



This is the story of a remarkable man named Ovadia, who lived during one of the worst periods in Jewish history – the Crusades. As during the terrible Roman persecutions, the time of the Crusades saw a notable number of men and women who risked their lives to become Jews. These gentiles, often from the highest echelons of society, became converts to Judaism out of love of the Torah and a desire to serve G-d according to its holy precepts.

Johannes, who upon conversion took the name Ovadia (which means “servant of G-d”), was one such man. He was a Norman nobleman and the son of a Norman knight who took part in the First Crusade under the command of Godfrey, the Duke of Lorraine.

The First Crusade, initiated by Pope Urban II, drew a motley crew of noblemen, adventurers and rogues who left France in 1096, ostensibly to free the Holy Land from the Moslem “infidels.” Along the way, they seized the opportunity to rid France and Germany of the local “infidels,” the Jews who lived peacefully in hundreds of communities along the Loire Valley, throughout the Rhineland, in Bohemia and in England. As the Crusaders passed through these lands they engaged in the most fearsome wholesale slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent Jews who happened to live in their path.

Johannes was introspective and scholarly, different from his brother, Roger, who fought alongside his father in the Holy Land. It is unknown whether or not Johannes also accompanied his father, but when Jerusalem was conquered by Godfrey and all the Jews in the Holy City were mercilessly slaughtered, he was living in Southern Italy and studying to become a priest. At some point in his Bible study, Johannes came to the conclusion that Judaism was the true faith, and he resolved to become a Jew. It is possible that he was moved by the staunch adherence to their faith displayed by countless thousands of Jews who chose to die horribly rather than abandon their beliefs. It is also possible that he was inspired by the conversion of another prominent gentile several years earlier.

The conversion, in about the year 1094, of no less a personage than Andreas, the Archbishop of Bari (Italy) created a great stir and caused tremendous consternation within the ranks of the Church.

In his diary, Ovadia (Johannes) wrote of Andreas: “G-d put the love of the Law of Moses into his heart. He left his country, his priesthood and glory, and went to the land of Constantinople, where he underwent circumcision. There he suffered great persecution and he had to run away before the uncircumcised, who had tried to kill him. But others imitated him and entered the Covenant of the Living G-d. And the man went to Egypt and lived there until his death, while the leading churchmen were downcast and bowed their heads in shame.”

Upon his decision to convert, Johannes traveled to Aleppo, where he sought the help of Rabbi Baruch ben Yitzchak. Johannes told the rabbi that he came from a wealthy and powerful family, but he had decided to abandon everything to become a Jew. This revelation was not only quite astonishing, but frightening as well, since persecution was guaranteed to follow and death was a very real possibility for any gentile who risked conversion. Johannes replied that he was well aware of all the repercussions of his actions, having made the decision thoughtfully over many years. And so, convinced of Johannes’s sincerity, Rabbi Baruch accepted him as a righteous convert.

It was impossible to continue living in France, and so Ovadia moved to the city of Bagdad, where life was far from easy, but there was more religious freedom for Jews. Ovadia had managed to bring a considerable part of his fortune with him, and in Bagdad he devoted himself to helping his less fortunate Jewish brethren. He became distinguished for his distribution of charity and was even appointed by the community to be treasurer of the community chest.

Ovadia wrote a fascinating diary during these years. In approximately 1121, he decided to relocate to Fostat (old Cairo), which had a flourishing Jewish community. He noted that while traveling, he met a certain Karaite named Shlomo Hakohen, who claimed to be Moshiach. The man tried to persuade Ovadia to become one of his adherents. Ovadia just

laughed at him, countering that Moshiach would be a descendant of King David, not from the priestly tribe as was this Karaite.

Ovadia eventually settled in Egypt, where he wrote an autobiographical memoir in the year 1241. The only fragments that remain were discovered in the famous Cairo Geniza (a collection of ancient manuscripts discovered in the Ezra Synagogue in Cairo). In this remarkable cache of thousand-year-old documents were not only fragments of his memoirs, but an inscription on his prayer book and a letter of recommendation given to Ovadia by Rabbi Baruch ben Yitzchak. The bits and pieces which have come down to us, provide us with a window into that time and a glimpse into a remarkable life of faith, sacrifice and adventure.

