors. Suddenly, Rabbi Akiva heard a mighty roar and he saw a lion bound out of the nearby forest and attack his donkey. He did not even have time to recuperate from the shock of what had just taken place when a cat, appearing out of no where, pounced on his rooster and dragged it away. Moments later, a gust of wind blew out his candle.

Calmly, Rabbi Akiva said, "Whatever G-d does is for the best."

Much later that evening, Rabbi Akiva heard loud noises and great confusion coming from the town. When dawn broke, Rabbi Akiva learned that soldiers had attacked the city, wreaking havoc and leaving death and destruction in their wake. Survivors were taken captive. The soldiers had even passed through the very field in which he had been sleeping.

Rabbi Akiva realized what had happened and said, "Now truly everyone can see that whatever G-d does is for the best. Had the lion not devoured my donkey it would have brayed; had the cat not eaten the rooster it would have crowed; had the wind not extinguished my candle it would have lit up the darkness. Then the soldiers would have found me and taken me prisoner too."

It happened once that the Jewish people in the Land of Israel decided to send a gift to the Roman Caesar in the hopes that he would treat them well.

They filled a box with precious stones and gems. They asked the wise and pious Nachum Ish Gamzu to bring the treasure to the Caesar. Nachum was known by the unusual epitaph "Gamzu," which means "this too," for no matter what happened he always said, "This too is for the best."

Nachum agreed to take the box and started on the long and dangerous journey. He traveled on a ship for many days. After the ship docked at its destination, Nachum found an inn to stay at overnight. He said the evening prayers and went to sleep, exhausted from his tiring journey.

The innkeeper, however, was not tired. In fact, he was quite alert and interested to see what his newest lodger had in the beautiful box he had brought with him. The innkeeper crept into Nachum's room and peeked into the box. The stones and precious gems dazzled the innkeeper. Within moments he had stealthily emptied the box and refilled it with common earth and stones.

Early the next morning, Nachum awoke, said his prayers and went to the Caesar's palace, eager to fulfill the mission the Jewish community in the Holy Land had placed upon him.

When it was Nachum's turn to go before the Caesar, he said, "Your Majesty, I have brought you a beautiful gift from the Jews of the Land of Israel."

The Caesar was eager to open the beautiful box. But when he opened the box his face burned with rage. "Have I not enough dirt and stones! The Jews wanted to insult me! I will punish all of them. But first I will put to death the one who had the audacity to bring this 'present' to me."

Nachum Ish Gamzu said simply and softly, "This too is for the best. Whatever G-d does is for the best."

At that moment, one of the princes spoke up. "Surely the Jews would not send the Caesar common dirt to anger him. Maybe there is a secret in this dirt. Let us throw some in the air and perhaps it will turn into swords and arrows as it did in the time of their ancestor Abraham!"

The Caesar agreed to try. They threw the dirt into the air and it turned into sword and arrows.

The Caesar told Nachum that he would refill the box with gold and precious gems to bring back to the honorable Jews in the Holy Land.

Nachum took the box and returned to the Holy Land. "Truly everything that happens is for the best," Nachum said as he retold the story to his brethren.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And you shall eat and be sated. (Deut. 8:10)

The Maggid of Mezritch once asked a wealthy man what he eats every day. "Bread and salt, Rebbe, like a poor man," was his reply. The Maggid rebuked him and told him to eat meat and drink wine every day as wealthy men were accustomed to do. Later, when the Maggid's disciples asked for an explanation, he said: "If a rich man eats meat and drinks wine every day, then he will realize that a poor person needs at least bread and salt. If, however, he eats bread and salt, he will think that his poor neighbor can make do with stones!"

And to serve Him with all your heart (Deut. 11:13)

Rashi explains that this verse refers to the service of the heart, namely prayer. Reb Yisroel of Ruzhin used to take a long time over his prayers; Reb Shalom of Belz would recite his prayers hastily. On this, one of their contemporaries commented that both of them cherished every word of the prayers: the former loved them so much that he could not bring himself to part with them, while the latter--for the same reason -- could not restrain his eagerness to make them his. (*A Treasury of Chasidic Tales*)

And now Israel, what does G-d ask from you but to fear G-d and to follow in all His ways, to love Him and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul. (Deut. 10:12)

The Talmud asks, "Is then reverence such a small matter?" and answers, "For Moses it is a small matter." Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the first Chabad Rebbe, commented, "The Torah speaks here to every Jew. How is this an answer for everyone? Every Jew, whoever he may be, contains a spark of Moses. This gives every Jew the strength to attain awe of G-d."

