בס״ד

L'Chaim

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3 Kislev, 5787
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The Weekly Publication for Every Jewish Person
נוסד תרך ימי השלושים
Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"Jerusalem has mountains around it, and the L-rd is around His people from now and to eternity" (Psalms 125:2)

IT HAPPENED ONCE

Rabbi Gershon, the brother-in-law of the Baal Shem Tov, had finalized his plans to travel to the Holy Land. A disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, he conferred with him before his departure and was told: "When you arrive in the Holy Land make sure to attend the yeshiva of Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, known as the holy Ohr Hachaim in Jerusalem. He has two separate yeshivas there - one in which they study the revealed Torah, and another, known to only a very few people, where he teaches the esoteric secrets of the Kabbala. Do everything you can to be admitted to the second yeshiva short of divulging your identity, unless you have no choice."

Rabbi Gershon's journey was successful and he arrived in Jerusalem and proceeded directly to the Ohr Hachaim's yeshiva. Anxious to see how they learned there, he attempted to join the students as they reviewed their study. But each time he approached them, he was told that it was permissible to attend the yeshiva only with the explicit permission of the Ohr Hachaim himself. When the Ohr Hachaim would enter the study hall to deliver his daily lesson, all strangers would be asked to leave.

Rabbi Gershon decided to approach the Ohr Hachaim personally and request his permission to learn. "Who are you?" inquired the Ohr Hachaim.

"I am a Jew who has come from Poland and I desire very much to study in your yeshiva," answered Reb Gershon.

The Ohr Hachaim gave him a penetrating, critical look and asked, "Are you fluent in the study of the Five Books of Moses and the Talmud?"

"Yes, I am," replied Reb Gershon.

"Then I give you my permission to remain here, and I will instruct my staff to accommodate you," the Ohr Hachaim said.

Rabbi Gershon was pleased with the outcome and settled down for the week to learn in the yeshiva of revealed Torah. All the while he was inquiring as to how to gain admittance to the yeshiva of Kabbala. He discreetly asked various students about the secret yeshiva, but none of them had the slightest idea what he was talking about. Those few who were the privileged students, refused to answer his repeated questions. So, Rabbi Gershon was forced to approach the Ohr Hachaim again and ask for permission to attend the yeshiva of esoteric study.

The Ohr Hachaim was surprised by the request. "How do you know about the other yeshiva?" he asked, as he stared into Reb Gershon's eyes, plumbing the depths of his soul.

Reb Gershon, wanting to avoid a detailed response, just looked down and said, "I was told by my brother-in-law." He hoped that his answer would pass without further comment.

"What is his name?"

"Oh, his name is Yisrael," was the matter-of-fact reply.

"I don't know him, but you may come to my lecture tonight," was the reply.

For the next three nights Reb Gershon learned Torah with the select group of students, but on the fourth night when he presented himself to the doorkeeper, he was refused admittance. He was astonished and turned to the doorkeeper crying, "Why have I been refused admittance, when I have the permission of the Head of the Yeshiva to attend?"

"I'm sorry, but I am following the instructions of the holy rabbi. He said that you are unworthy of learning the secrets of the Torah , since you have not attended to the needs of the Sages."

Reb Gershon turned away, puzzled, but resolved to do whatever was necessary to rescind the decree of the Ohr Hachaim. He noticed that the Ohr Hachaim donned a special pair of shoes and head covering before entering the bathroom. The next time he saw the Ohr Hachaim put on the special hat, he ran quickly and brought him the shoes. The Ohr Hachaim noted Reb Gershon's actions, but said nothing.

From that time forth, Rabbi Gershon was allowed to resume his midnight studies. He remained happily drinking in the learning at the Ohr Hachaim's yeshiva for the next few months. One day, he told the Ohr Hachaim that his own brother-in-law was a holy man.

"What is his name?" inquired the Ohr Hachaim.

"His name is Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov," Reb Gershon said.

"Oh," cried the Ohr Hachaim, "Of course I know him well. I see him very often in the supernal worlds. He is a holy man of unsurpassed greatness."

"Now I understand what happened to me in the Heavenly Court," continued the Ohr Hachaim. I had been sentenced to have some terrible calamity occur to me because of using a respected student of the Baal Shem Tov to perform a menial task for me. It was only through the intercession of the Baal Shem Tov that I was saved. If you had told me your true identity at once, I would have been saved the entire incident."

After this conversation, the Ohr Hachaim no longer permitted Reb Gershon to study in his yeshiva for, as he said, "You do not need me to teach you, if you have the Baal Shem Tov as a rebbe."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the Weekly Torah Portion

A ladder was standing on the ground and the top of it reached to heaven (Gen. 28:12).
Prayer is the ladder that connects our souls with G-d. Although it stands "on the ground," beginning with no more than acknowledgment of G-d's greatness, its top (the Amida, or silent prayer) reaches this level through the prior attainment of understanding inherent in the Shema itself. *(Hayom Yom, from the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