Adapted from Talks and Tales

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT
on the weekly Torah portion

And you shall serve the L-rd your G-d (Ex 23:25)
According to Maimonides, we learn the positive mitzva of praying to G-d from this verse; “service” refers to “the service of the heart,” i.e., prayer. As is known, during the exile our prayers must take the place of the sacrifices that were offered in the Holy Temple. However, when the Temple stood, only kohanim (priests) were allowed to actually bring the sacrifices; Levites and Israelites were prohibited from doing so. Thus the exile has a certain advantage over the time when the Holy Temple was in existence, for nowadays, every Jew can fulfill the role of the greatest kohen just by calling upon his Father in heaven. (*Peninei Geula*)

And you shall make two cherubim (Ex 25:18)
As Rashi explains, the wings of the baby-faced cherubim were spread over the ark which contained the Tablets of the Law. We learn from this that the continued existence and perpetuation of Torah depends on the “cherubim” – the very youngest Jewish children who study Torah and follow its ways. (*Likutei Sichot*)

If you lend money – kesef. (Ex. 22:24)
The Tzemach Tzedek, the third Chabad-Lubavitch Rebbe, explained that the Hebrew word for “money,” – *kesef* – comes from the root word meaning “longing and yearning.” The soul, he explained, always yearns to go upward, attaining higher and higher levels of spirituality. “If you lend money” – G-d “lends” the eternal soul to each of us for a certain period of time, to dwell in a physical body in this world. It is up to the individual to utilize that loan to the fullest, taking advantage of every day that is granted on earth. (*Hayom Yom*)



4:51 Candle Lighting Time
NY Metro Area
26 Shevat/Jan 28
Torah Portion Mishpatim
Blessing of the new month Adar I
Shabbat ends 5:53 PM

בס"ד
1708
26 Shevat, 5782
Jan 28, 2022

L'Chaim

The Weekly Publication for Every Jewish Person
ניסד תוד ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
“... I have called out to the L-rd and He answered me” (Psalm 120:1)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE
from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

The Torah portion of Mishpatim begins with, “And these are the laws that you should set before them.” It is strange for a portion to begin with “And.” When you say “and,” it connects back to what came before. So, what is this “And” referring to?

Rashi explains that the “And” here means that these laws are an “addition to the first (that came before)”, namely the Ten Commandments, and the other laws in the previous portion, Yitro. “Just as the first were from Sinai, also these are from Sinai.”

Also, the previous portion ended with laws about the Temple altar. Rashi asks, “Why is the portion of [civil and criminal] laws next to the altar? To teach you that the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Court, that was the ultimate authority in adjudicating those laws), should be located near the altar, meaning in the Temple courtyard.”

So when the Torah says “before them” it means before a Jewish Court, or ultimately before the Sanhedrin. As Rashi explains, you should bring your disputes before the Jewish court, “and not before that of the nations, and even if you know that they judge a certain law like Jewish law, don’t bring it to their courts.”

But, if the result is the same, what difference does it make who decides the judgement?

The point that Rashi is clarifying here is that the laws that follow are from Sinai - meaning from G-d. Even though they make sense, to the point that even the non-Jewish people see them the same way, we should keep them simply because they are G-d’s will.

An additional point can be learned from the words of Rashi, an “addition to the first.” Rashi is telling us that something new was added to these G-dly laws when they were given at Sinai - that now we can understand them. In other words, G-d’s wisdom can permeate the minds and so too, the minds of the people of the world. This is why, in some cases, secular law aligns with Torah law.

Mishpatim follows the laws of the altar in the previous portion and it precedes the next portion Teruma, which discusses the commandment to build the Temple. Both of these laws reach their ultimate perfection with the coming of Moshiach, when the Sanhedrin will be at the highest level of Torah knowledge and will be next to the third and everlasting Temple.

Mishpatim contains a reference to the Temple when it says, “to bring you to the place that I designated.” Rashi explains that this refers to the heavenly Temple that is directly above the earthly Temple, and will descend as the Third Temple when Moshiach comes.

So, Mishpatim, symbolic of G-d’s knowledge being understood by the people, also tells us that the redemption and the building of the Temple can become real in the minds of the people of the world. And this becomes clearer as the redemption nears.

May we merit to see all these signs become clearer and clearer as the redemption becomes a reality, with the coming of Moshiach, may it be very soon. The time has come.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

Past, Present, Future

“Don’t cry over spilled milk.” “You can’t unscramble scrambled eggs.” If you’ve ever heard these or similar phrases, you know you’re being told that you can’t change what has already happened.

Most of us have grown up with the idea that what’s done is done and there is not much we can do about it.

