



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, Va'eira, we read about the plagues G-d brought upon the Egyptians. On the simplest level, the plagues were intended to punish the Egyptians for enslaving the Jews and refusing to set them free. But the Torah tells us there was an even deeper purpose behind them: "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the L-rd."

The Egyptian people did not believe in G-d; the plagues were meant to educate them about the Creator and His power. As Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel explained, Pharaoh denied three things: the existence of G-d, the concept of Divine Providence (that G-d oversees and is intimately involved in everything that goes on in the world), and G-d's ability to perform miracles that transcend the laws of nature.

When G-d brought the plagues upon the Egyptians, all three of these erroneous beliefs were publicly disproved: The first three plagues demonstrated that G-d exists; the second three plagues established His Divine Providence; and the next three plagues taught Pharaoh that G-d can indeed act in a supernatural manner.

Significantly, however, the Torah mentions an additional reason for G-d's having brought the plagues: to teach the Jewish people about His greatness: "That you may tell in the ears of your child, and of your grandchildren, what things I have done in Egypt...that you may know that I am the L-rd." In other words, in addition to the effect they were supposed to have on the Egyptians, the plagues were meant as a lesson for the Jews, that they should "know that I am the L-rd." As Rashi notes, "The Holy One, blessed be He, brings punishment upon the nations in order that Israel should hearken and fear."

But why wasn't punishing the Egyptians and refuting their religious misconceptions enough of a reason? Why was it necessary for the Jews to be brought to a greater awareness of G-d?

The answer has to do with the reason G-d created the world in the first place. Our Sages teach that G-d created the world "for Israel and for the Torah." Accordingly, everything that happens in the world - every event and every little detail - has a direct connection to the Jewish people and the Torah, and is intended for their benefit.

For this reason, there had to be more "justification" than simply punishing the Egyptians and refuting their beliefs; the plagues would somehow have to be advantageous to the Jews. In fact, it was only when they caused the Jews to have a greater awareness of G-d that the Egyptian plagues completely fulfilled their objective.

Dressing the Soul: A Guide to Spiritual Style

We have all experienced that frantic moment in front of the mirror, searching for an outfit that feels just right. Whether it is a missing tie or a suit stuck at the cleaners, the struggle to look our best is a universal human experience. We recognize that while fabric and thread don't change who we are fundamentally, they do dictate how we present ourselves to the world. Yet, while we obsess over cotton, silk, and wool, we often neglect the most important attire of all: the garments of the soul.

In its purest state, the Divine soul is entirely spiritual and, in a sense, unequipped for the physical world. Just as we require physical clothing to interact with our environment, the soul requires its own set of "clothes" to relate to this material reality. These are not found in a boutique, but are woven through thought, speech, and action. When we immerse ourselves in study, we clothe the soul in thought. When we speak words of kindness or prayer, we wrap it in speech. And every time we perform a mitzvah—whether giving to charity or helping a stranger—we provide our soul with the garment of action.

The old adage "clothes make the man" carries a profound spiritual truth. Of course, a person is more than their outfit, and a soul remains a G-dly spark regardless of its covering. However, the care we put

into our spiritual appearance matters immensely. In our daily lives, we naturally prefer to interact with someone who is composed and takes pride in their presentation over someone who appears disheveled and indifferent. We must ask ourselves if we are treating our spiritual "look" with the same level of conscientiousness. Is our soul's wardrobe polished and intentional, or has it become neglected and "shlumpy"?

Cultivating this wardrobe does not require a sudden "shopping spree" of grand gestures; it is about the consistent, daily effort to be mindful of how we express our inner selves. Each positive thought and every selfless act adds a durable, beautiful layer to our spiritual collection. These are the garments that define our character and determine our impact on the world around us.

There is a deeper reason to start building this wardrobe today. Ancient tradition suggests that the "attire" we wear in the future era of Moshiach will be composed of the very mitzvot and wisdom we have accumulated throughout our lives. It serves as the ultimate formal wear for the world's most significant transition. By adding to our collection of good deeds now, we ensure that we won't be caught "all dressed up with no place to go," but rather perfectly prepared for the greatest celebration of all.

SLICE OF LIFE

The Hallway was His Classroom



Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Munitz

As a boy back in Russia, my father, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Munitz, would study Torah very diligently, and every Thursday night – even before his Bar Mitzvah – he would study all night. One Thursday, he had a headache and couldn't concentrate, so he decided to go home from the study hall. It was a cold winter night, and on his way home, he heard singing; he was passing by a gathering of chasidim celebrating the Chabad holiday of Yud-Tes Kislev. He decided to go inside, and as he would often say, once he entered, he never left.

