

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

The Paratrooper Clown Or Laughter in the Darkness



Dovid Ben Poret

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 evacuee 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.

The Rebbe

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

By the Grace of G-d

21 Kislev 5730 Brooklyn, NY Miss Chaya Devorah Plotkin 50 East 34th St. #6H New York, NY 10016

Blessing and Greeting:

I duly received your letter of the 14th of Kislev, with the enclosed tzedakah contributed by your group of girls. Enclosed are the receipts.

May G-d grant that the zechus of the tzedakah should stand each and every one of you individually, and all together, in good stead, for the fulfillment of your hearts' desires for good in all your needs.

I hope you will have an inspiring Chanukah, especially in the light of the fact that Jewish women had a significant role in the miracle of Chanukah, as you surely know. The women's contribution began with their self-sacrificing determination to observe the laws of tznius, and extended to the whole area of Torah and mitzvoth. Be it remembered that in those days they were confronted with a trend which had swept not only non-Jewish nations, but unfortunately also a substantial part of the Jewish people, who called themselves "Hellenists," faithfully following the customs and fashions of the day as set by the Greek culture prevailing at that time.

An event in Jewish history, particularly one that has been eternalized by a mitzvah, especially for eight consecutive days, surely must provide food for thought, not only as an important historic event, but also, and especially, as one that has a pertinent and timely significance for our own day and age. This should also make it easier to overcome whatever difficulties there may be, whether real or imaginary, to do so with confidence, joy, and gladness of heart.

The message of Chanukah, for Jewish girls and women, is that they should not allow themselves to be influenced by the environment, even though they are "few" and "weak" (as mentioned in Al Hanissim). Victory will be theirs if they assume a strong and determined posture, and the benefit of it will be not only for them, but for the entire Jewish people, indeed for all future generations, as was the case with Chanukah.

Surely it is unnecessary to elaborate to you at length as to the cult of the ancient Greeks, which was to worship physical strength and beauty, discarding all modesty, etc.

So shameless they became in their conduct, that they ascribed the same obscenities and vulgarity to their pagan gods, as is well known from their mythology.

In the light of the above, the issue, insofar as Jewish girls are concerned, is not merely the length of a dress, whether it be longer or shorter, but the fact that following the trend of the non-Jewish cult means subservience to it all along the line.

Secondly, this is not a personal matter, where a Jewish girl can think it is a matter of her own to do as she please, but it has farreaching implications involving other girls, and is indeed a matter of concern for all our Jewish people.

Thirdly, there is no basis to think that what can a girl do in the face of such a majority and a trend, etc. The message of Chanukah provides the answer in regard to all three mentioned points.

I hope and pray that those girls who have shown strength and independence in the matter of tznius will continue to do so even with greater strength, while those who have not seen the matter in the true light of the Torah until now will begin to do so from now on and will continue in the right direction, going from strength to strength, in accordance with the teaching of the Chanukah lights, which are kindled in growing numbers from day to day.

Although this letter has been addressed to you in reply to your letter, both your letter as well as the reply are, of course, intended on behalf of the entire group. I hope, therefore, that you will bring it to the attention of each and every one of the group, and that it will help you and them in your determination to show a living example to other girls and groups as to what the proper thinking and conduct of a Jewish girl should be. In this way we may be certain in the eventual victory of light.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

His [the Messiah's] name will be great and fill the earth to its uttermost bounds. It will be a greater name than that of King Solomon and mightier. The nations will make peace with him and lands will obey him by reason of his great rectitude and the wonders that will come to light by his means. Any one who rises up against him, G-d will destroy and make him fall into his

(Maimonides' "Introduction to Chelek")

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 Shabbat we celebrate the festive day of the Fifteen of Av. On the 15th of Av the days begin to get shorter.

In times gone by, the onset of evening meant that the workday was over. Our Sages, therefore, encourage us to use the longer evenings for increased study of Jewish subjects.

The exile is often referred to as "night" and the Redemption, as "dawn." Though we are certainly in the last few moments of the long night of exile, it sometimes seems like the "night" is getting longer rather than shorter. Thus, the above teaching of our Sages is certainly appropriate.

Maimonides explains that in the era of the Redemption, the sole occupation of the whole world will be to know G-d. The Rebbe suggested, therefore, that as a preparation for that time, we increase in our studies wherever possible. In addition, the Rebbe expressed the following thoughts on studying matters specifically concerning Moshiach and the Redemption.

"Since Moshiach is about to come, a final effort is required that will bring him. Every man, woman and child should increase his Torah study in subjects that concern the Redemption... One should likewise upgrade one's meticulous observance of mitzvot, particularly charity, 'which brings the Redemption near.

"It would be proper for one to connect his additional charity with his additional study of subjects connected with the Redemption, by giving charity with the intent that it hasten the Redemption. This intention in itself becomes part of learning subjects connected with the Redemption--for this is a real and tangible study of the teaching of our Sages: 'Great is charity for it brings the Redemption near.

"The above-described study is not only a spiritual means of securing the speedy advent of Moshiach; it is a way of beginning to live one's life in the mood of Moshiach and the Redemption by having one's mind permeated with an understanding of the concepts of Moshiach and Redemption. From the mind, these concepts will then find their way into the emotions Ultimately, they will find expression in one's actual conduct--in thought, word and deed--in a way befitting this unique era when we stand on the threshold of the Redemption.

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חי'ה י מושקא

Smuso Belmon

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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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 diffi-cult 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 threat-ened 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.

L'ilui Nishmat Yisrael Chaim Aziz ben Reuben נפטר כ' אב, תשס"ד

& L'refuah Shleima Dovid Yeshaya Ben Rivka Kayla

"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 Hidesheimer 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

Ethics Ch 3
Shabbat ends **8:46 pm**