7:30 Candle Lighting Time
NY Metro Area
22 Av/Aug 19
Blessing of new month Elul
Torah Portion Eikev
Ethics Ch 4
Shabbat ends 8:30 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion *Eikev*, we read, "I will give your land's rain in its time." The foremost Torah commentator Rashi explains the words, "I will give your land's rain," that G-d is saying to the Jewish people, "You did what was upon you, I will also do what is upon Me." In other words, because we do what G-d wants, He will do His part by giving us the rain we need.

A dozen portions earlier, in *Bechukotai*, G-d says, "I will give your rains in their time," and the verse continues, "the Land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit." Although the two blessings seem similar, there is much to learn from the subtle differences in wording between the blessing of rain in *Bechukotai* and that in *Eikev*.

Rashi's explanation in our portion, "You did what was upon you, I will also do what is upon Me," implies that we did only what was asked of us, and that G-d's response is just to keep His end of the bargain, by sending only the natural rain that we need. This explanation is derived from the wording of the verse "I will give your land's rain." The rain is the land's, and land is within nature.

However, in *Bechukotai*, the blessing is beyond the natural, "I will give your rain," meaning, the Jewish People's rain, and as we are above nature, so the rain is also above nature. And as we see in the continuation of the blessing, "the Land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit," including plain trees that don't normally give fruit. In the future they too will give fruit, which is not natural, rather above the natural.

Why is the blessing in *Bechukotai* greater? Because as Rashi explains that the words found there, "...if you will go in My statutes" means that you should toil in Torah. "Toil" means going beyond your norm, putting in effort beyond your nature. So the blessing G-d gives is also beyond nature.

How does this blessing of rain manifest itself? In *Eikev* Rashi explains "in its time" as "night," i.e., so you won't be bothered. In other words, you won't be bothered by the rain during the day when you are working in the field, but it will rain the natural amount necessary for the fields to produce its crop.

In *Bechukotai* Rashi explains "in their time," to mean at the time that it is uncommon for people to go out, like on the night of Shabbat. Meaning that it will rain one night a week, and with that small amount of rain the fields will yield their full potential, which is beyond the natural. So the blessing in *Bechukotai* is greater, because our effort is greater.

We learn from the contrast between these two verses that it is not enough for us to get by with what comes naturally. G-d expects more from us, to go beyond our nature, to toil in Torah and mitzvot, to go the extra mile. We should strive for the greater blessing. When we do that, G-d showers us with blessings beyond the natural.

May our efforts and toil, going beyond the natural bring the greatest blessing of all, the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon. Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

The Little Things

An unrecognizable picture drawn lovingly in three colors of crayons. Out of the blue, a card in your mail that says, "I'm thinking of you." A note from the boss saying, "Just wanted to let you know that we think you're doing a great job." It's often the small, seemingly insignificant acts, that don't necessarily cost scads of money, that mean the most to us.

Jewish teachings explain that the acts of our ancestors are a sign or help for us. Our ancestor Abraham had tremendous self-sacrifice. He was willing to give up his very life because of his belief in the One G-d. He was willing to sacrifice his only son because G-d told him to. He was tested by G-d ten times in all. Each test he passed with flying colors. In each test he exhibited total commitment to G-d and a willingness to give up his life for his beliefs.

Abraham's actions are not only a sign for each of us, but they are our inheritance. According to Chasidic philosophy, we inherited the willingness to sacrifice ourselves for G-d and Judaism from our ancestor Abraham.

But how does that inheritance play itself out in our everyday lives? How many of us today can honestly say that we are even faced with an "opportunity" to give up our lives for Judaism as our ancestor did? It's the little things that count.

