



Today, Maimonides (known by the acronym Rambam) is universally held in the greatest respect. Among his contemporaries, however, many were suspicious of his level of religious observance. The great rabbis of Germany dispatched Rabbi Meir to Spain to ascertain the level of religiosity of this controversial rabbi.

When Rabbi Meir arrived in Cordoba, he proceeded to the Rambam's residence. A servant admitted him and announced that his master would join him shortly. Soon Rambam entered the room and greeted his visitor, and invited him to dine. But when Rabbi Meir entered the dining room and glanced at his dinner plate, he felt faint. One of the items on his plate looked identical to a human hand. Could the renowned Rambam be a cannibal? he wondered. A very queasy Rabbi Meir politely refused any food, claiming not to be hungry.

Rambam suggested that perhaps a cool glass of wine might perk his appetite. "Patrus," he called to his servant, "please go to the cellar and bring up a jug of fine wine for our guest." Again Rabbi Meir was confused. Patrus was obviously a non-Jewish name, and yet Rambam was sending him to fetch wine in violation of the prohibition against drinking wine touched by a non-Jew. It was beginning to look like all he had heard about Rambam's heretical tendencies was true.

Rabbi Meir declined the wine, pleading exhaustion from his long journey. When Rambam offered him hospitality for the night, he was only too glad to accept and retired to his room to ruminate on his observations. Before he retired, Rabbi Meir overheard Rambam telling Patrus to kill a calf for the next day's repast. This was too much to bear. Had the great Rambam fallen so far from Jewish observance as to eat meat which was not even slaughtered according to the laws of the holy Torah?

That night, despite his exhaustion, Rabbi Meir was more awake than asleep. He concluded that he had no choice but to confront Rambam directly. He would reveal his identity and the purpose of his visit, and then he would demand an explanation for Rambam's audacious and obviously heretical behavior.

Rabbi Meir had barely fallen asleep when morning dawned and he was awakened by a knock on his door. There stood Rambam's servant, informing him that his master wished a word with him. Rabbi Meir nervously made his way to the room where Rambam stood with his hand out and a broad smile on his face. "My dear friend and colleague, I know exactly who you are and why you have come. I am aware of the fact that the great rabbis of Germany have sent you to examine the level of my observance of the laws of Torah. I also know why you refused to partake of any food yesterday at my table and why you refused to drink my wine. I know that you were so upset that you spent the entire night pacing the floor, worrying about my eating human flesh, drinking prohibited wine and eating meat which was not properly slaughtered.

"You may ease your mind, for now I will explain all of these apparent transgressions and put an end to your doubts. After you hear my words, you will agree that all the suspicions which have been voiced regarding me are untrue, and furthermore, you will understand how dangerous it is to cast suspicion on a person based only on outward appearances.

"The food which you took to be a human hand is actually a type of vegetable which grows in this part of Spain, but not in Germany. It is very nutritious, and as a doctor, I am careful to eat a proper diet."

"Of course," thought Rabbi Meir, "how could I have suspected him of cannibalism. But still, didn't Rambam drink the forbidden wine and eat non-kosher meat?"

Rambam continued his explanation, refuting Rabbi Meir's suspicions about the wine. "My servant, Patrus, is an observant Jew. Surely you will recall that the father of one of the Sages of the Talmud was also called Patrus – Rabbi Yosef ben Patrus is mentioned in *Bereishit Rabba!*"

Again Rabbi Meir regretted his doubts. Now he was sure that his final question would be explained away and he waited for Rambam's elucidation.

"You know that a calf which was removed from the womb of a cow which was slaughtered according to the laws of Torah is considered as if it had been slaughtered according to the law. This is the calf I wished to serve in honor of your visit," the Rambam concluded.

When he heard these words, Rabbi Meir was so overcome with emotion that tears poured from his eyes. Thinking of all the calumny which was heaped upon this great Sage was more than he could bear, and Rabbi Meir made a contrite apology for himself and the others who had sent him. What a terrible mistake they had made, judging the scholar from afar. Rambam accepted the apology and the two parted as friends.

