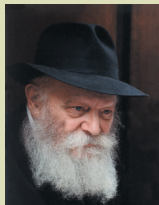


L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

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

This week we read two Torah portions, Chukat and Balak. Balak, the king of Moab, hired Bilaam, a gentile prophet, to curse the Jewish people. Earlier in the Torah we read of another nation who was also a sworn enemy of the Children of Israel, Amalek.

Mystical texts state that there is an inherent connection between Bilaam and Amalek. An illusion to this is seen when writing their names in Hebrew: when combining the first two letters of Bilaam (bet-lamed) with the first two letters of Amalek (ayin-mem), it spells Bilaam; and when combining the remaining two letters of Bilaam (ayin-mem) with the remaining two letters of Amalek (lamed-kof), it spells Amalek.

Amalek's basic ability to confront the Jews was derived from his family relationship with them; Amalek was the descendant of Esau. "I too am the great-grandchild of Abraham and Isaac," Amalek claimed. "I have the same right to voice my opinion in matters of Torah and holiness!"

The argument that was propounded by Bilaam was similar. Bilaam was a descendant of Laban, who insisted to Jacob that "the daughters are my daughters" - i.e., that the Matriarchs through whom the Jewish people would be established were his kin. With these words Laban claimed the right to have a say in Jewish affairs. Bilaam, a member of the same family, continued his forefather's argument and demanded that his opinion be given weight when it came to Torah and mitzvot.

From this we learn an important lesson that is valid in every generation: If someone comes along and makes an assertion that is contrary to Torah, it doesn't matter if he is the grandchild of Abraham and Isaac, or if the Matriarchs of the Jewish people are on his family tree. We are forbidden to heed his word.

"We have none but our Father in heaven upon Whom to rely!" we must respond to his argument. As Jews, there is only one yardstick by which we measure all things: the Torah. Nothing else, not even the most prestigious lineage, may enter the equation. The holy Torah is our sole criterion.

By definition, if a statement or directive is in accordance with the Torah it is good; if not, it doesn't matter who is saying it. If a Bilaam or an Amalek's words run counter to the Torah, they do not concern us in the least.

The best advice to a Jew who seeks to free himself from an Amalek or a Bilaam is yira (fear and awe) and ahava (love) of G-d, in that order. The Hebrew words themselves reveal this deep interconnection: combining the first two letters of yira (yud-resh) with the first two letters of ahava (alef-hei) spells yira; and combining the remaining two letters of yira (alef-hei) with the remaining two letters of ahava (bet-hei) spells ahava.

When a Jew possesses fear of G-d and love of G-d, there is nothing to be afraid of. Amalek and Bilaam will never succeed in defeating him.

Adapted from Volume 2 of Likutei Sichot

The Power of the Temporary Sacred Space

By Rabbi Yosef Y. Jacobson

TENTS AND DWELLINGS

This week's Torah portion, Balak, contains a striking moment. Balaam, a prophet hired to curse the Israelites, instead delivers one of the Bible's most beautiful blessings:

"How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your dwellings, O Israel."

These words became so beloved that they are recited at the beginning of Jewish morning prayers every day. Remarkably, they come not from Moses or a Jewish prophet, but from an outsider who was transformed by what he witnessed.

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement, offered a profound interpretation of this verse. Why does Balaam mention both tents and dwellings? And why associate one with Jacob and the other with Israel?

A TALE OF TWO STRUCTURES

A tent is temporary. A dwelling is permanent.

On a deeper level, these structures represent two ways of living a spiritual life.

Some people create a lasting inner home for higher awareness, purpose, and connection. Their sense of the sacred is steady and woven into daily life. They live from a place of ongoing clarity and presence.

Others struggle to sustain that connection. Work pressures, family responsibilities, uncertainty, and the endless demands of modern life can make deeper awareness feel distant. Yet even amid the noise, moments arise when the heart seeks something more.

A quiet morning. A reflective walk. A few minutes of prayer, meditation, gratitude, or honest self-examination.

These moments may not create a permanent dwelling. They are more like tents—temporary spaces in which we reconnect with what matters most.

And yet they matter deeply.

THE HEEL AND THE HEAD

The names Jacob and Israel symbolize these two states of being.

Jacob is linked to the heel—the part of us grounded in struggle, survival, and life's daily battles. Israel is associated with the head—clarity, vision, and higher consciousness.