Each and every day we are given innumerable opportunities to exhibit self-sacrifice for Judaism and mitzvot. It might be that you're

grappling with the possibility of keeping Shabbat or kosher, and wondering how family and friends will react. Or it could be that you just found out that every door in your house (except closets and bathrooms) needs a mezuzah and you had other plans for the money that you would need to spend on the mezuzot. Or maybe it's as simple as filling out an application that has a space for "religion" and you wonder whether to fill in "Jewish" or leave it blank.

Of course, each person has multiple opportunities each day, on his own individual level, to exhibit self-sacrifice. One who knows that Judaism forbids speaking ill of another is constantly confronted with the chance to fulfill this commandment, though it might mean being considered a "goody-goody" by co-workers or colleagues. Another person toying with the thought of wearing a yarmulka to work will be showing self-sacrifice in this area. And yet another person, who lovingly looks at the heirloom Chanuka menorah but chooses to use a different one because the antique doesn't fulfill the Jewish legal requirements is also exhibiting tremendous self-sacrifice.

Each day we are confronted and challenged with opportunities, in little ways, in small things that are meaningful only to us -- and G-d. And we have the ability, like our ancestor Abraham, to come through with flying colors, because we inherited this tremendous trait of self-sacrifice from him.

Dedicated in honor of dear friends of the L'Chaim Publication
Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy and Lidia Resnick

SLICE OF LIFE

Rebuilding a Jewish Community

by Yehudis Cohen



Rabbi Yeshaya Cohen leading the Lag B'Omer parade this year on a main street in Almaty

This past week was the *yartzeit* of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, the Rebbe's father. He was arrested by Soviet authorities in 1939 for his activities on behalf of Judaism and sent into exile for five years to the remote village of Chi'ili, Kazakhstan. When he was eventually freed he travelled 800 kilometers to live in the small Jewish community of Almaty, which he led until his passing in 1944.

A few months before Reb Levi Yitzchak's passing, the Chabad *chasid* Rabbi Hillel Liberow and his family arrived in Almaty, then the capital of Kazakhstan. Upon the passing of Reb Levi Yitzchak until his own passing in 1982, Rabbi Liberow served as the unofficial chief rabbi of Almaty. It was dangerous work, but his efforts kept Jewish life alive in Kazakhstan.

For the next 12 years there was no "official" Jewish presence in Kazakhstan. And then, in 1994, Rabbi Yeshaya and Chana Cohen arrived in Almaty as the Rebbe's *Shluchim* (emissaries).

In an interview with *Astana Times*, an English-language website that brings news about Kazakhstan to the English speaking

world, Rabbi Cohen explained, "The Jewish community of Kazakhstan requested the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) Chabad Association to send a rabbi. At the time, I had already completed my studies and served as assistant to the Chief Rabbi of the Grand Choral Synagogue of Petersburg, Russia. I offered to serve in Kazakhstan..."

It's hard to imagine what it was like for the Cohens to move to Kazakhstan nearly 30 years ago. Only about 20% of homes had computers and access to email communication. Long distance calls to family were relatively expensive. Though invented in 1992, smartphones weren't widely owned or used.

Moving to Kazakhstan back then meant being almost completely cut off from their family and all semblance of Jewish communal life that was familiar. Throughout the huge country of Kazakhstan, which is the ninth largest in the world, there was not one other Chabad family.

When the Cohens first arrived, there was one synagogue in Almaty that was open for only two hours a week – on Shabbat. Rabbi Cohen was quickly recognized as the Chief Rabbi of Kazakhstan. And the need for more help was readily apparent.

One of Rabbi Cohen's younger brothers, Rabbi Elchanan, came to help out temporarily and after getting married he returned with his wife Leah as *shluchim*. Today, Rabbi Elchanan oversees all of the *brisses* and the kosher slaughter. "When I first came," Rabbi Elchanan shared in an interview with *Beis Moshiah Magazine*, "I didn't have experience in either of these fields. When we had to make a bris, we contacted the organization Bris Yosef Yitzchok who sent us *mohalim* with all the necessary equipment. A bris for an adult necessitates an assistant to the *mohel* and I got pulled in. At a certain point, I decided to study and become a *mohel* myself, mainly to avoid the need to arrange a visa for a *mohel*. (We were not always successful in providing a visa within eight days and we had no choice but to delay bris. Since I became a *mohel* this is no longer a problem.

