

L'Chaim

1885

14 Av, 5785

August 8, 2025

The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תר"ץ ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalms 124:8)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

*from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion*

This week's Torah portion, Vaetchanan, contains the verse, "And you shall know this day, and take it to heart, that the L-rd is the G-d in the heavens above, and upon the earth below; there is none else." This recognition of G-d's unity may therefore be divided into three distinct areas: "heaven," "earth," and "there is none else" (which, according to the Midrash, refers to G-d's oneness "even within the very depths of the earth.")

Why does the Torah go to such great lengths to emphasize the oneness of G-d? Would anyone seriously entertain the notion that there is another G-d hiding in the murky depths of the sea or in the earth's core? Why is it necessary for the Torah to explicitly command us to "take it to heart?"

Chasidic philosophy explains that this verse not only negates the possibility of another deity's existence, G-d forbid, but rather emphasizes that fact that there is no existence at all besides G-d. G-dliness is the only reality; everything else is an illusion covering up the true essence within. Were we able to clearly perceive that there is no independent reality except for G-d, we would easily recognize that it is only G-d's constant recreation of the world, every minute and every second, which sustains both physical and spiritual reality. In truth, "there is nothing else."

Because one may mistakenly think that only spiritual matters are G-dly, the Torah specifically mentions "the earth below." The physical world, with its multitude of creations, is also a vessel for G-dliness, and must be properly utilized in the service of G-d.

This division is also symbolic of man himself: "Heaven" re-fers to man's G-dly soul; "earth" refers to his corporeal body, the vessel in which the G-dly soul illuminates; and "the very depths of the earth" refers to man's actions.

By stressing this verse, the Torah emphasizes that this awareness of G-d must be brought into all facets of our lives-- spiritual, physical and practical. By recognizing G-d's unity and reflecting it in our every action, we ready the entire world for the complete revelation of G-dliness that will take place with the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption, speedily in our days.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Day I Realized ChatGPT Has No Soul

By Rabbi Uriel Vigler

I've been aware of the AI revolution for a while now; I even wrote a few blogs about it, because, you know, I like to sound ahead of the curve and all. But truthfully, I wasn't impressed.

WhatsApp kept nudging me to try Meta AI, so I gave it a spin. I asked it all my deep questions, like, "How do you solve this math problem with decimals? It's my kid's third-grade homework and I have no clue," and, "Can you help me with my son's Chumash Parsha Puzzler?"

It answered, and its answers were fine, but they were just that: Fine.

Helpful? Sure. Game-changing? Not remotely.

So I figured we were still years away from anything truly useful. It was cute—but cute doesn't write your sermons or plan your fundraisers.

Then, a few weeks ago, I finally tried ChatGPT.

And it was like going from dial-up to fiber optics. From black-and-white TV to full-blown 4K Ultra HD. From your cousin's DJ set at a bar mitzvah to the symphony orchestra at Carnegie Hall.

Suddenly, this thing was writing thank-you letters, speeches, and fundraising appeals. It could even design full itineraries for our wounded soldiers' trips—down to the last detail.

It became my executive assistant, my creative partner, my editor, my therapist (who, thankfully, doesn't judge my overuse of commas). It even remembers what I said last week—something my own family still struggles with.

I was hooked.

It was perfect.

I was telling everyone about it—like a proud parent showing off a gifted

child.

Until I realized ... it isn't perfect at all.

Because for all its brilliance, ChatGPT has one glaring flaw: It can't feel.

It doesn't get choked up when a wounded soldier takes his first step on new legs. It doesn't stay up at night worrying about a friend. And it definitely doesn't cry at weddings.

Yes, it can mimic emotion. But it doesn't have a soul.

And that's when it hit me: The one thing AI will never replace—is you. Your soul. Your heart. Your messy, emotional, irrational, beautiful humanity.

In a world where everything is becoming automated—where jobs are being replaced by code and relationships by chatbots—there's one industry that will always survive: imperfection.

Because only humans make mistakes. Only humans love illogically. Only humans cry from joy.

