

SLICE OF LIFE

Four Generations
by Nicole Larney and Sarah Moshel



After discovering that she was Jewish, Nicole Larney, a young woman from a small town in Queensland, Australia, began a journey to learn more about her heritage with the help of her JNet chavrusa Sarah Moshel.

Nicole:

Eleven years ago, at the passing of my maternal grandmother, I discovered that I am Jewish. A survivor of the Shoah, my grandmother had rejected her own Jewishness, married a non-Jew and raised her children (including my mother) as Christians. Once the initial shock subsided, I began googling Judaism while continuing to live in my small town in Queensland.

Knowing no other Jews at the time, I began to take on some basic *mitzvot* (commandments), such as modesty and Shabbat, which I had learned about online. I first met another Jew three years ago purely by coincidence at a playgroup when she noticed my hair covering. This lady introduced me to JNet, who then connected me with my JNET *chavrusa* – study partner, Sarah Moshel, who I have been

learning with for the past two years.

Sarah's kind responses and step-by-step explanations to my many questions have been inspiring in my quest to live Jewishly. With Sarah's encouragement and guidance, I have learnt more each year and am increasing my observance for each Jewish festival year by year with my small Jewish community.

Some time after we started learning together, Sarah gently encouraged me to have my Jewishness authenticated. I was very apprehensive initially as my new Jewish identity had become so important to me and I was worried that there wouldn't be enough evidence. However, with Sarah's guidance I contacted Rabbi Yoram Ulman from the Sydney *Beth Din* (Rabbinical Court).

Over the course of a year and a half, I contacted Chabad houses in the Netherlands searching for familial evidence, and eventually received notification that they had found evidence of my great-great-grandmother being Jewish. During this time, I became pregnant with my son and when he was three months old, I was declared authentically Jewish. I remember crying with happiness as I told Sarah in our weekly lesson and, with the aid of Rabbi Ulman, she helped me to plan my son's *brit mila* (circumcision).

After catching two flights alone with my son, I walked into the Chabad of Bondi synagogue in Sydney with butterflies in my stomach. I had never been in a synagogue before. Rabbis Ulman and Niasoff were so kind as my hands shook while handing my son over – the first boy in my direct lineage to have a brit in four generations. When Rabbi Ulman named my son "Yosef Eliyahu ben Hadassah" – the names I had chosen for us both to honor my ancestors who died in the Shoah – I felt like I had finally come home.

My favorite quote that Sarah says is, "G-d gives us what we need". Truly, G-d gave me what I needed in Sarah to help me in my

journey to find my Jewish identity.

Sarah:

I found out about JNet through the Chabad women's group in Melbourne. I registered and was matched with a young lady Nicole from a small town in Queensland. We started our connection and I was immediately taken by Nicole's complete enthusiasm and her desire to learn how to actualize living as an authentic Jewess. She was hungry for knowledge beyond her gleanings from the internet. After each connection and each conversation I felt in awe of Nicole's thirst. I was touched and inspired by her wonderment at anything Jewish.

She got in touch with Chabad of RARA, which is the organization that provides Judaism to people in the small towns around Australia. Very soon, she began organizing different events for her small community. She would excitedly share how she found different Jews to invite to her festive gatherings. She became the unofficial Rebbetzin of her small town.

During our weekly chats, Nicole brings up many questions regarding her desire to live an authentic Jewish life. Her son's brit mila during the intermediate days of Passover was a powerful step in her journey as a religious Jewish woman. During the time when we commemorate the Jewish people leaving Egypt and becoming a nation, Nicole and her family entered into the covenant of Abraham.

I believe that the work of JNet is extremely powerful – creating paths of connection through chavrusa learning. Jews who live in distant communities and are thirsty to belong and feel connected are warmly received by JNet. Each teacher creates a small ripple and yet, each ripple changes lives for eternity.

JNet – Jewish Learning Network, provides people the opportunity to study any area of Torah on any level in any language with a study partner. To become a JNet Study Partner call 347-770-JNet, or email info@jnet.org. A division of Merkos L'Iyunei Chinuch.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

10th of Kislev, 5714 [1953]

Our Sages said that "Each and every soul was in the presence of His Divine Majesty before coming down to this earth," and that "The souls are hewn from under the Seat of Glory."

These sayings emphasize the essential nature of the soul, its holiness and purity, and its being completely divorced from anything material and physical; the soul itself, by its very nature, is not subject to any material desires or temptations, which arise only from the physical body and "animal soul."

Nevertheless, it was the Creator's Will that the soul - which is "truly a 'part' of the Divine Above," should descend into the physical and coarse world and be confined within, and united with, a physical body for scores of years, in a state which is absolutely abhorrent of its very nature. All this, for the purpose of a Divine mission which the soul has to fulfill: to purify and "spiritualize" the physical body and the related physical environment by permeating them with the Light of G-d, so as to make this world an abode for the Shechina [the Divine Presence]. This can be done only through a life of Torah and Mitzvot [commandments].

When the soul fulfills this mission, all the transient pain and suffering connected with the soul's descent and life on this earth are not only justified, but infinitely outweighed by the great reward and everlasting bliss which the soul enjoys thereafter.