As the work-load grew and more Jews became involved in Jewish life, two more

couples came to Almaty. Rabbi Mordechai and Yehudis Cohen, another younger brother of the first two rabbis, and Rabbi Saadia Liberow – great-nephew of Rabbi Hillel Liberow, with his wife Mina.

Today there are 11 Chabad couples who are emissaries in Almaty, Karaganda, Kostanai, Pavlodar, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Nur-Sultan (previously Astana) the country's capital. There are 700 children enrolled in the Ohr Avner Jewish community schools, 1000 pounds of kosher meat is slaughtered and sold each week, there are Jewish weddings, brisses, Bar Mitzvas (and sadly Jewish burials) that take place on a regular basis.

Knowing an accurate number of how many Jews live in Kazakhstan today is difficult, as in Soviet times many people were forced to conceal their ethnicity or use documents to switch to another. While some sources say there are as few as 3,500 Jews, others estimate the Jewish population to be close to 20,000.

"Many people, therefore, do not know their past. Sometimes, you hear people say they are Russians, but once you ask who their mother and grandmother were and in Jewish tradition the ethnicity is matrilineal, they say they were Jewish. We still have no clear idea about how many Jews there are in Kazakhstan, because your documents may say one thing while the reality can be quite different," says Rabbi Yeshaya Cohen.

According to the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, "Anti-Semitism is not prevalent in Kazakhstan and rare incidents are reported in the press," contrary to incorrect perceptions in popular culture caused by the country's portrayal in the 2006 film *Borat* as a "hot-bed of anti-Semitism." In fact, in 2020 the resting place of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson in Almaty was designated a National Heritage Site by the Kazakh government.

If you read Hebrew or Russian, I urge you to visit chabadkz.org to marvel at the full breadth of what has been accomplished in Kazakhstan in less than three decades. If not, then visit the Chabad of Kazakhstan Facebook page where you can view photos and read regular updates about their exciting programs and activities.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Elul 5th, 5712 [1952]

I have received your letter of August 7th, in which you express your very deep appreciation for the education and upbringing which your youngest son has received at the Yeshiva in the last four years, which you recognize to be the finest thing that could have happened to him, for which you feel thankful to me. Thanks are not due to me, of course, but to the Almighty who has given you such a fine son, whose desire it is to be a "vessel" to receive the right upbringing in Torah with *Yiras Shamaim* [fear of heaven], rooted in Chasidus. To him also gratitude is due for the recognition stemming from this *Chinuch* [education], that one is steadily to advance along this road like all things connected with *Kedushah* [holiness] which must rise higher and higher toward G-d the infinite. This is particularly true in the age of youth and adolescence, the impressionable age, when the right education and upbringing is bound to bring ever-growing fruit for the whole life.

Pursuant to the above, and to the spirit of your letter, I must say that I was greatly surprised and chagrined to read the conclusion of your letter which is so contradictory to its introduction, that you wish him to remain in - . This is all the more disappointing in view of the fact that only this summer he has become Bar-Mitzvah, when the Jew just enters into his obligatory life of Torah and Mitzvos. At this critical stage you consider uprooting him from the environment and upbringing which has been so beneficial to him, because you and your wife cannot be separated from him any more.

I fully appreciate, of course, the feelings of parents, especially towards such a son as - , and separation undeniably is a great hardship. On the other hand, it is also self evident that when it concerns the molding of one's son's character and upbringing which is to last him for the rest of his life and thereafter, the temporary separation of a few years is comparatively negligible considering the reward and what is at stake.

... the paramount factor is this:

At all times, and more so nowadays, everything

should be done to spare one's child any crisis in his life, for there are enough crises in life beyond our control. Inasmuch as your son has become so attached to the Yeshiva environment and has benefited from it so much, has many friends among the students, etc., there can be no doubt that to take him away from it and placing him in another environment, even one of Torah with *Yiras Shamaim*, but surely not identical with this one, is bound to create a crisis, which will be both apparent and hidden, deep in his innermost being, which may have lasting effects, G-d forbid.