And in Chassidic thought, that's not a bug—it's the ultimate feature.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that every Jew carries within them a "chelek Eloka mima'al mamash"—a literal spark of G-dliness. It's what makes us alive, human, real. It's what differentiates us from ChatGPT, MetaAi, DeepSeek and Claude.

A machine can search the Torah, but only a soul can live it.

So yes—use the tools. Let AI help you write faster, plan smarter, respond quicker.

But never forget: the sacred stuff still needs a soul.

Because at the end of the day, Chat GPT can't do a mitzvah or bring Moshiach closer.

Only you can do that.

SLICE OF LIFE

The Paratrooper Clown Or Laughter in the Darkness



David Ben Porat

In the mud-soaked trenches of Rafah, as exhausted paratroopers trudged through darkness under the weight of combat gear, David Ben-Porat made an unexpected choice. While others grimaced in fatigue, he began laughing—not from hysteria, but from a deliberate decision to transform the moment.

“I remember one night in Rafah, at the beginning of the war,” David recalls, his eyes reflecting both the hardship and hope of those early days. “We were among the first to enter, and conditions were difficult. Supplies hadn’t arrived due to fears that terrorists would fire on the carriers. At midnight, we were told we could retrieve the food and water, but it was a ten-minute walk through mud, in complete darkness.”

The 27-year-old resident of Rechelim in Samaria paints the scene with vivid detail: “We’re walking with heavy equipment, sweating, wet, tired, and then they tell us to

make another round. I look at the guys—everyone’s exhausted. I said to myself: this is the moment to lift them up. I started doing laughter exercises with them, laughing about our situation, about the mud, about the cold canned food waiting for us. And suddenly, everyone was laughing.”

Known affectionately as “the Paratrooper Clown,” David has mastered an unlikely dual identity—combat soldier and medical clown. A graduate of Hesder yeshivas and a paratrooper by profession, he dedicates his free time to bringing joy to those who need it most desperately.

His journey toward healing through humor began in Bat Yam, where he grew up in a religious family “with lots of warmth and love.” His father, a man of profound kindness, constantly helped those in need. “I would go with him on cold nights, with bags full of groceries, to families who couldn’t afford them,” David remembers with warmth. “It entered my heart. I asked myself: if Dad brings joy to people through acts of kindness, maybe I can bring joy through laughter?”

The pivotal moment came during his regular service when his unit was stationed near Kibbutz Re’im in the Gaza envelope. With conflict looming, his officer suggested they do something to cheer up the children in the settlement. “We went to the kindergarten. I didn’t bring a clown costume, but I brought my heart,” David says simply. “We started playing with the children, telling jokes—and suddenly I heard them laughing, real laughter. At that moment, I understood how much healing power there is in laughter. I told myself: I must continue this.”

He began balancing his military service with volunteer work as a medical clown in hospitals and clinics. “It’s a challenging combination between being a soldier, where everything is serious, precise, focused, and being a medical clown, who creates a light and relaxed atmosphere.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, David founded “Fighting for Your Smile,” an

initiative that began conducting virtual visits for isolated individuals. “We started with three clowns and reached 120, with 40 calls every day!” Although activity slowed after the pandemic, it was reinvigorated during the recent war.

“At the beginning of the war, when chaos ruled everything, we went to evacuate families, medical centers, anywhere people needed strengthening,” he explains. “I remember a case at Beit Levenstein (a rehabilitation hospital, one of Israel’s leading rehabilitation centers)—a Golani soldier who was severely wounded, lying there, broken and suffering. We started talking, laughing, and I saw how his eyes lit up. He forgot the pain for a few moments.”

On Simchat Torah last year, David left home and his two-month-old child to enter Gaza. “On one of the difficult days, I posted a short video with the guys in the unit, and I received responses from people who wrote to me: ‘You’re bringing us joy in the midst of all this pain.’ That gave me strength to continue.”