From the above one can easily appreciate the extent of the tragedy of disregarding the soul's mission on earth. For in doing so one condemns the soul to a term of useless suffering not compensated for, nor nullified by that everlasting happiness which G-d had intended for it. Even when there are moments of religious activity in the study of the Torah and the practice of the Mitzvot, it is sad to contemplate how often such activity is tinted by the lack of real enthusiasm and inner joy, not realizing that these are the activities which justify existence.

Aside from missing the vital point through failure of taking advantage of the opportunity to fulfill G-d's Will, thus forfeiting the everlasting benefits to be derived therefrom, it is contrary

to sound reason to choose that side of life which accentuates the enslavement and degradation of the soul, while rejecting the good that is inherent in it, namely, the great ascent that is to come from the soul's descent.

It will now become eminently clear what our Sages meant when they said, "No man commits a sin unless he was stricken with temporary insanity." No profound thinking is required to realize that since "life is compulsory," and since the soul which is a "part" of the Divine Above is compelled to descend into "a frame of dust and ashes," the proper thing to do is to make the most of the soul's sojourn on earth; only a life, in which every aspect is permeated by the Torah and Mitzvot, makes this possible.

It is also abundantly clear that since G-d, who is the essence of goodness, compels the soul to descend from its "sublime heights to the lowest depths," for the purpose of the study of the Torah and the fulfillment of the Mitzvot [commandments] - how great is the value of Torah and Mitzvot.

Furthermore, the descent of the soul for the purpose of ascent shows that there is no other way to obtain the objective except through the soul's descent to live on this earth. If there were an easier way, G-d would not compel the soul to descend from the sublime heights of the Seat of Glory down to this nether world, the lowest of all worlds.

For only here, in the lowest depths, can the soul attain its highest ascent, higher even than the angels, and as our Sages say, "The righteous precede the foremost angels."

Reflecting upon the greatness of the Torah and Mitzvot, specifically pertaining to this life, reflecting also that the Torah and Mitzvot are the only means to attain the soul's perfection and the fulfillment of the Divine purpose, one will experience a sense of real joy at his fate and destiny, despite the many difficulties and handicaps, from within and without, which are inevitable on this earth. Only in this way can one live up to the injunction: "serve G-d with joy," which the Baal Shem Tov made one of the foundations of his teachings, and which is expounded at length in Chabad, and stressed by its founder, whose liberation we commemorate on the 19th day of Kislev, in his monumental work, the Tanya (chapters 26 seq., 31 seq.).

I wish to express herewith, my inner wish that every one of us be liberated, with G-d's help and by determined personal effort, from all handicaps which arrest the good and noble in everyone's nature, so that this part of one's nature reign supreme, giving fullest expression to the threefold love: love of our people Israel, love of our Torah, and love of G-d, which are all one.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This week's Torah portion, Beha'alotcha, discusses the lighting of the menorah by the kohen (priest) in the Holy Temple. The flames of the menorah can be compared to the human soul.

The commentator Rashi states that "the menorah must be kindled until the flame rises on its own." This means that G-d has given each one of us a soul, and He is constantly giving us opportunities to improve in Torah and mitzvot.

Our goal is to use our soul and the opportunities we are given to bolster our initiative to do more, to increase in our Divine service. We must each strive to be a flame, rising on our own. This is not to say, G-d forbid, that we could be so self-sufficient as to not need G-d's help in order to carry out His will, but that automatically His will becomes our will. Just as the kohen kindles the lights of the menorah, so too does G-d kindle the light of our souls until they rise on their own.

In this week's chapter of Pirkei Avot, we learn further about how to advance in our service to G-d:

"Be wary of those in power, for they befriend a person only for their own benefit; they seem to be friends when it is to their advantage, but do not stand by a man in his hour of need."

While the literal meaning is surely sound advice, there is also a non-literal interpretation. The Rebbe explains that "those in power" refers to our egos, thoughts, and feelings. Although we rely on these in order to function, we must be aware of their fundamental self-interest, and that they are only concerned with their own benefit.

However, the soul - the essential self - is concerned only with being closer to G-d and observing His Torah and mitzvot. By succumbing to the desires of the soul rather than to the desires of the ego, we will surely find ourselves on the path of Torah. This, in turn, will lead to a world that is ready for Moshiach.

Shmuel Beilman

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.



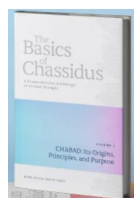
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TODAY IS...

24 Sivan

"You ask how can you be bound to me when I do not know you personally... The true bond is created by studying Torah. When you study my *maamarim*, read the *sichot* and associate with those dear to me the Chassidic community and the students – in their studies and *farbrengens*, and you fulfill my request regarding saying Psalms and observing Torah-study times – in this is the connection and bond."



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MOSHIACH MATTERS

But the man Moses was very humble, more so than any man on the face of the earth (Num. 12:3) Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi explained that

Moses felt humble especially in comparison to our generation, the last generation before Moshiah. For, despite the extreme darkness that would reign immediately preceding the Final Redemption, Moses foresaw and was humbled by the self-sacrifice our generation would show to keep the Jewish faith alive even in the most difficult circumstances. (Sichat Purim, 5747)