We can learn to accept the past, to live with the past, to learn from the past. But, we’ve been told, we can’t change the past.

Judaism has a different opinion about the past, though, which is epitomized by the fact that this Jewish year is a leap year and has an entire extra month. The lesson gleaned from the leap year is that it is never too late to make up for past deficiencies. Not only can we accept and learn from the past, we can change it, as well.

Jewish teachings explain that, in one single moment, a person can compensate for inadequacies in his behavior over many years. Indeed, with one sincere turn of *teshuva* – a return to one’s essential, G-dly self – one can compensate for all the sins committed during one’s lifetime and even for those committed in previous incarnations.

This is possible because each moment contains within it the totality of time and can thus alter the nature of the events which occurred previously.

In fact, Chasidic philosophy explains that one’s present actions can effect major spiritual changes retroactively.

If, for example, one did not observe a positive commandment, such as eating only kosher food, and thus did not accrue the spiritual dividends of that mitzva, when one begins fulfilling

that mitzva, the spiritual benefits are retroactively deposited into one’s “spiritual” bank account! Helping others participate in the mitzva that one did not observe adequately, or affording others the opportunity to perform the mitzva is a most effective way to change the past, as well.

A most striking example of mitzva observance in the present actually changing the past is the observance of the laws of Jewish marriage – *Taharat Hamishpacha*. Jewish mysticism explains that the soul of a child born to parents who observe the laws of *Taharat Hamishpacha* has increased spiritual sensitivity. If parents did not observe these laws before their child was born but begin to observe them afterward, the child – even if already an adult – acquires this enhanced spiritual sensitivity!

We can look at the famous story of Rabbi Akiva, who, at the age of 40-something did not even know the Hebrew alphabet. And yet, he became one of the greatest teachers, scholars, and leaders of the Jewish people of all time. After mastering the Hebrew alphabet, he advanced from level to level in Torah study to the point where he had 22,000 students to whom he taught Torah! Rabbi Akiva did not let the deficiencies of his past stand in his way. He and his students are actually credited with keeping the Torah from being forgotten from amongst the Jewish people! Even and maybe most importantly, in the area of Jewish education, we can change the past.

Mom was right. It’s no use crying over spilled milk, and don’t try to unscramble scrambled eggs. But, can we affect the past? Yes!

לעילוי נשמת
הבחור התמים מנחם מענדל ז"ל בן הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' דוד שיחי'

לעילוי נשמת
מרת חנה עטל ז"ל בת הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' דוד שיחי'

תנצב"ה

SLICE OF LIFE

A Favor Repaid Years Later

by Rabbi Uriel Vigler



In January 2010 I took a phone call from Leah*, an Israeli woman living on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Leah was asking if we could help with her son's Bar Mitzva. It was a pretty standard call. After all, that's what we do at Chabad – we help people! So of course we said we'd help!

At the time, Rabbi Leibel Kesselman (who today is a Chabad rabbi in Greenville, South Carolina), was involved at our Chabad House. Rabbi Kesselman agreed to tutor the child and prepare him for his Bar Mitzva.

And so, on a winter Shabbat, we arranged a beautiful celebration at the Marriott Hotel (where our *shul* was located in those days). The Bar Mitzva boy did a great job to the delight and pride of family and friends.

Shortly afterwards, Leah emailed me, "Thank you so much for your help with the Bar Mitzva. We appreciate it tremendously. We didn't imagine how we would enjoy it and

thank you for making us feel so welcome and part of the community."

The family moved back to Israel not long after the Bar Mitzva and I lost touch with them.

Fast forward to a winter weekend twelve years later – the weekend of the International Conference of Chabad Emissaries this year. Chabad rabbis from all over the world came together to enjoy, refresh, and learn from one another.

I went to the Ohel, the Rebbe's resting place, as I frequently do. However, because of the convention it was packed even at 6 am!

As I finished up the *Shacharit* morning prayer, someone came over to me and said, "Vigler! I've been looking for you! I knew I would meet you at the conference! I have a story to share with you."

Nu, I love stories!

He introduced himself as Rabbi Meir Abayov and began: "I'm a *shliach* (emissary) in Ramat Hasharon. It's a small town in Israel. Two years ago, right before Covid, I brought a group from Ramat Hasharon to New York. We visited the Ohel and I asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* (blessing) that we should have success in establishing a new preschool and after-school activities. We needed special government permits and I was quite worried about getting them as there was a strong anti-religious sentiment amongst many people in the area."