David’s approach to encountering sadness is deeply empathetic. “When I meet a sad person, I first listen. I talk with them about their pain, and from there I start to lift them up.” He recalls a touching moment: “Once I came to a patient and he said to me: ‘Thank you for trying, but I don’t want a clown.’ I apologized and left, but before I left he smiled, as if to say: ‘You know, the mere fact that you came already made me happy.’”

Beyond the laughter, David carries a powerful message: “When you bring joy to others, you discover how your own life changes for the better. There was a guy who studied medical clowning with me, and he told me he had been on the path to suicide, but the joy he brought to others gave meaning to his life.”

As he continues balancing his dual roles—soldier in a combat zone and healer in places of suffering—David embodies a profound truth: sometimes, in the midst of overwhelming darkness, a simple smile can become the most powerful medicine.

Adapted from Sichat Shavu



Century-Old ‘Siddur’ Discovered During Restoration of Historic Soldiers’ Synagogue in Tomsk

Old, sturdy timber beams line the walls of the Soldiers’ Synagogue in the western Siberian city of Tomsk, Russia, its ornate window frames topped by Stars of David carved over a century ago.

Built in 1907 by Jewish child soldiers of the Russian Imperial military—known as Cantonists—Tomsk’s Soldiers’ Synagogue is likely the last synagogue of its kind in existence. It was confiscated by Soviets in 1930, and was returned to the Jewish community, in 2018.

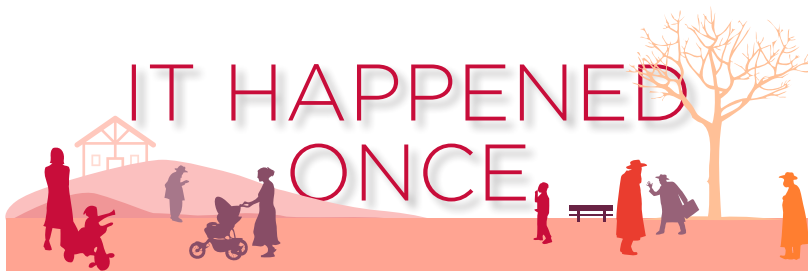
Today, the old building is being restored with an eye towards serving as a museum of Siberian Jewry. “It’s a miracle,” says Rabbi Levy Kaminetzky, the chief rabbi of the city who leads Chabad-Lubavitch of Tomsk with his wife, Gitty. There is something special about finding a siddur here. “The siddur will join another sacred item, a Torah scroll, hidden away in 1930 by the synagogue’s caretaker.

Ethics Chapter Three

He would also say: One whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures. But one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom does not endure.

He would also say: One who is pleasing to his fellow men, is pleasing to G-d. But one who is not pleasing to his fellow men, is not pleasing to G-d.

Visit www.moshiach.com or call (718) 953 6100



Reb Leibush had just arrived in Belz to pay a visit to his mother. When he entered her home, which she shared with his brother, Reb Shalom, the Rebbe of Belz, the sound of hammering resounded through the rooms. The town of Belz was constructing a new synagogue.

Reb Leibush couldn't wait to visit the site of the new shul, and so after partaking of a cup of tea and some fresh cake with his mother, he went out to check on the progress of the building. He was surprised to see his brother standing with a shovel in his hand, helping with the work like a member of the construction crew.

Reb Leibush felt that this manual labor was below the dignity befitting the town's rabbi, and decided to tell his brother how he felt. "Listen, my brother, you know that the Talmud says that a leader of a Jewish community is not permitted to perform menial labor in the presence of three or more people. You, the Rebbe of Belz, know this law, so why are you standing here like a common worker?"

Reb Shalom listened quietly to his brother's words before responding. "Leibush," he began. "I will tell you a story that will explain my apparently strange behavior. Many years ago when I was studying in the town of Skohl my two study partners and I learned that if we studied with the utmost dedication and unstinting effort for a 1,000 consecutive nights without sleeping, we would merit a revelation of the prophet Elijah. When we heard about this, we wanted this holy revelation more than anything else in the world. We resolved that we would undertake to study together for a 1,000 nights in a row. In the beginning it wasn't hard. After all, we were very enthusiastic and burning with our desire to reach our exalted goal. Nights passed in intense study, and we hardly noticed when the morning came.