He became a real chasid, studying Chabad teachings, and praying at great length, and he even taught Torah to children when it was against Soviet law.

At one point, after a close call with the KGB while teaching Torah, he and his friends resolved to one day open a yeshivah of their own. And in the 1950s, once they were living in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, they did. Oholei Torah, as it was called, started off in the home of one of those friends, Reb Elya Chaim Roitblat, who taught alongside my father, while the other friend, Reb Michoel Teitelbaum, took care of the administration.

I was born a little before this, though, in 1951. We were still living in the Lower East Side, but for the brit, my father wanted to bring me to Crown Heights. That way, the Rebbe – who had only recently assumed the position – could serve in the honorary role of sandek, by holding me during the ceremony. My father wanted to name me after the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, as well as after a relative whose name was Yosef.

At a farbrengen just before the brit, my father

asked the Rebbe whether it is proper to also have this relative in mind while giving me the Previous Rebbe's name.

The Rebbe replied that "the name of a tzaddik," meaning a truly saintly figure like the Previous Rebbe, "should not be mixed with those of other people."

Later, it emerged that this long-lost relative was actually alive – which was another reason, according to our tradition, not to name me after him!

By the day of the brit, my mother still wasn't feeling well and couldn't travel to Crown Heights, so it took place in the Lower East Side, and the Rebbe sent three yeshivah students to represent him at the event. As they were emerging from the subway on their way back, they saw the Rebbe coming out of 770.

"Are you coming from the brit?" the Rebbe inquired. "What is the name?" "Yosef Yitzchok," they replied. "The name of a tzaddik," remarked the Rebbe.

When we moved to Crown Heights, we lived in an apartment on New York Avenue – just down the road from where the Rebbe and his wife lived at the time. As children, we tried to figure out the time that the Rebbe would be walking to 770 in the morning, and we would wave to him as he walked by. The Rebbe would make sure to look up at us and wave back.

Before my Bar Mitzvah, I had a special audience with the Rebbe, along with my father, and after that, I would have an audience with the Rebbe each year on my birthday. The custom was that you would write a note with anything you wanted to say, and when you came to the Rebbe, he would read it, and, almost at the same time, respond to everything you had written. One year, while reading in my note that I was turning 17, he took a pen, circled my age, and wrote "tov." That is to say, the Hebrew word for "good" has the numerical value of 17. As he gave me a blessing for the year ahead, with a small smile, he picked up the paper and showed me what he had written.

When my father started to get too old to keep teaching in Oholei Torah, the school was planning to suggest that he retire. But when they wrote to the Rebbe about it, he replied that it would be worth keeping my father there, if only for the students to see his face in the hallway.

And so, my father was given the responsibility of sitting in the school hallway – and any kids who were misbehaving in class would go out and spend time with him. I later heard from many Oholei Torah students that they would try to get sent out

of class so that they could study together with my father – especially when they had a test coming up!

In the late '70s, I moved to Pittsburgh to serve as a Chabad emissary under the direction of Rabbi Sholom Posner, who founded the local Chabad yeshivah. It was just after my father had passed away, and he took me in like his own son.

At first, we moved into a house that had belonged to one of the teachers in the local school and was being sold. It was barely livable; there were broken windows and doors, and the heat didn't work. It was so freezing in the winter that we had to move out, but the search for a replacement was difficult. When we did find something that we could afford, I didn't know if it would be large enough for our family. So I wrote a letter about the apartment to the Rebbe, to which he replied: "As is well known – it is preferable to buy."

I could barely afford the rent, and now the Rebbe was telling me to buy a home! When I got the reply, I ran straight to Rabbi Posner. "How could I possibly do this?" "The Rebbe said to buy a house," Rabbi Posner replied. "So find a house that is for sale, and you will buy it."

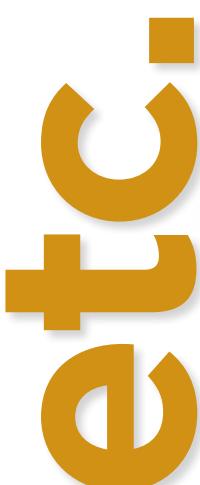
But when I found one, the price was exorbitant – there was no way I could afford it – and so I went back to Rabbi Posner. That's when he told me, "I've bought much larger properties without any money."

