

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In the first verse of this week's Torah portion, *Lech Lecha*, G-d commanded Abraham, "Go out, from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." G-d continues to tell Abraham that, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great." This is the first command to the first Jew, therefore, there must be a message here for every Jewish person, for all time. What is the message?

There are two approaches to understanding this verse. The first is that it is referring to the journey of the soul, a descent from above to below. The soul is asked to leave its home in the highest spiritual realms, and make the descent into the lowest possible realm, the physical world. But it is here that it affects the most change and accomplishes its purpose, and the effect is so powerful, that it brings G-d's blessing and becomes great. Meaning, that the soul is uplifted to higher spiritual realms, beyond where it was before its descent.

In this way of understanding the verse, we are given a glimpse of our purpose, the goal of every Jew, to make this world into a better place, the way G-d wants it. A place where G-d could call home.

The second approach is more in line with the simple meaning of the verse. It refers to the ascent from below to above we must make every day from the lowly and mundane, from "your land, your birthplace, and your father's house," which in the context of the verse, refers to a place and an atmosphere of idol worship, "to the land that I will show you," the land of Israel, a place of holiness.

This is especially poignant now after the Tishrei holidays, when we are thrust into the mundane. After the holidays, every Jew "goes out," doing his mission to transform his part of the world into a dwelling place for G-d.

It is through Torah, mitzvot and living the life of a Jew that transforms this world, and we have the power to do it, we inherited it from our forefather Abraham. It is through this work that we complete G-d's command to Abraham, "Lech Lecha."

Although these two explanations are opposites, the first a descent, and the second an ascent, they are both explanations of the same verse, and therefore simultaneously true. And we have to take both messages at the same time. That we have descended to affect this world, and we should try to change it from the bottom up.

So "Lech Lecha," is a call to every Jewish person, to do all you can to complete the mission and make this world into a home for Hashem. It is through both of these approaches working simultaneously that we create an environment that the highest levels of G-dliness, even the levels that are beyond the world, to enter the world and become part of our lives.

This is the key to the blessings found in *Lech Lecha* and the path to the ultimate blessing, the coming 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.

Building Boom

While there might be reasons to expect otherwise, parts of the world are experiencing unprecedented building booms or home construction and renovations higher than expected – Australia, Jerusalem and Florida, to name a few.

The Torah (*Deut 22:8*) teaches that when we build a new home, we must erect a guard-rail around the roof. The following verse presents the obvious reason for this commandment: someone can fall from an unenclosed roof.

According to various commentators, this *mitzva* (commandment) applies to a home one purchases or even rents.

On a deeper level, this *mitzva* applies not only to someone who is constructing, purchasing or renting a home, but to every Jew. Whether an apartment, condo, co-op, or a house, any edifice that we call "home" must have a guard-rail.

The Hebrew word for guard-rail is "*maaka*." And it is from this word that we can learn how this partition applies to each of us.

The first letter of *maaka* is *mem*. The *mem* signifies "*malchut*" or royalty. In a Jewish home everyone should be regarded as royalty, not just guests! Spouses, siblings, children, should all be treated with respect and dignity.

The second letter of *maaka* is *ayin*. *Ayin* is the first letter of the Hebrew word "*ol*," meaning "yoke." Each person must place upon himself or herself the "yoke" of 100% commitment to the other person, be it spouse, parent or child.

The next letter is *kuf*. *Kuf* stands for *kedusha* – holiness. Every activity in the home can and should be endowed with holiness, even such mundane acts as eating or decorating the home.

We can understand the intrinsic holy

nature of a Jewish home (apartment, dorm room, etc.) by studying an earlier commandment in the Torah. "You shall make a Sanctuary for Me and I will dwell in them." (*Ex. 25:8*). G-d enjoined us to make one Sanctuary but promised to dwell "in them" – plural – for G-d dwells in every Jewish heart and home where His presence is welcomed.

The final letter of *maaka* is *hei*. In Hebrew each letter has a numerical equivalent and *hei* equals five. This teaches us that in our homes we must bombard all five senses with good. What we see, touch, taste, smell and hear should be positive and beneficial.

