

SLICE OF LIFE

A Talmud Surprise in Shandong Province, China

By Rabbi Shimon Freundlich

As part of my work as a Shliach in China, I regularly visit factories that produce kosher food for export. Jews around the world rely on kosher products, and since so many ingredients are made in China, we help ensure that what reaches kosher consumers truly meets halachic standards. These visits are part of my ongoing effort to represent several kosher certifying agencies and support factories in maintaining full kosher compliance.

Today I visited four factories. Each one had its own rhythm, its own smell, and its own story. At every site, I observed the processes carefully for kosher compliance, as usual, walking through production lines, checking ingredients, examining equipment, and reviewing records. But in the fourth factory, something remarkable happened.

There was nothing unusual about the plant itself. It was clean, organized, and efficient, typical of the well-run facilities scattered across China's industrial regions. The surprise came not from the machinery or the process, but from a person. The factory's representative responsible for kosher

certification, whom I had never met before, made a deep impression on me.

From the moment I arrived, I sensed something different about him. Factory staff are generally polite and respectful, but this man displayed an extra measure of reverence, not just professionalism, but almost a quiet awe. I later learned that he had recently been transferred to this department, which explained why our paths hadn't crossed until today.

After completing my inspection and verifying that everything was in order, I gathered my notes and prepared to leave. But before I could step out, he approached me with visible excitement and asked if he could show me something. Intrigued, I agreed. He led me to a small closet behind his desk, opened it carefully, and took out two books in Chinese.

To my astonishment, both were about the Talmud.

He held them as if they were sacred treasures. With a proud smile, he explained that these books are his constant source of wisdom and that he studies them regularly for inspiration. The titles read Talmud Bavli and The Book of Wisdom, compiled by a Chinese scholar named Qiuquan and published by the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Press.

When I opened the books, I noticed that they didn't cite the actual references for the passages they quoted, but the content was fascinating nonetheless. Each page reflected deep admiration for Jewish learning, moral reasoning, and the life lessons derived from our ancient texts.

I asked him to share one of the stories he particularly liked. He eagerly turned to a passage and began recounting a tale, one that, interestingly enough, comes not from the Talmud itself but from the Midrash. It told of a Talmudic sage often mentioned throughout our literature: Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel.

This is the story he shared:

Once, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel called his attendant Tavi and said,

"Please go to the market and bring me the best food you can find."

Tavi went and soon returned, holding beef tongue.

Rabbi Shimon thanked him and then asked him to go again, this time to bring something bad.

A short while later, Tavi returned, and again, in his hand, tongue.

"I don't understand," Rabbi Shimon said. "When I asked for the best food, you brought me tongue, and now when I ask for bad food, you bring the same thing?"

Tavi, the clever attendant, replied, "Exactly. From the tongue comes the good, and from the tongue comes the bad. When it is good, nothing is better than it; when it is bad, nothing is worse than it."

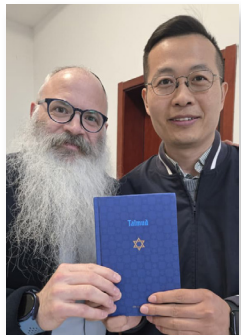
(Midrash Rabbah, Parashat Behar)

The story's simplicity hides its depth. Our words have power, to heal or to wound, to uplift or to destroy. What amazed me most, though, was not just the wisdom of the story but who was telling it: a Chinese factory manager in a remote corner of Shandong province, passionately studying lessons from our Sages.

Standing there, thousands of miles from home, I felt a sudden, unexpected connection, one that transcended language, culture, and geography. Here was a man who found personal meaning in the teachings of our ancestors, whose lives and lessons have shaped Jewish thought for over two thousand years.

One never knows where inspiration will come from. Today, it came from a Chinese gentleman in Shandong province, deeply engaged with our 2,000-year-old literature, and in turn inspiring me. Encounters like these remind me that the light of wisdom travels far beyond its origin, touching hearts in ways we could never imagine.

May we all continue to be shining examples of passion and learning, wherever we travel.



Rabbi Shimon Freundlich and a Chinese factory worker, holding the Talmud.



New Shluchim to Rancho Mirage, California

As the Coachella Valley sees an influx of young Jewish families Chabad of Rancho Mirage is excited to welcome Rabbi Sholom & Sarale Posner as Youth Directors.

Under the direction of Rabbi Shimon and Chaya Posner, together with Rabbi Benny and Chani Lew, Chabad of Rancho Mirage has grown into a vibrant oasis of Jewish life. Although often seen as an older community, the Coachella Valley has seen an uptick in young Jewish families these past couple of years, and CKids attendance has grown by 40%. With many family residences being built in the area, including "Storyliving by Disney -Cotino" right across the street from Chabad, this number is sure to grow.