Rabbi Posner knew some of the members of the local Federation who might be open to supporting a community educator, and he advised me to approach them. "But if you ask for a thousand dollars, they'll only give a hundred. Ask for ten thousand." I thought that was too much, so I only asked the Federation for seven – and they gave me all seven. "You should have asked for twenty-five!" Rabbi Posner chided me.

Eventually, a free loan society in Crown Heights gave me enough money to cover the rest, and the Jewish owners of the house agreed to let me rent the house until I had done so.

And so, as impossible as it had seemed when the Rebbe first raised the idea, we ended up buying the house and living there for nineteen years, until we moved to open the Mesivta Menachem yeshivah in Buffalo, New York. Along the way, Rabbi Posner taught me a lesson: When the Rebbe tells you to do something, you do it! You're worried about material considerations? You don't have enough money? Worry about those things later – G-d will help.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Munitz is a mashpia (chasidic mentor) in the local community and a teacher in the Ohr Temimim yeshivah of Buffalo.



20,000 'Reclaim' Bondi Beach With Defiant Pledge to Increase Light

"I stand here tonight to say, loud and clear, that darkness does not get the final word," declared Rabbi Yehoram Ulman, director of Chabad-Lubavitch of Bondi. It was Sunday evening, the eighth and final light of Chanukah. Before him stood 20,000 people. Sunday had also been designated as a "National Day of Reflection". The event drew thousands, including senior dignitaries, to stand in collective remembrance and resolve.

They'd all come together on Bondi Beach, where just one week earlier, a brutal terror attack claimed the lives of 15 people and left more than 40 wounded. Among the victims was Rabbi Ulman's son-in-law, Rabbi Eli Schlanger, who served as junior rabbi at Chabad of Bondi.

Psalm 136 was recited by Rabbi Pinchus Feldman, head of Chabad NSW, and words of inspiration were offered by Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. Rabbi Mendy Ulman of Chabad of Bondi then led the crowd in reciting the Shema prayer before presiding over the kindling of the menorah.

WHO'S WHO

Who was the Baal Shem Tov?

The Baal Shem Tov, meaning "the Master of the Good Name," was born Yisrael, son of Eliezer and Sara on Elul 18, 1698. His teachings, emphasizing the worth of every Jew in G-d's eyes, lifted the spirits of the Jews of his time and encouraged them in their Divine growth. He also attracted some of the greatest spiritual giants of his age to his doctrine of Chasidut. Two of his main teachings are: to love every Jew regardless of his status; and everything that happens is a result of Divine Providence. When the Baal Shem Tov ascended to the heavenly chamber of Moshiach, he asked, "When will you come?" Moshiach replied: "When your teachings will be spread out."

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

2nd of Shevat, 5740 [1980]

Executive Director North American Jewish Students Network

Greeting and Blessing:

Your letter of the 16th of Kislev reached me with some delay. Subsequently, I was gratified to be informed by the Lubavitcher activists who participated in the Convention that it was both an impressive and stimulating event. Of course, as our Sages emphasize, "The essential thing is the deed," and real Hatzlocho [success] is measured in terms of actual accomplishments in matters of Torah and Mitzvos. And if this applies to every individual, how much more so in the case of a Convention to which hundreds of young Jews have been brought together from different parts of the country. Thus, the fullest measure of the Convention's success will be reflected in the actual results, in tangible deeds and activities into which the Convention's aims, resolutions and spirit will be translated.

In view of your leading position in the organization and, especially, since you and your colleagues undoubtedly invested an enormous amount of energy, time and effort into the Convention, and "a person treasures his handiwork," you will surely wish to see the Convention achieve the maximum tangible results.

Needless to say, the above will largely depend on the follow-up, as is customary in such a case. It would be highly desirable that every participating student, and especially the group leaders, should receive copies of the resolutions, with an encouraging cover letter that would stimulate the actual implementation of the resolutions to strengthen Jewish knowledge, identity and commitment among Jewish students in the fullest possible measure.

At this time, approaching the Yahrzeit-Hilul of my father-in-law of saintly memory on the 10th of Shevat, whose life and work is surely known to you, every one of us will surely remember his total dedication to the spreading and strengthening of Yiddishkeit, and how much he urged everyone to be involved in this vital activity.

We recall, particularly, that one of the first public

pronouncements which my father-in-law made immediately upon setting foot in this country forty years ago was, "America is not different" - not different from any other place insofar as a Jew's commitment to the eternal Torah and Mitzvos is concerned. And in keeping with the principle that "action is the essential thing," he immediately threw himself into a determined all-out effort to make his vision a reality. How well he succeeded, with G-d's help, in this vital task is a matter of open record, as anyone who is familiar with the American scene, as it was then, and as it is now, can clearly see, especially on the campuses of the colleges and universities in all parts of this continent.