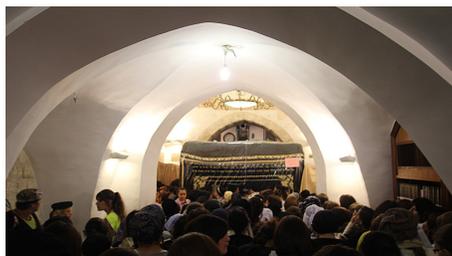
When we see a *mezuzah* on the doorpost or Shabbat candlesticks in a prominent place, we know that we are in a home where Jewish observance is valued. The words that we hear in the home should be worthy of this "miniature sanctuary." The distinctive aromas – *latkas* or jelly donuts on Chanuka, special dishes for Passover, challa baking on Friday – are scents that literally create memories.

In addition, Judaism involves our senses in practical mitzvot: When Shabbat ends we recite a blessing over spices and smell them during the *Havdala* ceremony. Upon seeing a rainbow, or a long-lost friend, there are special blessings say. It is a *mitzva* to hear the shofar blown on Rosh Hashana. We are encouraged to taste of the foods of Shabbat on the eve of Shabbat, and so forth.

G-d's purpose in creating the world is for us to make it into His "home." This will be realized in the Messianic Era. As each of us works on building a *maaka* for our own homes, we simultaneously prepare for the Messianic Era, when G-d's dwelling in this world will be fully revealed, may it commence now.

SLICE OF LIFE

Inside and Out
by Suzie Steinberg



One of the places where my husband and I most like to pray is at *Kever Rachel* – Rachel’s Tomb in Beit Lechem, Israel. We go there frequently – sometimes for a particular reason, and sometimes just because. Sometimes the inner chamber is jam-packed with visitors, and sometimes there’s plenty of room with just a few people coming and going. But no matter what day or time of year it is, there always seems to be something going on at *Kever Rachel*.

We recently came to *Kever Rachel* to celebrate the *chalakeh* (first haircut for a boy at age three) of our great-nephew. Taking advantage of the location of the event, I hopped inside for a quick prayer and found just a handful of women there. This was in stark contrast to the outdoor area, which was a major hub of activity.

Our group of 10 to 15 people carved out a little spot for ourselves, our plattered refreshments, a chair on which to give the haircut, and one very excited three-year-old boy. As the men passed the scissors from hand to hand, gingerly cutting his silky, auburn locks of hair, we noticed a chatty group of women nearby performing the *mitzva* (commandment) of separating dough from the challah and additionally saying the

prayer “*Nishmat*” out loud. Their corner exuded optimism and enthusiasm. They seemed to be perfectly comfortable going about their business as visitors from all walks of life passed them by.

As we sang to the three-year-old, brimming with pride as he showed off his *tzitzit*, we noticed another group in the area immediately next to us. They appeared to be conducting a meal of thanksgiving of some kind. As they expressed gratitude to G-d by closing their eyes and passionately singing *Tov Lehodot* (“It is good to thank G-d”) and other soul-stirring songs, several of them tried unsuccessfully to hide the unbidden tears running down their cheeks by turning their backs to their family. Their carved-out area was thick with intensity and emotion. They felt that *Kever Rachel* would be the most meaningful venue for their event, but attempted to maintain some semblance of privacy despite being in such a public area. As each group continued its activity within its own space, a bride suddenly arrived in her wedding gown accompanied by her lively entourage. The members of the challah crowd caught a glimpse of the bride, hesitated for a short moment, but then could not help themselves and as a cohesive group charged from the challah toward the bride and requested a blessing from her. A bride on her wedding day and is considered to be free of sin, and the blessing of a bride is believed to be exceptionally potent on that day. The bride, delighted with her role, magnanimously listened to each one, and didn’t move on until each woman who approached her had received her own personal blessing.

The *yahrtzeit* (anniversary of passing) of Rachel our Matriarch, 11 Cheshvan, is undoubtedly the busiest day of the year at *Kever Rachel*, inside, outside, and beyond. But by far the most crowded time that I personally ever experienced at the site was on the last day of Chanuka, which is viewed as a most auspicious time to pray. On that day, traffic heading towards *Kever Rachel* was backed up extraordinarily far out and parking was nearly impossible. Inside the compound, there was absolutely no place to stand. Literally. Every inch of the floor was occupied by a jumble of women of all ages and stages, facing in every direction, pouring

their hearts out. With the exception of a group of women joining together to say *Nishmat*, each woman was in her own private world, seemingly oblivious to her surroundings. Each woman looked as if she was attempting to shake the heavens on behalf of those near and dear to her while simultaneously carrying the weight of the entire world on her shoulders. The intensity of devotion on the faces of young and old was something to see. Some covered their faces with their prayer books and Psalms books, and some reached upward with their hands. Some cried out loudly and continuously while others moved their lips without a sound, as their tears silently streamed down their faces like a flowing river that replenishes itself over and over again. There was a charge in the air.