"But, after a while, it began to be increasingly more difficult to study with the same dedication. We were becoming tired from not sleeping night after night. Finally, one of my partners couldn't stand the strain any longer and he decided to drop out. But I continued the nightly session with my remaining partner. It was on the eight hundredth night that he, too, lost the quest, but I was firm in my will to continue right through to the end.

"I sat alone in the dark shul every night, fighting sleep and utter exhaustion, determined to reach the one thousandth night. When I thought that I had no more strength to continue I still pushed on, so deep was my desire to receive the revelation of the holy prophet.

"On the thousandth night a terrible storm blew up. It seemed like the gates of Hell had opened and the fierce winds had threatened to destroy the world. Even I, who was normally unfazed by the weather, no matter how violent, was shaken by the unearthly howls and piercing flashes of lightning that zigzagged across the sky. Still, I sat by my open book, determined that nothing would interfere with my reaching my goal. Suddenly there was a loud, frightening crash of glass. The wind had blown out one of the windows of the study hall and its breath had extinguished my candles. This was too much for me. I had persevered for a 1,000 nights though my strength was all but gone, and now this. The rain and wind pelted me through the shattered window and my spirits had plummeted to rock bottom. I would have left had I not been so terrified of the raging storm.

"But then I gathered myself together. Was this not my last night, after which I could expect a visit from the prophet Elijah himself? How could I allow a mere storm to deprive me of my reward? I felt my way to the holy Ark and slid open the carved door, and wept my heart out before G-d, begging Him to help me. I don't know how long I stood there pouring out my yearning and frustration to the One Above, but at one point I realized that the storm had ended.

"I came to myself and went out to look out the broken window. The sun was trying to break through the remaining clouds, and I saw walking in the direction of the study hall, an old man. I knew it was Elijah who had come to learn Torah with me. We sat together and learned all that night, and I was like a person transported in a dream.

"The last part of the Torah which he taught me was the laws of building a synagogue. This teaching is so precious to me that if I were able, I would erect the whole building by myself from beginning to end. Alas, this little bit is all I am capable of doing, but even so, it is so dear to me that my entire being is full of joy with each brick that I place."

Reb Leibush smiled, happy with his brother's explanation.



You shall not add to that which I have commanded you nor shall you subtract from it, to observe the command of G-d (Deuteronomy 4:2).

The Torah is called the "prescription of life"-a medicine able to purify those who take it. That is why we are warned not to add and not to subtract from the Torah's words. A prescription drug is a precise mixture of various substances, and changing the proportions can have toxic effects. So, too, are the commandments of the Torah given in the exact and correct proportions, and to change even a word has a deleterious effect. (Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz)

The purpose of the "Enlightenment" was to reform the Torah and mitzvot. One of the proponents of that approach once suggested to Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer that it was necessary to change certain detailed practices to make the observance of the commandments easier. Rabbi Hildesheimer replied "That is the meaning of the [above-mentioned] verse. Even when your purpose is to observe the command of G-d, you still may not subtract."

"In the heavens above and on the earth below" (Deut. 4:39).

When contemplating one's heavenly or spiritual condition one should look "above" to those who have attained a higher level; one can never be satisfied. However in "earthly" matters of wealth and so on, one should look "below," to the less fortunate, and be thankful for the blessings one has. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

I stand between your G-d and you (Deut. 5:5).

Early chasidim used to explain that the "I," the awareness of self, the ego, stands between the person and his efforts to come closer to G-d.



7:44 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
14 Av / August 8
Torah Portion Va'etchanan
Shabbat Nachamu
Ethics Ch 3
Shabbat ends 8:46 pm

L'ilui Nishmat Yisrael Chaim Aziz ben Reuben

נפטר כ' אב, תשס"ד

& L'refuah Shleima Dovid Yeshaya Ben Rivka Kayla