At times we live as Israel, guided by insight and purpose. At other times we are Jacob, pulled into the pressures and complications of ordinary life.

One might assume that the permanent dwellings of Israel are spiritually superior to the temporary tents of Jacob.

But Balaam's blessing suggests otherwise.

"How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your dwellings, O Israel."

The tents come first.

Why? Because there is something uniquely powerful about choosing meaning in the midst of distraction. When a person pauses during a busy, demanding day to reconnect with their deepest values, that act carries extraordinary significance.

A permanent dwelling is beautiful. But a tent built in the middle of life's chaos reflects a different kind of courage.

Perhaps the purpose of spiritual life is not to escape the world, but to bring depth, awareness, and meaning into it. In that sense, even a brief moment of genuine connection can transform the ordinary into something sacred.

And sometimes, a tent is exactly where that transformation begins.

SLICE OF LIFE

Getting Central Africa's Rabbis Into One Room Isn't Easy



For the first time, all 11 Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries representing 11 Central African countries gathered together on the rooftop of the Sheraton in Kinshasa on May 26, marking 35 years of Chabad of Central Africa.

It took some of the conference-goers two flights and a layover in Europe just to get there. One flew from his home in Abuja, Nigeria to Paris and then on to Kinshasa, the capital and largest city in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Another took the Accra to Amsterdam flight, before turning around and flying to Kinshasa.

That's just how it works when you're a rabbi in Central Africa, where getting from one place to another isn't always a straight line.

But make it there they did, all 11 Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries representing 11 Central African countries from Ivory Coast to Tanzania, Ghana to Zambia, for their conference of rabbis in Kinshasa. On Tuesday May 26 they finally met—together for the first time on African soil—celebrating an occasion worth the lengthy journey: 35 years of Chabad of Central Africa.

The occasion was marked on the rooftop of the Sheraton Kinshasa, drawing diplomats, community members, distinguished guests, friends of Chabad, and, somewhere in the middle of it all, colleagues who hadn't seen each other in years.

Ambassador-at-Large Antoine Ghonda Mangalibi spoke on behalf of President of the DRC Félix Tshisekedi. "Your work goes beyond religious boundaries," he said. "It touches something more universal: human dignity, respect for others, the

transmission of knowledge, and the light of faith."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Rabbi Shlomo Bentolila and his late wife, Myriam, received the blessings of the Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—to establish Chabad-Lubavitch of Central Africa on the second-to-last night of Chanukah 1990. They settled in Kinshasa, then Zaire, today Congo, less than a month later.

Life in the Congo wasn't always easy, especially in the beginning. The Bentolilas headed out to Kinshasa with little fanfare in an age before widespread internet. For a while, they lived in a tiny two-bedroom apartment before moving into a larger and more secure home in the synagogue compound. The country was plagued by electric blackouts, and even once they got a generator, there was no guarantee it wouldn't blow.

Over time they built a beautiful Jewish community in Kinshasa, Myriam focusing on education and Rabbi Bentolila balancing his responsibilities in the Congo with reaching out to Jews in the rest of Central Africa.

Every holiday season, Bentolila would draft rabbinical students to lead services and organize Passover seders in countries across the continent, in the process discovering Jews in even the remotest parts of Africa. Bentolila would maintain and develop relationships with all the Jews the young rabbis found, and when the need for a full-time rabbi in a location became a necessity, he would dispatch a young couple to build a permanent Chabad center.

Rabbi Israel Uzan was one of those student rabbis. Today he lives in Abuja where he directs, together with his wife Haya, Chabad of Nigeria.

"These years of rabbinical students and Chabad of Central Africa's outreach allowed the Jews of Nigeria to become familiar with Chabad," he says. "Because of this foundation, they already knew what to expect from Chabad: the same warm and uplifting atmosphere they tasted during the festivals."

He and his wife moved to Nigeria in 2011, and were joined by Rabbi Mendy and Mazal Sternbach in neighboring Lagos nine years later.

Rabbi Noach and Alti Majesky first visited Accra, Ghana, during Chanukah of 2014, and returned four months later to lead a community Passover Seder. Seeing how much their presence and service was needed, they stayed.

Today, they lead a community of hundreds of Jews—Israeli expats, American and European businesspeople, and everything in between—guests filling the Chabad center every Shabbat. Their Jewish preschool has dozens of children and hundreds of alumni. They also run a kosher store inside the center, with containers with kosher food and Judaic supplies coming in regularly from Israel.

