

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

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

As related in this week's Torah portion, Vayeira, when G-d told Abraham He was going to destroy the city of Sodom, Abraham tried everything he could think of to dissuade Him. "And Abraham drew near and said, Will You then destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

Rashi, the foremost Torah commentator, explains this verse to mean that Abraham attempted several methods of persuasion: speaking harshly, conciliation, and prayer.

Abraham was willing to do anything in order to save the city of Sodom. The first approach he took was to "speak harshly" to G-d. When that wasn't effective he tried to appease Him, and when that didn't work he resorted to praying. All conceivable approaches were attempted to persuade G-d to avert the decree.

In the Torah, our Patriarch Abraham is referred to by G-d as "Abraham, the one who loves Me." How then could Abraham have had the audacity to "speak harshly" to G-d? Another question: If Abraham's intent was to dissuade G-d from His plan, why did he start off with harsh words, rather than first trying to appease Him in a more conciliatory way, or by praying? Wasn't Abraham characterized by his great kindness?

The key to understanding this lies in the fact that Abraham was trying to save lives. G-d had already issued His decree; the angels had already been dispatched to destroy the city. Abraham saw no other choice but to demand that G-d change His mind, even if harsh words were required.

At such a time Abraham did not allow himself the luxury of taking personal considerations into account. No method of persuasion was off limits or out of bounds. The only thing that mattered was that the city of Sodom not be destroyed, and Abraham tried with all his might to prevent it from happening. Speaking harshly to G-d was the antithesis of Abraham's nature; nonetheless, he did not refrain from doing so in the hope that it would save the city and its inhabitants.

We, the descendents of Abraham, should learn from our forefather's example and emulate his ways.

Whenever the saving of a Jewish life is at stake, either in the physical or spiritual sense, we cannot stop to weigh our options or consider our choices. The thing to do is act, and to act immediately. All our efforts and all of our strengths and powers must be employed, even if it is contrary to our nature and even if harsh words are required. For all methods are permissible when it comes to saving the life of a fellow Jew.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 10

A Jew's Gotta Do

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Is it a sin to argue with G-d? Is it sacrilegious to question the Divine? Abraham did it—not for himself, but on behalf of the people of Sodom, whom G-d had decided to destroy because of their wickedness. Abraham, the personification of chesed, kindness and compassion, attempted to negotiate a stay of execution for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?" he asks G-d. "Will the judge of all the earth not do justice?" He asks whether G-d will spare the cities if there are 50 righteous men, then 45, 40, 30, 20, or even 10. In the end, Abraham cannot find even a minyan of righteous men, and he gives up.

The verse then reads, V'Avraham shov l'mkomo—"And Abraham went back to his place." Having failed, he acknowledges defeat and retreats to his corner.

But there is another interpretation: Abraham went back to his ways, his custom of defending the underdog, helping those in trouble, and looking out for the needy, even when they are not the most righteous. He refused to become disillusioned by defeat. Though this attempt failed, he returned to his principles.

What happens when we lose? We hurt, sulk, and give up. It didn't work; why bother? Just throw in the towel.

Not Abraham. He stuck to his principles. Despite the setback, he continued championing justice

and speaking out for those in peril. Abraham teaches us not to lose faith or abandon our convictions. If something is right, we should stand by it, regardless of the outcome.

One of my favorite cartoon characters is Charlie Brown in Peanuts. In one memorable strip, a storm rages outside, but Charlie Brown insists on flying his kite. His friends warn him that the wind will destroy it. Yet he marches out the door, kite under his arm, with the caption: "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

Do we follow our principles of faith because it is convenient? Are we virtuous because we expect a good life in return? What happens when we don't see the reward? Do we become frustrated, disillusioned, and angry at G-d?

Some people embrace religion hoping for a magical solution to life's problems. When those problems don't disappear as expected, they give up. It didn't work; I'm outta here.

Virtue is its own reward. Sleeping better because our conscience is clear is part of the deal. As the Sages teach, "the reward for a mitzvah is the mitzvah."

Abraham reminds us that a Jew's gotta do what a Jew's gotta do, regardless of the outcome. Whether we see the fruits of our labor or not, if it's the right thing to do, we must carry on.