In the many towns and cities Rabbi Meir passed through along his return route from Spain to Germany, he made it a point to announce: "From Moses our teacher to Moses the son of Maimon, there was never such a Moses."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

And he returned to the land of Egypt; and Moses took the staff of G-d in his hand (Ex. 4:20)
While Moses certainly demonstrated to Pharaoh the proper honor due a king, he nonetheless "took the staff of G-d in his hand" in all his dealings with him -- prideful in his Jewish heritage, imbued with an attitude of G-dly assurance, and without any feelings of inferiority. (*Likutei Sichot*)

G-d heard their groaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob (Ex. 2:24)
When the Israelites were unable to endure the harsh exile in Egypt, they cried out to G-d. Indeed, G-d heard their cry and sent Moses to redeem them. So it is with us in our present exile. When we cry out, "Take us out of galut and bring Moshiach!" G-d will certainly hear our cry and send the Redeemer. Moreover, our mere being in a state of readiness to call upon G-d is already enough for Him to respond, as it states in Isaiah, "Before they call, I will answer, and while yet they speak I will hear." (*The Rebbe, Parshat Tavo, 5751*)

Moses returned to G-d and said, L-rd! Why have You mistreated this people? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he made things worse... You have not saved this people at all (Exodus 5:22-23)
We are not allowed to resign ourselves to our present situation of exile with the excuse that "such is the will of G-d." The harshness of the galut is a sign that the Redemption is near, yet it is still bitter and painful. Therefore, even while reaffirming our absolute faith in the principle that "The ways of G-d are just," we are also to express our anguish with the prayerful outcry "Ad Masai?" – "How much longer?" and ask for the immediate coming of Moshiach. (*The Rebbe, Parshat Va'eira, 5743*)



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20 Tevet/Dec 24
Torah Portion *Shemot*
Shabbat ends 5:20 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

The Haftora for this week's Torah portion of *Shemot* has one theme, divided into three parts. The theme is the blossoming of redemption. First, we go down into exile for a reason. Second, in the darkness of the exile is where we are able to accomplish the most, developing ourselves and the world for the ultimate redemption. Third, the gathering of the exiles and how when Moshiach comes, we will reap the fruits of our labor in exile.

There are also hints of how to bring Moshiach – through showing love to our fellow Jews.

The connection to our Torah portion, is that the portion begins with the descent of the Jewish people into Egypt. Then it tells of the hard labor and the amazing growth of the Jewish nation. And finally the beginning of our redemption from Egypt, when G-d sent Moshe to start the process of the Exodus.

Another connection to our portion is the first verse of the Haftora. The portion begins, "And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt." The Haftora also begins, "Those who came," and continues, "whom Jacob caused to take root, Israel budded and blossomed and they filled the face of the Earth with fruit." Just as the parsha tells us, how the Jewish people multiplied.

Both Jacob and Israel are names of the Jewish people. When it comes to taking root it says Jacob, but by budding and blossoming it says Israel. Why the difference?

Jacob, refers to the Jewish people when they interact with the physical world, which in the time of exile, is a very dark place. Jacob is symbolic of serving G-d out of accepting the yoke of His will, which is our main service to G-d in exile. This form of service is not necessarily very meaningful, but it is the most powerful. It is compared to planting which is hard work. Planting a small tasteless seed in the ground, where it is dark and cold. But it is there where this small tasteless seed takes root, and grows into a great tree. The transformation from a small seed to a large tree, is exponentially great. The same is true about our service in exile. It is hard work, tasteless, it is cold and dark, but here is where our work takes root and the transformation is well beyond our efforts.

Israel refers to the Jewish people's interaction with the spiritual and G-dly, which is mainly in the time of Moshiach. Israel is symbolic of serving G-d out of understanding. It is compared to budding and blossoming, and the growth of fruit. Above ground, in the light and warmth, the budding and blossoming is visible and beautiful, and the fruit is tasty and enjoyable. Because in the light and revelation of G-d in the era of Moshiach, we will have the pleasure of seeing the accomplishments of our actions and the fruit of our labor.

All this will be possible, only because of the seeds we planted in the exile. So our work now as Jacob, in the darkness of the exile, is what gives us the great pleasure as Israel, in the time of Moshiach.