"The logistics of life are difficult," Majesky says. "We have to import everything, but it's worth it. Every year, there are more families joining the community."

Two years ago, Chabad of Ghana purchased a property. Construction is underway on a permanent facility, a \$3 million project that the community is largely funding itself.

What began as a single Chabad House in Kinshasa has, over 35 years, grown into eleven permanent Chabad centers across ten countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Angola, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, Kenya, and Tanzania. Each center serves as a full hub of Jewish life, synagogues, Torah classes, educational programs for adults and children, youth activities, kosher facilities, mikvahs, holiday celebrations, lifecycle events, and a welcoming home for residents, businesspeople, diplomats, travelers alike.

COMING TOGETHER

The continent's geography does not always make things convenient.

"People don't realize that Africa is a continent, and assume all the emissaries here are nearby," says Majesky. "But it's hard to see each other in person. At the conference, there were colleagues I met for the first time because travel is so difficult, and there are visas required too."

But once they were there, something clicked. They all shared common experiences: the same power outages, the same embassy negotiations, the same everyday struggles and successes.

Workshops over the two-and-a-half days covered everything Chabad emissaries deal with: education, youth programming, community development, security, fundraising and outreach approaches specific to the African context.

A highlight of the conference was the announcement of a new Chabad center opening in Senegal, another young couple soon to establish a permanent Jewish presence in a country that has never had one.

Historic Siberian Shul Returned to Jewish Community



After nearly a century in government hands, the historic shul in Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia in southeastern Russia, has been officially returned to the local Jewish community.

Following a lengthy effort that was officially completed during 5786, historical documents proved that the property belonged to the Jewish community, allowing the building's return to its rightful owners. The project advanced with the involvement of philanthropist Yan Yankelovich, a supporter of Jewish life in the region.

Rabbi Aharon Hakohen Wagner, Shliach and mara d'asra of Irkutsk, who has been closely involved with the Jewish community of Ulan-Ude, said the restoration will be a major undertaking. Plans include restoring the original structure of the building.

ETHICS CHAPTER FIVE

There are seven things that characterize a boor, and seven that characterize a wise man. A wise man does not speak before one who is greater than him in wisdom or age.

He does not interrupt his fellow's words. He does not hasten to answer. His questions are on the subject and his answers to the point.

He responds to first things first and to latter things later. Concerning what he did not hear, he says "I did not hear."

He concedes to the truth. With the boor, the reverse of all these is the case.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

15th of Tammuz, 5718 [1958]

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to see you at the Farbrengen [Chasidic gathering] of the 12th-13th of Tammuz, which is dedicated to the sacred work of my father-in-law of saintly memory, who disregarded every danger to his life in his work to strengthen and spread Torah and Yiddishkeit [Judaism]. As you no doubt know, he had to contend with overwhelming odds and evil forces that tried to stop him, but nevertheless he came out victorious, for he had the strength of the Torah on his side. This is also the purpose of the Farbrengen, when we all meet together to strengthen each other in our attachment to the Torah, and to the spirit of self-sacrifice in the cause of true Yiddishkeit, that we may not be afraid of any difficulties and obstacles. In reality, most of such obstacles are only in the imagination, and when there is a strong will, all difficulties disappear.

I hope that your parents encourage you in your studies and in your conduct in accordance with the Torah and your teachings at the Yeshiva, and the Al-mighty will surely reward them with much Nachas from you.

With prayerful wishes, and

With blessing,

Under separate cover you will receive one of our publications which we trust you will read with much interest.



End of Tammuz, 5719 [1959]

Hon. --

London

Shalom U'brachah [Peace and Blessings]:

Rabbi Hodakov has conveyed to me the gist of his telephone conversation with you. Needless to say, I was gratified to hear of your reaction, and thank you also in anticipation of the information which you promised to send.

I wish to add here that according to information received, though I cannot vouchsafe for its absolute accuracy, R.— is said to have applied for a visa to Rabbi—'s place and was denied.

No doubt you are informed that the contract which is being prepared for Rabbi— is limited to himself, whereas insofar as his son is concerned, efforts are only now being made to find one for him. Common sense would indicate that Rabbi- would hardly be willing to depart and leave his son in the present situation. Moreover, even his contract has been progressing with difficulty (it is hoped that on Wednesday it will be confirmed), though the efforts began several weeks ago. From this one gathers the difficulties that would attend the obtaining of a contract for his son.