With prayerful wishes for your continued Hatzlocho in all above, and hoping to hear good news from you,

With blessing,

2nd of Shevat, 5745 [1985]

To All Participants in the Annual Melava Malka Of the Hillel Academy of Passaic, N. J.

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to be informed of the forthcoming Annual Melava Malka honoring Rabbi [redacted] and other worthy honorees.

It is gratifying indeed to note that the Passaic and Clifton Jewish community appreciates the services of their Rav, rendered with a dedication and devotion that exceeds what is normally expected of a conscientious Rabbi and spiritual leader. But a graduate of the Lubavitcher Yeshiva demands of himself the very utmost and more. And Rabbi [redacted] is one of the early graduates of the Lubavitcher Yeshiva founded by my father-in-law, the Rebbe, of saintly memory - whose Yahrzeit-Hilul will be observed on the 10th of Shevat. This, by the way, provides the significant timely connection with the Melava Malka event that follows it so closely. The Baal Ha-Hilul was the embodiment of real Mesiras Nefesh [self-sacrifice] in his boundless dedication to the dissemination and strengthening of Yiddishkeit, Torah and Mitzvoth, all throughout his lifetime. This spirit permeates the Lubavitcher Torah institutions and activities, as well as its students, of whom Rabbi Bobrofsky is a living and inspiring example.

I extend prayerful wishes to each and all of you, especially to the worthy honorees, honorary officers and all community leaders, that the inspiration of the Melava Malka event be with you in all days ahead, to stimulate you, one and all, to even greater achievements in the cause of Torah education and true Yiddishkeit, in an ever-growing measure.

With esteem and blessing,

MOSHIACH MATTERS

Whoever does not believe in the involvement of Divine Providence in every aspect of this world, is enslaved to the shell that covers and conceals Divine Providence. This is the

inner meaning of Maimonides' statement that "There will be no difference between the current age and the Era of Moshiach except our emancipation from subservience to the gentile nations." In the future, however, when the spirit of impurity will be removed from the earth, everyone will see how every occurrence derives from G-d.

(Keter Shem Tov)

"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 coming week we will enter the Hebrew month of Shevat. It was on the first day of this month that Moses began his final repetition of the Torah and alluded to the sins of the Jewish people throughout their 40-year sojourn in the desert. Moses completed this repetition over a month later, on the seventh of Adar, the day of his passing.

As "Moses was the first redeemer and Moses will be the last redeemer," it should not come as a surprise that this month of Shevat has many connections to Moshiach and the Redemption.

The name Shevat relates to the Hebrew word "shevet" which means "staff." Shevet is associated with the concept of authority and kingship, as it is written, "The shevet will not depart from [the royal family of] Judah." The most perfect expression of the concept of royalty will be in the Era of the Redemption, when Moshiach will reign. For this reason, on the verse "And a shevet will arise in Israel," Maimonides comments, "This refers to the King Moshiach."

The word shevet also means "branch" or "shoot." In this context there is also a connection to Moshiach. On the verse "A shoot will emerge from the stem of Jesse" which begins a renowned prophecy concerning Moshiach's coming, the Metzudat David commentary states, "a shevet will emerge... the King Moshiach."

The connection between the month of Shevat and the Divine revelations that the world will experience in the Messianic Era is also apparent from the fact that it is the eleventh month. All existence is structured in a pattern of ten, and eleven alludes to a revelation that transcends this structure.

In this month, which is so completely associated with Moshiach, may we finally merit the long-awaited Redemption, NOW!

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA

לזכרון חייה ימושקה

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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As told by Refael Ben-Zichri of Beersheba, Israel

I was born in Safro, Morocco, where I attended yeshiva until I was 16 years old. By then it was time to learn a profession, so I went to the city of Fez where there were more options. I decided to become a draftsman and enrolled in a special vocational school.

When the Second World War broke out it became very hard to find work - especially in my profession, and especially as a Jew. People were grateful to have any job at all.

One day I applied for a job at a huge woodworking factory that produced furniture and other items for the government. The plant was French-owned, and the workers were Arabs and Jews. Because it was wartime, the factory was open seven days a week.

As soon as I walked through the doors I vowed to myself that I would never desecrate the Sabbath, no matter what happened. I presented myself to the supervisor, and after a short interview I was hired.

For a whole week I worked very diligently, so much so that I received several commendations. But I could not stop worrying about the coming Shabbat. No matter how hard I tried, I could not come up with any solution to the problem.