They both come with a shared passion for Jewish education, outreach, and warm authentic connection. Their energy and experience will guide them in leading our Hebrew School, camp, CTeen, and Kosher Food Club, expanding programming and reaching out to more Jewish families.

What's In A Name

CHAGAI means "my festival." Chagai was one of the last of the prophets (Chagai 1:1). Chagai was one of five people who hid the vessels and treasures of the first Holy Temple before it was destroyed. A later Chagai was a fourth-century Palestinian scholar. (Kidushin 3:2)

CHEDVA means "delight." The last of the seven blessings at the Wedding ceremony reads "Blessed are You...who created joy and happiness, bride and groom, gladness, jubilation, cheer and delight (chedva), love, friendship, harmony and fellowship..."

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

12 Cheshvan, 5711 [1950]

...With regard to your question concerning the shidduch [marriage prospect] for your sister-in-law with a bachelor of about 35 years, I would suggest that inquiries be made to find out why he did not marry before, and if the reasons are such that do not affect a Jewish home, it would be advisable for the two people to get better acquainted and ascertain what mutual attractions they have.

I was very pleased to read in your letter that your son desires to study for semichah [rabbinic ordination] and that the Rosh Yeshivah [dean of the yeshiva] regards him as fitting for it. I was also glad to hear that he devotes time to strengthening Yiddishkeit [Judaism] among the youth. I am sure you will encourage him to continue along this course and will help him achieve his ambition.

As to the question of a shidduch for your son, about which you write that you are afraid to do anything in this matter, not knowing if it would be suitable, the Torah teaches us not to rely on miracles where things can and ought to be approached in natural ways and means. However, while doing so it is necessary to bear in mind that these so-called "natural" ways and means are also miracles ordained by G-d, especially in the case of marriage, as it is said in Proverbs: An intelligent wife is a gift from G-d. At any rate, an attempt should be made in the usual way, and G-d will certainly lead it in such a way as to ensure a suitable and

fitting wife for your son.

As to your apology for troubling me and your question whether you can do anything in return, this matter cannot be termed "trouble." You may have heard the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov as to how the three loves - love of G-d, love of Israel, and love of the Torah - are one, and a means to "Thou shalt love G-d thy G-d" is "Thou shalt love thy friend as thyself." There is no question of trouble here at all. May G-d grant that every one of us, including you, do all you and every one of us can to help others.

However, since you have offered to do something in return, and everything is connected with Divine Providence, I am enclosing herewith a copy of the Talk of Shabbos Bereishis. I call your attention to pars. 21 and 22, where you will find some suggestions as to what you could do to strengthen Torah and Yiddishkeit. As to what this would mean to me - I refer you to the Rambam (Maimonides' Hilchoth Teshuvah, ch. 3;4) where he states that "Everyone should regard the world on the basis that the good and bad deeds are equally balanced. Thus, through a bad deed one tips the scale of the bad side, G-d forbid, and through a good deed one tips the scale on the good side." Therefore, if you follow the suggestions in the above-mentioned paragraphs, you will increase the merits of the entire world, thus benefiting me also.

It would interest me to know what "fixed times" you have for the study of the Torah in general, and no doubt for the study of Chassidus also.

As already mentioned, you need not hesitate in writing to me at any time, but you must be patient if my reply is delayed because of pressure of work.

I hope to hear good news from you.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

If a Jew has no merits except that he hopes in Redemption, he is fit to be redeemed.

(Yalkut Tehillim, Remez 36)

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

Every year at this time we read about one of the most famous sets of twins in history, Jacob and Esau. As any child can tell you, Jacob was the "good" one and Esau was the "bad" one, and the two brothers never got along with each other. But the Torah is not a history book; Torah means "teaching," it contains eternal lessons that are always relevant and have a direct impact on our daily lives.

On a deeper level, Jacob and Esau represent two ways of looking at the world, two different life styles that even modern man is forced to choose between. Esau's attitude was "carpe diem" - seize the day, with no thought for tomorrow. Jacob, by contrast, lived a more elevated existence, recognizing life's spiritual dimension.

According to Chasidic philosophy, every Jew is made up of two souls: an animal soul and a G-dly soul. Like Jacob and Esau, they too never get along, and are in constant conflict. The animal soul is interested only in the physical; like an animal that walks on four legs, its head is focused downward rather than up at the sky. The only thing that matters is the here and now. The G-dly soul, however, looks upward. Why am I here? What's the real purpose of my life?

As we learn from this week's Torah reading, the true birthright belongs to Jacob, and our function as Jews is to elevate the world by imbuing it with G-dliness. The battle will always be there, but it's a battle we can win by choosing wisely.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקא

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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