May we all be true children of Abraham.

SLICE OF LIFE

On a Texas Army Base, a Bris in a Military-Issue Sukkah

It was an unusual Sukkos gathering at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, a mix of service members in uniform mingling with civilians who had been cleared to enter the base.

After all, it isn't every day that a bris takes place on a U.S. Army base—let alone in the Army's own sukkah.

The meal inside was no caterer's work. Every dish had been prepared in the Jewish chaplain's own kitchen, and all of it was for the guest of honor, an eight-day-old boy who had not yet been given his name.

Most notices for a brit simply give a time and an address. The one sent by Chaplain (Maj.) Menachem "Mendy" Stern, a Chabad-Lubavitch rabbi who serves as the Jewish Army chaplain at the base, also asked whether the receiver needed a base pass.

Stern's part in the occasion had begun weeks earlier, when a Jewish service member stationed on base had told him she was expecting.

The day after Yom Kippur, she called again, telling him the baby had arrived. It was a boy, and she and the baby were both doing well.

"I immediately started the coordination to bring a mohel," Stern said.

A reserve military chaplain who is also a certified mohel was available, and they arranged to fly him in. That left the question of where to hold the celebration.

"Obviously, because it was Sukkos, it would be



A Jewish baby boy joins the Covenant of Abraham at Fort Sam Houston

held in the sukkah!" Stern said.

The Army's sukkah stands behind the Stern home on base, which also has the installation's only kosher kitchen. Every year, soldiers help the rabbi put up the sukkah before the holiday and take it down when it ends, and Jewish troops use it throughout Sukkos.

The Army traditionally pays for the mohel, Stern said, but not for the rest of a bris. His wife, their daughters and a daughter's friend who was visiting for the holiday did all the cooking and baking themselves. The result, Stern said, "was a meal that could rival the best of the best kosher caterers in New York or Miami."

About 30 guests came, roughly half military and half civilian.

Before the ceremony, Stern and the mohel, both officers, gave the family what's known in military lingo as a "mission brief"—the step-by-step briefing soldiers receive before an operation. They explained what would happen and showed the family the instruments, sterilized and sealed.

Stern served as sandek. The baby's aunt and grandmother carried him in. A Jewish chaplain from the nearby Air Force installation recited the blessings as they welcomed this child into the Covenant of Abraham and gave the boy his name: Shraga Feivel ben Avraham.

Earlier that day, just after the tables had been set, Stern felt rain begin to fall and went outside expecting the worst. A hurricane had been forecast to hit the region that day. Instead, a brief drizzle fell from what looked like a cloudless sky and stopped almost as soon as it started.

Stern counts it as hashgacha pratit, Divine providence, along with everything else that came together.

"It was beautiful," he said. "We could not have planned it better."

Tech Sergeant Discovers Her Jewish Identity at Military Base Sukkah

This Sukkos, Baltimore Shliach and Chaplain Rabbi Chesky Tenenbaum, director of the Jewish Uniformed Service Association of Maryland-Chabad (JUSA), brought the joy and traditions of Sukkos directly to Maryland's military community.

For the first time, JUSA arranged a Sukkah

at the 175th Wing at Warfield Air National Guard Base. One Staff Sergeant was especially appreciative, explaining that the Sukkah allowed him to eat his meals in a Sukkah while working on base.



The Sukkah also led to an unexpected Jewish discovery. A Tech Sergeant stopped by the Sukkah and shared that, although she does not identify as Jewish, she said her maternal great-grandmother was Jewish. Rabbi Tenenbaum explained that, according to halacha, she is considered Jewish.

Rabbi Tenenbaum then explained the significance of Sukkos and the mitzvah of Lulav and Esrog. Intrigued, the Tech Sergeant expressed an interest in participating but explained that she did not speak Hebrew. Rabbi Tenenbaum assisted her in reciting the brocha, and she held the Lulav and Esrog and performed the mitzvah for the first time in her life.

At Aberdeen Proving Ground, the U.S. Army's oldest active proving ground, JUSA continued its ninth consecutive year of providing a Sukkah in the courtyard of the APG Main Post Chapel.