On Shabbat morning I found my feet taking me in the direction of the factory. But I was determined not to do any actual prohibited work, even if it meant being fired. I thanked G-d for every moment that went by without the supervisor noticing me. When eventually he came over, I made believe I was busy solving an equation, but I could tell that he knew I was faking. I said nothing, and he continued on his rounds. I breathed a deep sigh of relief. My first Shabbat had passed without incident.

I continued to be very industrious. The second week passed as the first. My hands worked diligently, but my mind was elsewhere. All I could think about was the coming Shabbat.

Again I found myself in the same situation as before. I stood at my usual workplace, but did not touch any of the wood or machinery. Unfortunately, that day the supervisor showed up early in the morning. I don't know if it was a coincidence or he was checking up on me.

My heart started to pound as he walked over. "Why aren't you working?" he demanded. I didn't answer, and he repeated the question. When I still said nothing he told me, "If you do not start working you will have to leave. You'll have to find a job among the Jews..."

A few minutes later the supervisor returned, but this time he wasn't alone. Walking alongside him was the manager of the factory! My whole body started trembling.

The manager looked a little familiar to me, but I wasn't really sure and I couldn't remember where I might have seen him. The manager gave me the once-over from head to toe before whispering something in the supervisor's ear. The only word I could make out was "draftsman."

It was common knowledge that the plant's draftsman had quit several weeks before. Since then the factory was lacking a full-time draftsman, and the work supervisor, who had been formally trained as a draftsman, was trying to fill two jobs at once. It had never occurred to me to apply for the senior position, as I was too shy.

Suddenly, I found myself being addressed by the manager. "If I'm not mistaken, I signed your diploma from draftsmanship school," he said. At that moment I realized why he looked so familiar. "Yes," I answered.

"Report to my office first thing tomorrow morning," he said, and went back to his other duties.

The next day I began my career as the plant's official draftsman. I was delighted by the unexpected promotion, but still worried about keeping Shabbat. I had a feeling that the whole happy adventure would be coming to an end that Saturday...

Shabbat came. This time I decided to take the initiative. I went to the manager's office and announced, "I don't work on Saturdays." His face paled, and for a whole minute he was dumbstruck. In the end he didn't say anything and just nodded his head slightly in agreement.

I worked in that plant for many years. And never again did my feet cross its threshold on Shabbat.

One time, in a rare moment of candor, the manager confided, "You should know that never in my life has anyone won an argument with me. You are the first person who ever succeeded, and got me to back down. Can you believe it? A little Jew, barely an adult, got the best of me..."



The L-rd ... gave them a charge to the Children of Israel (Ex. 6:13)

Despite the fact that the Jewish people hadn't listened "because of their anguished spirit and the cruel slavery," G-d commanded Moses and Aaron to keep on talking. For the word of G-d always makes an impression and has an effect: if not immediately, then sometime later. Holy words are never wasted, and are always ultimately heard.

(Sefat Emet)

And Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh (Ex. 7:7)

Why does the Torah need to tell us the ages of Moses and Aaron? To refute the common misconception that only young people can carry the banner of liberation and redemption. Older people, too, can be "revolutionaries," if G-d determines it is necessary and the proper time.

(Shaarei Yerushalayim)

And the frogs died in the houses, in the villages, and in the fields (Ex. 8:9)

When the plague of frogs was over, the frogs died. By contrast, after the plague of "various wild beasts" the animals did not die, but went back to wherever they had come from. The reason is that no "new" animals were created for the plague of "various wild beasts"; at G-d's command they left their natural habitat and converged on Egypt. When the plague ended, they were still necessary for the world's ecosystem. The frogs, however, were created especially for the plague; when it was over, there was no need for so many.

(Kehilat Yitzchak)

It is not proper to do so...shall we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us (Ex. 8:22)

The Egyptians were extremely careful to avoid hurting animals; according to the Ibn Ezra, they did not eat meat and would not even use any animal products. It is therefore "not proper" when such "humanitarians," who are so filled with pity for four-legged creatures, think nothing about enslaving Jews and throwing their babies into the river.

(Imrei Chein)

4:36 PM Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area

27 Tevet / January 16

Torah Portion Va'eira

Blessing of the new month of Shevat

Shabbat ends **5:40 PM**



ל'עלוי נשמת
מרת מרים ריזע שושנה בת ר' מנחם מענדל ע"ה
Dedicated in memory of
MRS. MIRIAM FELDMAN, OBM
On the occasion of her Yahrzeit
By her family