Rabbi Abayov explained that during the trip two years earlier, he had heard we were having a special event at our Chabad Center. Rabbi Shneur Ashkenazy of Israel was going to be a guest speaker one evening. Rabbi Abayov had asked if he could bring his group from Ramat Hasharon to the event. Of course I had agreed, and it was a wonderful evening.

"When I was back at home, the next week,"

Rabbi Abayov continued, "I found out there was a new woman in charge of approving the permits I needed for my preschool. With a prayer on my lips, I went to meet her. I had no idea what to expect and was very concerned that she might be anti-religious and would make getting the approval for the necessary permits even more difficult.

"When I got to her office and stated my request, she said, 'You look like a Chabadnik! Are you Chabad?'"

"I confirmed that I was and she said, 'I love Chabad! Do you know Rabbi Vigler from Manhattan?'"

"I told her that in fact I had been with you just the week before! I showed her a picture on my phone that our group had taken the evening of the event in your Chabad Center.

"'I love Rabbi Vigler!' she said excitedly. 'He helped me Bar Mitzva my son in his shul!'"

It was, of course, Leah!

Leah agreed to help Rabbi Abayov, went out of her way to fast-track his permits, and promised to help him with whatever else would come up, all because she remembered her experience with Chabad 12 years ago so fondly!

I was very inspired by this story. Living on the Upper East Side, much of our community is transient. Literally thousands of people walk through our doors, but many only live here for a few years before moving on. Unfortunately, we often lose touch, but this story reminded me that we can never know how much we may have affected someone in our brief time together, or how far-reaching that effect may become. Here, 12 years after the fact, Leah was able to return the favor to a Chabad rabbi across the globe!

**Name changed to protect privacy.*

Rabbi Vigler co-directs Chabad Israel Center of the Upper East Side in New York City with his wife Shevi. From Rabbi Vigler's blog at www.chabadic.com



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

24 Tammuz, 5726 (1966)

...With regard to the question about seeking psychiatric advice, judging by the description of your mood, etc., it would seem advisable. However, for reasons which need not be entered into here, most psychiatrists are prejudiced in relation to parents, and in relation to G-d and religion.

One should, therefore, reckon with this, and more importantly, one should try to find a psychiatrist who is free from such prejudices through the recommendation of a doctor-friend, or by independent inquiry.

Needless to say, it is most advisable for you to keep in contact with the element (religious people) you mention as being new to you, involving also the study of a field of knowledge which is entirely new to you – Torah. For this would obviously broaden your horizons, in addition to the essential aspect – the importance of the subject itself for its own sake.

I trust, therefore, that you will continue along these lines, and, as in all new ventures of this nature, it is necessary to apply yourself with enthusiasm and gladness of heart, which the subject merits, and which also is the way to ensure the utmost success of intensive and extensive comprehension.

I was very much surprised to read in your letter, that by becoming religious you would have to seclude yourself from the world.

This is diametrically contrary to the concept of the Jewish religion and way of life, wherein, as you surely know, there is no such thing as monasticism, celibacy, and the like.

It is even more foreign to the spirit and way of the teachings of Chasidus which emphasizes that the purpose of every Jew is not only to make himself personally a "vessel" for the Divine Presence, but also to do his utmost to make his immediate surroundings (his share in the world) a fitting abode for holiness.

This cannot be accomplished by secluding oneself from the world, or by withdrawing from it, but rather by actively participating in, contributing to it.

Of course, before this can be done, it is necessary to have the proper preparation, in order

to forestall any possibility of falling under the influence of the material world with all its temptations and passions, and to ensure that one will be master over it.

I would like to make a further observation in regard to the idea (which I believe is not your own), that in order to acquire a particular system or discipline, it is first necessary to acquaint oneself with all other systems, to be able to judge and verify its truth, to the extent of being non-committal to any discipline, pending personal verification.

Such an idea is the best rationale and excuse that an individual can find (while he still needs a rationale) to indulge fully in a licentious life, and give free rein to his carnal appetites.

As I have often emphasized - if one will not accept the first two Commandments, "I am G-d, your G-d," and "You shall have no other gods," one will inevitably break all other Commandments, including "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," not to mention "You shall not covet," however self-evident these precepts may seem.

This has been amply demonstrated by Hitler and the German nation. All the philosophies which the Germans had invented and expounded were of no avail because they made the human mind the supreme and final judge, creating the concept of a "superman," etc.