On the first day of Chol Hamoed, JUSA hosted a Sukkah Party that brought together a strong turnout of soldiers and civilian staff. Participants had the opportunity to recite the blessing over the Sukkah, shake the Lulav and Esrog, and celebrate the joy, unity, and traditions of Sukkos together. During Chol Hamoed, Jewish soldiers and civilian employees were able to use the Sukkah. JUSA thanks the APG Chapel and the military communities at both installations for helping make these Sukkos celebrations possible.

Throughout Sukkos, the JUSA Chabad House hosted a variety of programs and activities. Among the highlights was a visit from the local Jewish Baltimore Police commander, who joined the JUSA community to do the Mitzvah of Lulav and Esrog.

The JUSA Chabad House, located in Baltimore, an affiliate of Chabad of Maryland, is the only such Chabad House of its kind dedicated to Maryland Jewish Men and Women in Uniform, including Military and Veterans, Law Enforcement and First Responders. For more information, go to jewishusamd.org.

Mountain Top Havdalah Completes Teen Shabbos in Asia



The CTeen Asia Shabbaton brought together 100 teen leaders from 17 chapters across Asia for a Shabbos of learning, friendship and inspiration in Hong Kong. The teens enjoyed services, a festive meal, singing, dancing, an "Ask Me Anything" session and a farbrengen. The program continued with mitzvah commitments and Teen Talks. The group then hiked to Victoria Peak for Havdalah overlooking the city.

"The Rebbe taught us to recognize the power of young people's idealism to change the world," said Rabbi Mendy Kotlarsky, chairman of CTeen International.

For teens from small Jewish communities, meeting Jewish peers was especially meaningful. Organized by CTeen International at Merkos 302 and hosted by CTeen Hong Kong, the Shabbaton celebrated Jewish unity and CTeen's growth across Asia.

A GUARDIAN AT THE DOOR

Why is the Hebrew letter "shin" on the front of the mezuzah cover?

"Shin" is the first letter of one of G d's names, "Shad-dai" - Almighty. It is also an acronym for "Shomer Delatot Yisrael - Guardian of the Doors of Israel." Thus, it is appropriate to be on the mezuzah cover. In addition to being on the mezuzah cover, the word Shad-dai is also written on the back of the mezuzah parchment itself.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

29 Shevat, 5739

February 26, 1979

The Honorable Walter F. Mondale

Vice-President

The White House

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Vice-President:

I read with profound interest your Remarks at the Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee For a Cabinet Department of Education, Jan. 24, 1979. Needless to say, I fully endorse the substance and urgency of your message. Indeed, in light of the saying of our Sages, "Words coming from the heart penetrate the heart and are eventually effective," I am confident, Mr. Vice-President, that your words will find the proper response they deserve.

You will surely recall, Sir, the meeting at the Caucus Room of Congress, which you graciously chaired, in celebration of the H.J. Res. 770, authorizing and requesting the President to issue the Proclamation designating April 19, 1978 as "Education Day, U.S.A." I trust you also read some of my remarks in this connection that appeared in the Congressional Record, the thrust of which, permit me to reiterate, was:

Education, in general, should not be limited to the acquisition of knowledge and preparation for a career, or in common parlance "to make a better living!" We must think in terms of a "better life," not only for the individual, but also for society as a whole. The educational system must, therefore, pay more attention, indeed, the main attention, to the building of character, with emphasis on moral and ethical

values.

The above principle, which is surely indisputable, assumes added significance now that the Administration is making an all-out effort to promulgate the required legislation to implement the President's proposal for a Cabinet-level Department of Education-for the following reason:

The skepticism on the part of those who, at present, oppose the Administration's educational program (of which you make mention in your Remarks) is, I believe, in large measure due to the shortcomings of the educational system in this country, which leaves much to be desired in the way of achieving its most basic objectives for a better society. In a country, such as ours, so richly blessed with democracy, freedom of opportunity, and material resources, one would expect that such anti-moral and anti-social phenomena as juvenile delinquency, vandalism, lack of respect for law and order, etc. would have been radically reduced, to the point of ceasing to be a problem. Hence, it is not surprising that many feel frustrated and apathetic.