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.

Right and Right

Someone tells you emphatically, "You're right. You're absolutely right!"

Ahhh, it feels so good to hear those words: "They see it my way," you sigh, relieved that the battle is over even before it has begun.

At other times, though, being told that you're right is not what you want to hear: "I don't need you to tell me I'm right; I know I'm right. I didn't want to have to deal with this stuff to begin with!"

Whether or not we're interested in hearing that we're right, we always want to be right.

Most of the time, it is clear and straight-forward what is right and what is wrong is. Still, there are those times when we think "the right thing" is so obvious, but it really isn't.

A story is told of a great rabbi whose student had been a highly successful businessman. The student had given up his worldly and mundane pursuits in order to dedicate himself to full-time Torah study. What could be wrong?

But one day, the rabbi warned the student, "You are in great danger."

"Why?" asked the student.

"Surely you know," explained the rabbi, "that an army is composed of many units – divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, platoons, and so forth. If a person decides on his own to move from one unit to another, he is liable to be punished as a deserter. You were blessed by G-d with wealth and you were

supposed to belong to the brigade of philanthropists. But you have deserted your brigade and on your own initiative have joined the brigade of Torah scholars."

Jewish wisdom teaches that a person can be doing something that is right, but it might not be the right thing for that person or for that particular time in that person's life.

The great Chasidic master, Rabbi Zushe of Anipoli, was wont to say, "If they will ask me in the World of Truth, 'Why weren't you like Moses?' I will know what to answer. But if they will ask me, 'Why weren't you Zushe,' I will not have an answer."

Each one of us is "only" expected to be exactly who we are. And, we are expected to be all of what we can be.

In order to be everything we can be we need to know who we are. The path to self-discovery begins with Torah study. For, we cannot possibly know who we are and where we are going unless we know where we come from.

But we don't have to, nor should we, go it alone. Along the path to actualizing our potential, the Torah urges us to search for and find a mentor, a teacher, a guide, a spiritual life-coach – someone who can direct us on the journey to fulfilling our divinely ordained purpose.

With a mentor's help, we can work on doing the right thing, without worrying that we're not like Moses or Zushe.

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He Thought About It

He is visiting from America. When I asked him to come put on tefillin he stopped... stood still... started to think. He stood there thinking for over a half a minute, and then he walked right over to put on tefillin.

I wondered, "What did he think that convinced him to do the mitzva (commandment)?" I wanted to know because it might be something I could use to help others, but I didn't want to ask right then thinking he might change his mind, so I held off my question until he finished.

He read the Shema, went to the Kotel to pray for his loved ones and for his needs, we took pictures, and then I asked him, "What convinced you to come put on tefillin? You didn't come over right away. You had some kind of conversation in your head that ended up with you agreeing. What convinced you?"

He didn't know. I pressed him to think about it. I asked him a number of times, but he didn't know.

I think I know... Because putting on tefillin is a good thing, and Jews like to do good things.

All you have to do is to figure out how to invite them to do it in a way they will know what you are asking them to do is good.

Why?

I think he said he's from Holland. Before he put on tefillin he wanted to know, "Why do you want other people to put on tefillin?"

I told him to first put them on then I will answer his question.

He said the Shema in English, went to the Kotel to pray for his loved ones, and then, before taking off the tefillin, I answered his question.

"All the Jewish people are one. When you put on tefillin, you strengthen the Jews all over the world. You could be saving a Jew's life by fulfilling this commandment.

"Another reason is, I noticed that the guys with the grey beards (I tugged my beard a little) leave this world first. That means that you guys (I tapped him on his chest) are going to have to take care of our people. In order to take care of our people, you have to know what G-d wants from us."

He understood the second answer better than the first.

Portugal

A group of Jewish teens came to the Kotel on a trip from Portugal. They were really excited. One asked me, "Why is the connection so much stronger here?" Another was excited to tell me that he cried by the Kotel. They wanted to know why these things were happening.

I answered them in two ways. First, I told them what they wanted to know, what they asked... then I told them what they had to know.

"G-d is equally everywhere, at all times. There is no more of G-d here in this holy place than anywhere else in the world, not even more than in Portugal.