There is, obviously, quite a difference in a system which leads to human perfection through stressing the Divine qualities in man, which can be developed only through self-discipline and the curbing of natural desires and propensities. There can be no relationship between the two systems; they are diametrically contradictory.

This brings me to the final remark, which is actually the essential point of the letter.

The problem in your case, as with others in similar situations, is the lack of self-discipline, and it is due to the fact that it means curbing one's desires and passions, and this lack of discipline, therefore, extends itself also in other areas, such as regular study and daily routine, so as not to have to think and decide each day what to do with it.

You should also bear in mind that the *Yetzer Hora* [the evil inclination] will try to counteract this effort by causing a depressed mood and planting the thought that by breaking the discipline, the mood will improve.

The truth is, however, that even if momentarily there seems to be a relief, it is only a fleeting one attained at the cost of a regulated and orderly life which alone can assure success and contentment of a lasting nature.

Much more could be said in regard to all the above, but I trust the above lines will be adequate.

Berditchev reached this verse he would cry out. "Master of the Universe! You instructed us in Your holy Torah to be kind to widows and orphans, and yet we are like orphans in this bitter exile! You must therefore take us out of this exile at once!"

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

As this year is a leap year on the Jewish calendar, there are two months of Adar; known as Adar Rishon and Adar Sheini, or Adar I and Adar II. This Shabbat we bless the new month of Adar I.

Our Sages have taught that, just as when the month of Av begins (the month in which we commemorate the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem) we lessen our joy; so, too, when the month of Adar begins, we increase our simcha -- joy and happiness.

In talks delivered immediately preceding and during the two months of Adar in 1992, the Rebbe emphasized the importance of simcha in turning the darkness of exile into the light of Redemption.

The Rebbe also emphasized that, being as there are two months of Adar this year, there are 60 days during which we are to increase our simcha. More importantly, in Jewish law, the quantity of 60 has the ability to nullify an undesirable presence.

Specifically, this concerns food, as we see that if a quantity of milk, for instance, has accidentally become mixed with meat, if the meat outnumbers the milk by a ratio of 1:60, the milk is nullified and we may eat the meat.

Similarly, explains the Rebbe, 60 days of simcha have the ability to nullify the darkness of the present exile, allowing us to actually turn the darkness into light.

Concerning the kind of things that should be done to arouse simcha, the Rebbe suggested that each person should proceed according to his level: a child, for instance, should be made happy by his parents; a wife by her husband, and visa versa. The bottom line, my friends, is that the Rebbe did not let up on encouraging an increase of simcha in all permissible manners during the entire month.

We must hearken to the Rebbe's words and utilize simcha, especially during this month, to turn darkness into light, sadness into joy, and pain and tears into rejoicing with Moshiach in the Final Redemption, may it take place, as the Rebbe so fervently prayed, teichef umiyad mamash -- immediately, literally.

Shmuel Beilman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA

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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New Facility

Chabad of the West Side in **Lakewood, Ohio**, recently opened the Jewish Discovery Center. Under the direction of **Rabbi Mendel and Devorah Jacobs**, the 900-square-foot Jewish Discovery Center is a community space where local Jews of any age or stage can explore their heritage, gain knowledge, celebrate the holidays or just hang out. Chabad of the West Side offers youth programs, adult education courses, community holiday celebrations and other services. One of its more successful offerings is a popular youth summer camp held annually at the Rocky River Recreation Center.

New and Improved

The famous "Hekdesh" Synagogue in **Brest, Belarus** (formerly known as Brisk) that had been taken over by the Nazis in 1941 was returned to the Jewish community two years ago. **Rabbi Chaim and Michal Rabinowitz** expended much effort to arrange the return and then began working on the synagogue's restoration. The restorations continue and as well a new state-of-the-art mikva is being built.

TODAY IS...

29 Shevat
Rabbi Shneur Zalman once said: Rashī's commentary on the *Five Books of Moses* is the "wine of Torah." It opens the heart and uncovers one's essential love and essential awe of G-d. *Rashī's commentary on Talmud opens the mind and uncovers the essence-intellect. Rashī's genius lay (in part) in his ability to express the essence of the Talmudic concept briefly, succinctly, and in terms lucid to the beginning student, yet providing illumination to the seasoned scholar. Rashī engages the core of intellect of the student, the pre-verbal cognition that may develop into depth and breadth of comprehension.*

MOSHIACH MATTERS

In this week's Torah portion we read: You shall not afflict any widow or orphan (*Exodus 22:21*) Whenever Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of