I submit, therefore, that the Administration's resolve to restructure the Federal education role-long overdue-would be well served if it were coupled with greater emphasis on the objective of improving the quality of education in terms of moral and ethical values and character building that should be reflected in the actual everyday life of our young and growing generation.

I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of a brief memorandum on the subject, which I trust you will find of interest.

With prayerful wishes and blessings for success in your endeavors to upgrade the educational system, and in all your public and personal affairs,

I remain, Mr. Vice-President,

Cordially yours,

MOSHIACH MATTERS

Someone once complained about the difficult economic and political plight of Russian Jewry to the renowned 19th-century Chasidic leader Rabbi Chaim

Halberstam, Rebbe of Sanz. Rabbi Halberstam replied: "Unfortunately I can't help you now. But before the Messianic Era, Russia will crumble into many pieces and then Moshiach will come!"

(Shem MiShlomo)

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 will be commemorating the birthday of the fourth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Ber, who was known as the Rebbe Rashab. It is said that on a person's birthday, the "spiritual source of the soul shines powerfully." Therefore, it is important to understand what the central point of the Rebbe Rashab's leadership was, and how it differed from the other Chabad Rebbes.

The Rebbe explains how each of the Rebbes was characterized by a particular dimension which reflected his individual nature.

Chabad Chasidut is characterized by the ability to make the esoteric teachings of the Torah, which remained hidden from the majority of the Jewish community, accessible to every single Jew. The Rebbe Rashab was able to bring the teachings of Chabad Chasidut to an even more comprehensible level than his predecessors.

The Rebbe Rashab's teachings put a great emphasis on summarizing subject matter so that it could be more easily implemented into daily life. For this he is referred to by many as the "Rambam [Maimonides] of Chasidut," because he summarized Chasidut in the same way the Rambam summarized the Oral Law, making it comprehensible and giving it clear directions for every aspect of our conduct. The lessons of the Rebbe Rashab are easily understood and are concluded with directions for the practical application of those lessons.

In 1897 the Rebbe Rashab established a yeshiva, Tomchei Tmimim, and he was personally involved in every aspect of it, designing the curriculum, and asking for a detailed progress report on each student. He strove to raise both their standard of learning and their standard of behavior. It was a great honor to be accepted into the yeshiva, and its students were highly respected by the community.

The Rebbe Rashab published many of his teachings, which deal with improving one's character, how to prepare for prayer and the importance of prayer, and of studying Chasidut. May we all benefit from his teachings.

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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1408 President St, Brooklyn, NY, 11213
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Chairman
Director
Publishing Director
Program Director
Secretary
Administrator
Layout
Associate Editor
Chairman Editorial Comm.
Rebbe photo

Rabbi David Raskin ז"ל
Rabbi Shmuel Butman ז"ל
Rabbi Yosef Y. Butman
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Many years ago in Poland there lived a wealthy Jewish merchant who bought flax from the nobility and then resold it abroad. At the same time, he pursued the commandment of "pidyun shevuim," ransoming prisoners. (In those days it was not unusual for Jews to languish in debtors' prisons when they failed to pay on time for leasing inns or other properties.)

One day the merchant was on his way to the estate of one of the Polish landowners, when he fell asleep at the reins of his carriage. As he dozed, the horses wandered off the path. When the merchant awakened he found himself on an unknown road. In front of him was a carriage driver fixing a broken wheel. Inside the carriage, a Polish gentleman sat looking angry and impatient. The merchant asked the nobleman if he could be of any assistance.

"Yes, you certainly can," he replied. "I would be most grateful if you would drive me to the inn just 15 minutes ride from here. I could use a bit of whiskey, and I will be happy to treat you to some also in return for the favor."

"I will be happy to take you to the inn," the merchant replied. On the way they spoke amiably, and the nobleman discovered that the merchant dealt in flax, which was one of his primary crops. "What a happy coincidence," he said, and they agreed to meet again to conduct some business.

When they arrived at the inn the Jewish innkeeper rushed to offer the Pole, who was his landlord, hospitality. The merchant went into the other room to say his afternoon prayers. He couldn't help but overhear snippets of conversation. "Moshke, you had better pay up the rent, now!" the landlord barked. The Jew responded meekly about the terrible snows which had kept customers away.