G-d is equally everywhere, but He hides. He hides so we will seek Him... and He hides here in this holy place less than in any other place in the World. He does this because this is the home of His Torah, and He wants to draw us to His Torah, His ways, His instructions for us."

"And why is all this here so special for you

but not to the rest of the World? Why do you feel what you call a 'stronger connection,' ... why do you cry here but they don't? Because you are a Jew. And you are a Jew because your mother is a Jew.

You were born a Jew for some reason, and the only way you can pass this on to your children is if you marry a Jewish girl. Make a Jewish family, then Jerusalem will not only always be yours, it will always belong to your children, too."

Meaningful

He's from Argentina. He moved to Tel Aviv because he found work in the hi-tech industry. He is 24 years old. This was the first time he had ever put on tefillin. He didn't know what they were. After reading the Shema in English he prayed silently for his loved ones. You could see that it was a meaningful time for him.

What made it meaningful?

Historically; being at the Kotel... first time putting on tefillin... doing what G-d said to do... being in this holy place.

Emotionally; learning to talk to G-d in his heart.

Spiritually; If he will continue to talk to G-d as he goes through his day, he will become aware of G-d's Presence.

A mitzva opens the door to Heaven, but we have to do something more to go in.

G-d is everywhere at all times, but He hides. Talking to Him reminds us that we are actually standing before His Holy Presence.

Thank G-d

He is visiting from Las Vegas. He almost cried when he said the blessing on the tefillin. After he read the Shema, he went to the Kotel to pray for his loved ones. When he returned, I asked him what was so special about it for him.

He answered, "I remembered all the blessings G-d is giving me."

There are tears of sorrow, and there are tears of humility that overwhelm us when we realize just how much we have to be thankful for.

Gutman Locks is well-known at the Western Wall for over two decades. He is the author of several books, musical tapes and many educational videos. See more of his writings at www.thereisone.com

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Continued from previous issue from a letter dated

27 Shevat, 5723/1963

In this connection, you also mention the similarity of the custom found in the Torah as well as in ancient Mesopotamia, that when a wife could bear no children to her husband, she could take her maid-servant and give her to her husband for a wife, with a view of adopting the children, etc. Here again, I do not see what difficulty this similarity of custom presents.

For, even today, you may find similarity of custom between the most observant Jew and his non-Jewish neighbors as long as it is not in conflict with the Torah. For, to be authentically Jewish, it is not absolutely necessary to reject every possible similarity of custom or habit which might prevail in the society, but rather to bring a spirit of holiness into a custom or practice which is otherwise not in conflict with the Torah.

You ask: "Granted that the Torah is accepted as being of Divine origin, how is it possible to be certain of the validity of the Oral Law, and of the traditional interpretation of the Torah?"

This question is also not difficult to answer. Inasmuch as you are a University student, I will give you an example from science.

As you know, modern science has made all sorts of discoveries and opened new fields, such as electronics, etc., which are based on the science of mathematics, the basic principles of which were known thousands of years ago, as is well known and admitted.

Needless to say, the mathematicians of old had no idea or conception of electronics, but there is no contradiction here, only the application of old principles and methods of deduction to new fields or branches of science. Therefore, the traditional interpretation of the Torah is already contained

in the Torah itself, and is nothing but a continuation of the written Torah, so that only both together do they constitute one living organism.

In this case, too, we can apply the argument from common sense, as mentioned above. For it is unthinkable to assume that at any particular time there arose a new school of thought which claimed to give a new interpretation to the Torah which was in conflict with the accepted traditions of the past. No one would accept such a radical change, and certainly it could not be accepted by the whole Jewish people. For, it is not a case where a particular professor is studying with a group of students, but the study and interpretation of the Torah has been going on in numerous Yeshivot and Academies, all of which presented a remarkable degree of unanimity.

To be sure, we find differences of opinion in the Mishna and Gemara, but the important thing is the resulting decisions, which became unanimous in the halacha [Jewish law]. Thus, we also find in the Torah itself a difference of opinion, on occasion, between Moshe Rabbeinu and others, but it is the final outcome of such differences that is important.