And Isaac loved Esau...but Rebecca loved Jacob (Gen. 25:25)
Isaac was a "perfect offering," whose "style" of Divine service was somewhat removed from the material world and its concealments. Rebecca, by contrast, had grown up in household surrounded by devious people. When Esau asked his father how to "tithe salt" (Esau knew that it is not required to tithe salt, he was just trying to show his father how "pious" he was) it was beyond Isaac's imagination that his son was being deceitful. Rebecca, however, with her experience in the ways of the world, recognized that it was only a scheme to impress his father, and "loved Jacob" for his quality of truthfulness. *(Der Torah Kval)*

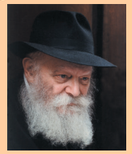
Behold, I heard your father speak to Esau your brother (Gen. 27:6)
Although Isaac had carried on his conversation with Esau in a whisper, Rivka had heard it as loudly as if he were speaking in a normal tone. She thus interpreted it as a sign from Above to intervene. *(The Rebbe of Dinov)*



4:21 PM *Candle Lighting Time*
NY Metro Area
3 Kislev / November 13
Torah Portion *Toldos*
Shabbat ends **5:22 PM**

Dedicated in honor of a dear friend
of the Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Stephen Bokser

to dedicate an issue
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LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, Toldot, we read of how Isaac wanted to bless Esau but was prevented from doing so by Rivka, his wife. It was through her intervention that the blessings were bestowed upon Jacob instead.

A fundamental question is raised by this incident. How could Isaac have possibly preferred Esau over Jacob? True, our sages tell us that Esau repeatedly tried to deceive his elderly father into thinking he was G-d-fearing and observant, by pointedly asking questions about religious law, but it is still hard to imagine Isaac being fooled by Esau's ruse. In fact, when Jacob presented himself to receive his father's blessings, Isaac declared that "the voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau," recognizing how unusual it was for Esau to address him in such a civil manner or even to bring G-d's name into the conversation. Isaac surely realized that something was amiss. But if Isaac was well aware of Esau's serious shortcomings, why did he nevertheless want to give the blessings only to him?

The truth is that Esau, the firstborn twin, possessed an extremely lofty soul capable of incredible spiritual accomplishments. In certain respects, Esau was on an even higher spiritual level than his brother Jacob. Jacob was born to be a "dweller in tents (of Torah)," protected from the outside world, enclosed within the four walls of the yeshiva. Esau, however, was "a man of the field," blessed with the spiritual strength to venture forth into the coarser material world to wage war against evil and impurity, bringing G-dliness and holiness down into the physical realm. It was Esau, therefore, who possessed the greater spiritual might.

This, then, explains Isaac's desire to bless Esau, despite his knowledge that his son was abusing these spiritual gifts: Isaac hoped his blessings would cause Esau's considerable talents to be brought out and revealed. Not only would Esau repent of his evil ways, but the entire world would benefit from his actions.

G-d, however, knew it was too late for Esau to repent and live up to his potential. Instead, the blessings were given to Jacob, and with them, the power to overcome evil and transform it into good, and to illuminate the world with the light of Torah.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

An Unexpected Lesson at the Scrap Yard

A scrap metal yard is hardly the place one would expect to discover an inspiring lesson about life.

At first glance, it looks like organized chaos. Mountains of broken appliances, discarded furniture, rusted pipes, and twisted metal rise in every direction. Giant cranes lift enormous loads, powerful magnets separate different materials, and heavy machinery transforms yesterday's useful possessions into tomorrow's recycled resources.

But behind all that noise and confusion lies a surprisingly fascinating system.

Consider how scrap metal is weighed.

When someone arrives with a vehicle filled with unwanted metal, the workers don't necessarily unload everything onto a scale and weigh each piece individually.

Instead, the entire vehicle, including all the junk inside, drives onto an enormous scale. Its total weight is recorded.

The driver then proceeds into the yard, unloads the scrap metal in its designated area, and returns to the scale with the now-empty vehicle.

The vehicle is weighed a second time.

By subtracting the second weight from the first, the workers know exactly how much scrap metal was delivered.

The difference between what came in and what went out determines the amount of metal being paid for.

It is a remarkably simple system. But it also offers a remarkable lesson.

Think about how we measure our own lives.

We tend to judge success by what we accumulate. How much money have we earned? How many accomplishments can we list? How much knowledge have we acquired? How many experiences have we enjoyed?

Yet perhaps the most important measurement is not how much we have collected, but how much we have changed.

Imagine two people attending the same lecture, reading the same book, or experiencing the same challenge.

One walks away virtually unchanged. The other gains a new perspective, becomes more understanding, develops greater patience, or discovers a deeper appreciation for life.

Both experienced exactly the same thing. But the impact was entirely different.

And that is what really matters.

A person can spend years accumulating knowledge without becoming wiser. Someone can experience tremendous success without becoming more generous. We can travel the world, meet extraordinary people, and encounter countless opportunities, yet remain essentially the same.

Conversely, a single conversation, a small act of kindness, or one difficult experience can transform the way we think and live.

Judaism teaches that life is a continuous journey of growth. Every day presents another opportunity to refine our character, strengthen our relationships, and bring more goodness into the world.

Perhaps that is the greatest lesson from an ordinary junkyard.

Life's true value is not measured simply by everything we carry along the way. It is measured by the difference between the person who began the journey and the person who emerges from it.

And that is a difference worth making.

L'Chaim L'Chaim L'Chaim