The *Midrash* states that Jacob did not bury Rachel in Hebron at burial Cave of the Machpela, but rather on the road on the way to Beit Lechem, because he foresaw that when the Jews would pass that way on their way into Babylonian exile after the destruction of the Holy Temple, Rachel would sense the pain of her children and she would cry and beg for G-d to have mercy on them. According to the introduction to the *Midrash on Lamentations*, when the Jews went into exile, G-d told Jeremiah to inform Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as to Moses about the destruction and exile, “as they know how to weep.” They implored G-d to save us in the merit of what they had done during their lifetimes. But G-d didn’t respond to their pleas. It was only when Rachel intervened on our behalf that G-d was moved and promised her that in her merit He will eventually bring us back to our land.

Visitors from all over the world flock to *Kever Rachel* because Rachel is the quintessential mother, willing to sacrifice everything on behalf of her children. People are drawn to their mother at every age and want to bask in the warm embrace, acceptance, and unconditional love that only a mother can give. It’s hard to think of a better place to pray than there!

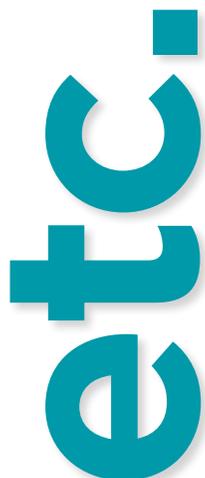
Suzie Steinberg, CSW, is a native of Kew Gardens Hills and resident of Ramat Beit Shemesh who publishes articles regularly in various newspapers and magazines about life in general, and about life in Israel in particular. Suzie can be reached at suzie.sliceoflife@gmail.com and would love to hear from you. Reprinted with the permission of The Queens Jewish Link

New Emissaries & Centers

Rabbi Tzvi and Mushka Birnhack will be establishing **Chabad of Southend On Sea, Essex, UK** and its surrounding areas. The new Chabad Center is the fourth Chabad Center in Essex, UK. **Rabbi Sholem and Aidele Vigler** have established **The Heights Chabad in Houston, Texas**. “The Heights” is referred to as one of the top suburbs of Houston to live in and has 2,500 Jewish residents. The Heights Chabad will be the 14th Chabad House servicing the Houston Jewish Community. **Rabbi Avremi and Rivky Raichik** opened **Chabad Jewish Center of Cape Ann in Gloucester, Massachusetts**, to serve Rockport, Gloucester, Essex, and Manchester-by-the-Sea. The Chabad Center moved into its permanent home on Main Street in Gloucester in time for the High Holidays last month. **Rabbi Shmuli and Chasi Rothstein** of **Chabad at Pitt** have moved their programs – including Shabbat meals that attract up to 200 students each Friday night – out of their home and into a dedicated space on Atwood Street, just a five minute walk from the University.

Hakhel – Unite

Even though in the present age, when the Holy Temple is not standing and there is no *mitzva* (commandment) of *Hakhel* in the literal sense, it is understood that all matter involving the Holy Temple still exist in the spiritual sense. In this vein, our Sages said, “The prayers were ordained in place of sacrifices.” Similarly, there should be parallels to the *Hakhel* gathering. (*Likutei Sichos*) Find out more at hakhelnation.com





IT HAPPENED ONCE

Reb Dov Ber of Lubavitch was the son and successor of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad chasidism. One time, while still a young man, Reb Dov Ber met one of the chasidim of his father during a visit to Janowitz. The young chasid was a peer of Reb Dov Ber's and they began a discussion on various matters relating to Torah and a Jew's G-dly service. During the conversation, Reb Dov Ber made light of his friend's accomplishments in Torah study and prayer.

The chasid was upset by Reb Dov Ber's words and replied: "How can you make such statements? Are you comparing yourself to me? Who is your father, and who is mine? Your father is our Rebbe, and everyone knows what spiritual level he is at. When it was time to bring a soul down to This World, no doubt he and your mother brought down a pure and lofty soul. Then as you were growing up, your family watched you carefully to make sure that not only no physical harm befell you, but also that no spiritual harm would befall you. You were given the best possible Jewish education and you were always surrounded by people of exemplary character and religiosity. So, what kind of impressive achievement is it that you are meticulous in the observance of *mitzvot* (commandments), that you relish Torah study, that your soul desires to cleave to its Maker during prayer?"