The merchant finished praying, and was about to leave, but the innkeeper begged him to partake of some refreshments. "No, I'd better be on my way," the merchant replied. "But tell me, are you having problems with the landlord?" "He's drunk now. I hope when he sobers up he'll extend me credit a bit longer." The two Jews bade each other farewell, and the merchant departed.

When the flax harvest arrived, the Jewish merchant remembered the Polish landlord. He went to the estate, and the Pole was glad to make a deal with him. They settled on a price and drew up a contract. The conversation was friendly, and the merchant mentioned Moshke. "How is our friend, the innkeeper?"

"Oh, I put him in prison. Imagine, after all the chances I gave him, he still didn't pay me! Now, it's his wife's problem to come up with the money!"

"What! I can't believe you actually imprisoned the poor fellow! How much does he owe you?" asked the merchant.

The landlord mentioned a figure, exactly the sum agreed upon for the deposit. The merchant placed the money in the Pole's hand, and said, "There is the money he owes you. Now, set him free!"

"Fine. Now give me the money for the deposit and we'll conclude our deal."

"I'm sorry, Sir. I have no more money with me."

"I have never seen such a thing!" exclaimed the Pole. "You have just given all your money to an utter stranger, and in the bargain, you have lost out on a wonderful deal that could have made you a tidy profit!"

"What you say is true, Sir, except for one thing. That Jew is not a stranger to me. He is my brother, and it is my duty to redeem him."

The Pole was stunned. "You are a fine fellow. I will sign the contract without a deposit. I will also write a letter of recommendation to my brother-in-law, also a flax merchant. He will be anxious to do business with you."

The Jewish innkeeper was returned to his joyful family, and the gratitude they felt toward the merchant was inexpressible. But how on earth would they ever be able to repay him

for his kindness? "I wouldn't sell my mitzva (commandment) for any amount of money!" the merchant declared, and they parted in happiness and with a deep feeling of brotherhood.

The merchant proceeded to the other landlord with the letter of recommendation. Just as the first Pole promised, his relative was happy to sell his flax to the Jew. They were about to conclude the deal when the merchant heard a child crying in Yiddish, "Daddy, Mommy, I want to go home!"

"Why is a Jewish child here, away from his parents?"

"I had to take him so his parents would pay what they owe me!"

The merchant suddenly rose from his seat. "I can't do business with a man who would take a child as hostage!"

The Pole was anxious not to lose the sale. "I'll have the child returned, just let's finish our business." Just as his brother-in-law had done, this man also concluded the deal without a deposit, and the merchant made a very nice profit on the sale of the flax. In addition, he accrued yet another precious mitzva to his account when the child was returned to his grieving parents.

The Jewish merchant was rewarded in this world as well as the next. But he was blessed with yet another great reward, the birth of two sons who lit up the world with their holiness, the illustrious tzadikim, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk and Reb Zusia of Anipoli.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed to the ground (Gen. 18:2)

The great Sage Shammai said: "Greet every man with a pleasant countenance." Should a person give his friend every gift in the world, yet greet him with a scowl, it is considered as if he gave him nothing. But if he greets him with a smile, it is considered as if he gave the other person everything, even if he is empty-handed. (Avot D'Rabbi Natan)

And he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared and set it before them (Gen. 18:8)

How could Abraham have offered his guests meat and milk at the same time? The answer is that he served the meat and dairy foods to them separately, with the intention that each guest should choose for himself what he wished to eat. Abraham even went to the trouble of preparing three tongues, should each of the three guests wish to eat only meat. This is the epitome of the mitzva of hospitality (Likutei Sichot)

And offer him there for a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2)

"Master of the Universe!" cried Abraham before G-d. "When you commanded me to offer up my son as a burnt offering, I could have said, 'But yesterday You promised that my seed would be perpetuated through Isaac!' However, I conquered my own inclination to carry out Your will. In return, may it be Your will that should the descendants of Isaac ever be in trouble, with no one to defend them, You Yourself will come to their defense."

(Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit)



5:37 PM Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
19 Cheshvan / October 30
Torah Portion Vayeira
Shabbat ends 6:35 PM

Dedicated in memory of a dear friend
of the Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Martin Zimet, OBM