We also find a difference of opinion between the first Jew, Abraham, and his wife Sara, in which case there was Divine directive that Abraham was to follow Sarah's opinion. Therefore, the integrity of the whole tradition and Oral Law is in no way challenged by the differences of opinion which are mentioned in the Talmud, which are in themselves methods of deduction to arrive at the final decision, or psak din [legal ruling].

I trust you know the dictum that the important thing is not the discussion but the deed. Therefore, my intention in writing you the above is not for the purpose of discussion, but is an effort to remove the confusion which seems to bother you and seems to interfere with your duties as a Jew – to live up, in your daily life, to the Jewish way of life, the way of the Torah... It is only a matter of will and determination, and we have been assured that he who determines to purify himself a little by his personal efforts, receives a great deal of help from On High.

Him even in the darkest moments of exile? G-d answers this question by saying, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The patriarchs and matriarchs possessed this unshakable faith, and we inherit it from them. If we nurture it properly, we, too, will "see" G-d even when His goodness is not readily apparent. This faith enables us to live out the final moments of our exile yearning for its end – and demanding it! – while maximizing our use of its remaining moments. (Daily Wisdom by Moshe Wisniewsky from Hivra' adiyot 5743, vol. 2)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

This Tuesday is the 24th of Tevet, the yartzeit of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Chasidism. The name Shneur means "two lights," and indeed, throughout his life Rabbi Shneur Zalman caused the two lights of Torah to be illuminated: nigleh, the revealed part of Torah, and Chasidut, its hidden, esoteric aspect.

What is light? Light does not create anything new; it merely allows for something that already exists to be seen. The introduction of light makes revelation possible.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman revealed Chasidism by bringing down even the very highest philosophical concepts into the intellectual faculties known by the acronym "Chabad" (chochma, bina and daat-wisdom, knowledge and understanding). He explained these concepts in a way that every Jew can understand. Rabbi Shneur Zalman also authored the Shulchan Aruch, a work of halacha, Jewish law.

When a person studies a Torah concept and grasps it intellectually he becomes "enlightened" – the concept is revealed before him in all its clarity. Of course, the concept was there all along, but the person couldn't "see" it. Understanding the concept is thus synonymous with revelation, for both reveal something which was already in existence.

In truth, this was the sum and substance of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's Divine service, illuminating the world with the two lights of nigleh and Chasidism. Rabbi Shneur Zalman made it possible for the Torah, which already existed, to be revealed to every Jew, enabling everyone to comprehend it in a manner in which it is truly "seen."

This ability to perceive G-dliness will reach its culmination in the Messianic era, when even the most difficult concepts will be immediately grasped and understood just by "looking" at G-d's creation.

May it happen immediately.

Shmuel Butman

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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Today Is...

Tevet 22

My father proclaimed at a gathering: Just as wearing tefillin every day is a mitzva commanded by the Torah to every individual regardless of his standing in Torah, whether deeply learned or simple, so too is it an absolute duty for every person to spend a half hour every day thinking about the Torah-education of children, and to do everything in his power – and beyond his power – to inspire children to follow the path along which they are being guided.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

When it appears to us that something is wrong in the way G-d runs the world, G-d wants us to question Him. But at the same time, we must continue to believe absolutely in G-d's reality and goodness. From where can we draw the power to believe in G-d so thoroughly that we see



New Emissaries

Rabbi Dani and Rochel Libersohn have established Chabad at the **University Nevada-Reno** (UNR). UNR is located in the heart of downtown Reno and in close proximity to Lake Tahoe. With a student population of 20,000 students and an ever growing Jewish student body, the need for a Chabad on campus is readily apparent.

Rabbi Tzvi and Sarah Schectman are establishing **Chabad of Eastern Baltimore County**, Maryland, serving the communities of White Marsh, Perry Hall and Middle River. The Schectmans will provide programs and activities geared to the Jewish families living in the area including Shabbat meals, family and holiday programs, Jewish educational opportunities.

Rabbi Levi and Leah Danow have moved to **Fort Wayne, Indiana**, to open a new Chabad Jewish Center. Fort Wayne, in northeastern Indiana, has approximately 1,000 Jews.