"But me – my soul was probably arbitrarily swiped from the storehouse of souls up there. After I was born, I grew up like any other Jewish child, with as much supervision as my parents could offer while they were both involved in trying to put food on the table. Of course, I studied in the local cheder, but my playmates and comrades were just regular children like myself.

"And now, how do I make a living? I give the local peasants the capital they need to buy grain during the sowing season. But that is not the difficult part of my job, for the hard work is in the winter. During the winter I have to collect my debts. There's a whole procedure to follow in order to do this properly! I have to bring a bottle of vodka with me on these ventures. Of course, I have to travel at night, since in the winter the peasants get up while it's still dark outside. When I finally get to the first peasant's home I have to make a little 'l'chaim' with him, and his wife, too! Without that he won't even begin to talk business with me.

"I settle the accounts with him and then I move on to the next house. There, too, I must have a 'friendly' drink before they will let me discuss business. This goes on at the next house and at the next, until I've collected from three or four people. At this point it's light outside. I head home, immerse in the *mikva* (ritualarium) as does every chasid, and say my morning prayers with the congregation. So you can imagine what kind of praying one can muster following a 'morning' like that. After that, I grab a few precious moments for Torah study before I have to go back out and deal with the local peasants once more."

In truth, this chasid who had just delivered the long soliloquy, prayed with the greatest devotion and concentration and was an impressive Torah scholar. But, since he was a humble person, he underestimated himself considerably.

When the young Reb Dov Ber heard his words he was quite overwhelmed. He returned at once to his father, the Rebbe, related the entire conversation, and bemoaned his own spiritual attainments. It seemed to him that everything he had accomplished until now really wasn't worth anything at all.

The next time the chasid from Janowitz came to Liozna to be with the Rebbe, the Rebbe told him, "I am indeed indebted to you. You have made a chasid of my son, Berl!"

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion



The L-rd said to Abram, lech lecha – Go out from your land, from your family, and from your father's house... (Gen. 12:1).

The literal translation of the words "lech lecha" is "Go to yourself." Going has the connotation in Torah of moving towards one's ultimate purpose – service towards one's Creator. And this is strongly hinted at by the phrase, "Go to yourself," meaning, towards your soul's essence and your ultimate purpose, that for which you were created. (*Alshich as quoted by the Rebbe*)

The command to "go out" of one's natural inclinations and become spiritually elevated is directed toward every person individually. No one is required to do more than he is able; at the same time, each person is expected to achieve all that he is capable of. G-d doesn't require Reb Zushe to be a Baal Shem Tov. He does, however, expect him to be a Reb Zushe. (*Rabbi Zushe of Anipoli*)

On a spiritual level, the "land that I will show you" refers to the revelation of G-dliness that comes as a reward for Divine service. This service of "going out" consists of connecting the soul as it is invested in the physical body with its spiritual source above, which can actually "see" G-dliness. When the lower soul and its higher source are connected, the soul within the body benefits from this vision. (*Ohr Hatorah*)

Ever since G-d told our father Abraham, "Go from your land etc," and subsequently "Avram kept travelling southward," we have the beginning of the mystery of birurim - elevating the sparks of holiness. By decree of Divine Providence man goes about his travels to the place where the "sparks" that he must purify await their redemption. The righteous tzadikim, who have vision, see where their birurim await them and go there deliberately. As for ordinary folk, The Cause of all Causes and the Prime Mover brings about various reasons and circumstances that bring these people to that place where lies their obligation to elevate the sparks. (*Reb Shalom Dov Ber of Lubavitch*)

There are some lands that produce naturally strong and robust people, but as G-d implied to Abraham, a Jew mustn't rely on his inborn strength. Nor should he content himself with the positive character attributes he inherited from his family, or with the fact that his father was holy and righteous. Rather, every Jew must "go out" and expend his own efforts, as it states in Psalms (128:2), "For you shall eat the labor of your hands; happy shall you be, and it shall be well with you." (*Daat Moshe*)

לעילוי נשמת הרה"ת הרה"ח
 ר' רפאל משה הכהן שפערלין ז"ל
 In memory of
R' Refoel Moshe A"H Sperlin
 on the occasion of his Yahrtzeit on the 11th of Mar-Cheshvon



5:31 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
 10 Cheshvan/Nov. 4
 Torah Portion Lech Lecha
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