In view of the above, it would be well if you could ascertain what are the chances of obtaining a British visa for both of them together. I would very much appreciate your information on this.

I cannot conclude at this time without reference to the significance of this month of Tammuz, with its historic anniversary of the liberation of my father-in-law from Soviet imprisonment (12th-13th of Tammuz). The experiences of our leaders are surely a living lesson and inspiration to all of us, that when one fights for the truth to the extent of real mesiras nefesh [self-sacrifice], one person can single-handedly overcome the greatest power on earth.

With kind regards and with blessing,

MOSHIACH MATTERS

When Moshiach comes everyone will manifestly see how the life-force that animates the organs of the body stems from Divinity. It will then be seen that every individual organ lives from the

Divine life-force that is drawn into it by the fulfillment of the particular mitzva which relates to that organ. For, as is well-known, the 248 positive commandments correspond to the 248 bodily organs.

(From a Chasidic discourse of Rabbi Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch)

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 is the 12th of Tamuz, which is both the birthday and day on which the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Y. Schneersohn, was liberated from Soviet prison and exile in 1927.

One of the most anti-Semitic leaders of old-time Russia was a man by the name of Stolipin, who was famous for his vicious hatred of Jews and the many harsh decrees he enacted against them.

Once, when the Rebbe Rashab learned that Stolipin was planning to issue a particularly cruel edict, he sent his son, the Previous Rebbe, on a mission to Moscow in an attempt to prevent it.

The Rebbe was given an appointment to meet with a certain minister, a friend of Stolipin. The meeting, to be held in the minister's home in a suburb of Moscow, was scheduled for Friday night, meaning that the Rebbe needed a place to stay within walking distance.

It was far too cold to walk the streets, and extremely dangerous for a Jew to go out alone in a neighborhood where not one Jew lived. With no other option, the Rebbe decided to spend Shabbat in the local public tavern.

The tavern was filled with drunken, Jew-hating Russians. Just walking inside placed the Rebbe's life in danger. But the Rebbe passed the whole day on the premises, aside from the time he left to speak with the minister. For an entire Shabbat the Rebbe had to make believe he was one of the crowd, lest the drunken revelers discover his Jewish identity. Yet the Rebbe did so willingly, in the hope of being able to nullify the evil decree.

The Rebbe's love for his fellow Jew was so all-encompassing that when he learned of the evil decree, it touched the essence of his soul. He willingly risked his life, even though the outcome was doubtful. In the end, the Rebbe was successful.

This contains an important lesson: Whenever we hear of another Jew's pain, be it physical or spiritual, it should affect us so deeply that it touches the essence of our souls. We must always do whatever we can to come to another Jew's aid, even if it is doubtful that our efforts will bear fruit.

Shmuel Butman

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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IT HAPPENED ONCE

It was a time of relentless tension and intimidation. The noose that the Soviets had so carefully placed around the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Y. Schneersohn, was tightening day by day. Everyone could sense that the situation was reaching critical mass: the Chasidim, the Rebbe's family, and the Rebbe himself. Nonetheless, the Rebbe refused to be intimidated, and persisted in his activities to strengthen and disseminate Judaism.

By Purim of 5687 (1927) the Rebbe was being harassed almost daily by the Yevsektziya (the Jewish branch of what would later develop into the K.G.B.). Members of the secret police were bursting into the Rebbe's house at all hours of the night and day, rifling through his belongings, confiscating papers and issuing threats. But the Rebbe insisted on celebrating the traditional Purim farbrengen (Chasidic gathering) in his home as always, despite the foreboding atmosphere.

The farbrengen began as usual, with the Rebbe seated at the head of the table. However, the Chasidim could immediately sense that the Rebbe was in another world. Much of the time the Rebbe's eyes were closed; from time to time his face would redden from mental exertion, and tears would roll down his cheeks. The Chasidim watched the Rebbe nervously, interspersing the Rebbe's words of Torah with Chasidic melodies.

At the height of the farbrengen the Chasidim noticed three figures slinking into the room and sitting at the end of the table. No one had any doubts about who they were. Although outwardly dressed as Chasidim, the three informers had by then become regular participants in all their gatherings.