Being also acquainted with the general state of Torah education in - , I know that there is a basic difference in the approach to the whole problem between here and there, and the transition would by no means be a smooth one, involving either a cardinal change or a breach, G-d forbid, an experience which should be avoided even in the case of an adult, let alone a child, especially such a sensitive one as your son.

I must therefore emphasize again that you must weigh the physical and especially spiritual well-being of your son against the temporary separation from him. There is also the advice of our Sages, "Go into exile to a place of Torah" (*Avoth* 4:13).

Let me finally add that, based upon my observations and life experience, I am certain that when parents concede to the above saying of our Sages, despite their personal sacrifice, it is amply rewarded with the joy and happiness of their children. I trust you will bear with me for being so outspoken in this problem, since I consider it my duty, having personal knowledge of the factors and knowing your son intimately. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of return to New York before Rosh Hashanah, for that special atmosphere that prevails here at that time, where he longs to be together with his friends, during prayers and at meal time, and be inspired together with them by all that he sees, hears and feels here.

I pray that you make this decision without undue difficulty, and the Almighty will surely reward you with much joy from him and your other children.

Our Sages say that the words of the Torah "And ye shall teach them diligently unto thy children" refer also to one's disciples; and truly the students are treated here like one's own children. I shall therefore feel greatly relieved to hear that you have made the right decision with regard to - .

Wishing you and yours a *kesiva vechasima tovah* [inscribed and sealed for good],

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

The first and second paragraphs after the recitation of *Shema Yisrael* in our daily prayers are from last week's and our present Torah portion (*Ekev*), respectively. Both paragraphs enjoin us to serve G-d devotedly, and command us to observe the mitzvot of *tefilin*, *mezuzah*, and teaching Torah to children.

Where do these paragraphs differ, then? The first paragraph is written in the singular form, addressed to the individual. The second paragraph is written in the plural and is addressed to the community. In addition, the second paragraph also includes mention of the reward and punishment for keeping the above-mentioned and other mitzvot.

Our commentators also explain that because of the wording of the commandment to teach our children, we understand that one refers to a teacher's obligation toward his students while the other refers to a parent's obligation.

Concerning the mitzva of giving our children a proper Jewish education, the lesson from this week's and last week's portion is clear. Both the individual and the community are obligated to fulfill this mitzva.

Parents and teachers both share the responsibility. We can do it for altruistic reasons or we can ensure a proper Jewish education for fear of punishment or because of the reward – *nachas* from children, being honored at a dinner, etc. Whatever the reason, whoever the person, wherever the community, proper Jewish education for every Jewish child must be our number-one priority.

Surely this dedication to Jewish education will prepare us in an even greater manner for the imminent revelation of *Moshiach*.

Shmuel Beilman

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...

23 Av

Tanya states "The second soul in Israel is actually part of G-d above." Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch explained the connotations of the words "above" and "actually" are contradictory. "Above" indicates the most spiritual of spiritual levels, while "actually" describes the most material of material things. He explained that this is the unique quality of the "second soul," that though it is the epitome of the spiritual it has an effect upon the most material of materiality.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The term *Ikvesa di Meshicha* – the footsteps of Moshiah – can be interpreted in two ways. a) The first focuses on the more common meaning of the word *eikev*, "heel," an insensitive part of the body. Thus *Ikvesa di Meshicha* refers to the lowest level in the spiritual history of the Jewish people, a generation characterized by a spiritual

darkness, in which all the undesirable omens our Sages said would precede the Era of the Redemption have taken place. b) *Eikev* also means "after." Thus it refers to the end of the exile, the time directly before Moshiah's coming. This surely refers to our generation, for all the service demanded of us has been completed and we are on the threshold of the Redemption. The two interpretations are interrelated. It is precisely when the Jews have reached the low levels implied by the first interpretation, that the ultimate fulfillment promised by the second interpretation will be realized. (*The Rebbe*, 23 Av, 5751 - 1991)