The Rebbe was usually cautious and circumspect whenever the informers showed up, but this night would prove to be different. Several hours into the farbrengen the Rebbe suddenly rose from his seat and tore off his coat. Opening the buttons of his shirt he moved his talit katan [four-cornered garment with fringes attached to each corner] aside to expose the area over his holy heart.

"Eli Chaim!" the Rebbe called out to one of his Chasidim. "I once ordered you to do something and you refused, but I'm ordering you a second time and you must obey. I want you to go out and announce that whoever sends his children to a Soviet or Yevsektziya-run school will not live out the year!"

The Rebbe then turned to another Chasid. "Zalman! If they make a bonfire and ask you to choose between sending your children to their schools or jumping into the fire, do you know what you must do? You are to throw yourself into the flames!"

An icy fear gripped the hearts of everyone present, aware that every word the Rebbe uttered was being recorded as "evidence" against him. As if reading their minds, the Rebbe then turned his gaze on the three informers, who were clearly uncomfortable. "I know that they are here," the Rebbe said, "the men of the cursed Yevsektziya, may their name be erased. But I am not afraid of them at all!"

At that point some of the Chasidim started to sing, but the Rebbe's voice was louder. "When you see the body burning, G-d forbid, you must have no mercy. Just watch out for the head!" The Rebbe then added cryptically, "I asked my father [the Rebbe Rashab, Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber of Lubavitch], 'Just like Nikolai?' And he said, 'Yes, like Nikolai.'"

When the Rebbe saw that no one had understood his reference to Nikolai he continued. "The Kaiser Pavel once sent his son Nikolai out to war to prove his mettle. The son performed fearlessly and emerged victorious. However, when the battle was over, he began to distribute the spoils without his father's permission. The Kaiser was faced with a decision. On the one hand, Nikolai had demonstrated his military prowess, but on the other, the Kaiser wished to punish him for his disobedience. In the end Nikolai was sent to jail and imprisoned.

"I asked my father, 'The same as Nikolai?' and he said, 'Yes, like Nikolai.'" When the Chasidim grasped the Rebbe's implication they were horrified.

Hoping to impede the awful flow of words, one of the Chasidim ran into the next room to summon the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah, to try to calm her son. But as soon as the Rebbe saw her he began to weep. "Mother, I do nothing of my own volition. All my actions are in accordance with Father's wishes." The Rebbe and his mother both stood crying for some time.

No one could remain indifferent to such a scene, and the entire assembly dissolved in tears. The farbrengen ended when the Rebbe fell into a deep faint.

Exactly three months later, shortly after midnight on the 15th of Sivan, the Soviet secret police invaded the Rebbe's house and arrested him for crimes against the state. The Rebbe was held until the 12th/13th of Tamuz, when he was liberated in a miraculous manner - for which reason these dates have been celebrated as the Previous Rebbe's Festival of Redemption ever since.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the Weekly Torah Portion



Speak to the Children of Israel, that they bring to you a completely red cow on which there is no blemish, that has never borne a yoke (Num. 19:14)

Comments Rashi: "It should be perfect in redness; if there were two black hairs upon it, it would be disqualified." In the same way a red heifer is prevented from being "perfect" by the appearance of two black hairs, so too is a Jew's perfection disqualified by even the slightest "hairsbreadth" of dishonesty or deception, as it states, "You shall be perfect [whole] with the L-rd your G-d." (*Chidushei HaRim*)

And [Moses] said to them, "Hear now, you rebels, must we bring you forth water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10)

Calling the Jewish people "rebels" was considered a very grave sin for a person on Moses' spiritual level. For when Jews are in trouble, the proper thing to do is help rather than chastise them. (*Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev*)

Therefore it is said in the book of the wars of the L-rd (Num. 21:14)

The "book of the wars of the L-rd" refers to a specific volume recording all G-d's battles on behalf of those who fear Him. It is quite possible that the book dates back to our forefather Abraham, as many ancient manuscripts have been lost over the millennia: The Words and Testimony of Nathan; The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel; and King Solomon's Songs and Parables. (*Ibn Ezra*)

Lo, it is a people that shall live alone, and among the nations shall not be reckoned (Num. 23:9)

When the Jewish people are "alone," separate and distinguished from the gentiles, their existence is secure and they are respected by the nations. If, however, they begin to assimilate and copy their non-Jewish neighbors, they "shall not be reckoned" - they lose their importance and high esteem. (*Divrei Eliezer*)

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