

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

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

This week's Torah portion, Pinchas, describes the apportionment of the Land of Israel. The Torah states, "Through the lot shall the land be divided." The Talmud notes that the process by which the lots were drawn was neither arbitrary nor random; the miraculous Urim and Tumim, in the breastplate of the High Priest, guided the outcome. Rashi explains that not only was the portion of the Holy Land to be given to each tribe written on the lot picked for that tribe, but the lot itself spoke and announced the result. In other words, the division of the soon-to-be conquered Land of Israel was determined by G-d Himself.

The inheritance of the physical portion of land is symbolic of the spiritual inheritance of every Jew with which he is enjoined to fulfill his individual mission in life. Just as each of the Twelve Tribes was given a specific portion of land to live in and cultivate, every Jew is allotted his own spiritual realm to perfect.

Although a person might think he is free to choose his own spiritual portion, following whichever path in the service of G-d that appeals to his nature, the Torah teaches that this is not a matter of free will or logic, but is ordained by G-d.

Every Jewish soul has its own particular inclinations and disinclinations; some mitzvot are easier to observe than others. The Talmud notes that many of our Sages were especially careful in their performance of one particular commandment. Although they certainly observed all 613 of the Torah's mitzvot, their performance of that one mitzva was especially praiseworthy. The exemplary observance of that one mitzva served as the conduit through which all other mitzvot flowed.

A person cannot choose his own spiritual bent; it is an integral part of his individual spiritual makeup. But how does one determine exactly which mitzvot are especially relevant to him? By objectively ascertaining those which he finds the hardest to do!

A person may safely assume that a given direction is his "inheritance" whenever the path seems strewn with obstacles and hindrances. In fact, the more important the mitzva, the harder the Evil Inclination tries to dissuade the person.

A lack of interest in a particular facet of Torah study or indifference to a certain mitzva indicates that it is precisely in these areas that special efforts must be made. In the merit of this effort, G-d grants the individual success in all other areas of his life as well.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Lions Wearing Tefillin

By Rabbi Eli Friedman

The name Operation Rising Lion in Hebrew is Mivtza Am K'lavi - "Operation Nation Like a Lioness." The phrase is from the Torah, Bamidbar 23:24.

The evil prophet Bilaam has been retained to lay a curse upon the Jewish People, but G-d has compelled him to bless them instead. And so he sings the praises of Israel, blessing them and explaining to the king why battling the Israelites is futile. And this is one of those lines:

"Behold, (Israel is) a people that rises like a lioness, leaps up like a lion." You can see the full verse written out in Hebrew in the Prime Minister's Kotel prayer note for the Operation's success.

Rashi illuminates the verse, explaining the message Bilaam is conveying to Balak.

"When they (Israel) rise from their sleep in the morning, they show themselves strong as a lioness and as a lion to "snatch at" the Divine precepts, to perform them immediately — to clothe themselves with the Tallit, to read the Shema, and to lay Tefillin."

Balak wanted a military advantage over Israel. He hired Bilaam to curse and demoralize Israel. He wanted a military victory, and Bilaam advised him to give up because the Jewish People wake up and put on their Tallit and Tefillin and recite the Shema.

One needs no further elaboration to understand that we here in America must not sit with folded hands while Israel engages her enemies militarily. While the IDF

does what it does, we can do our part. When Israel rises with Tallit and Tefillin and Shema, the war is already won; there's no need for our enemies to engage. It's in the name of the operation! When they start up with rising lions, they've already lost.

So drape that Tallit over your shoulders and strap on your Tefillin. It's war, and spiritually speaking, every Jew is on the front lines. If you don't already have the recitation of the Shema as a twice-daily habit, now is a perfect, crucial time to start.

Join the operation! It's time for the lions to rise like never before.



When the Jewish People wandered the desert, they were led by the holy ark containing the Ten Commandments. In fact, the holy ark traveled three days ahead of them, blazing and clearing the path forward. And thus, whenever they hit the road, Moses would pray for G-d's presence to keep pace with them, not to leave them behind, but to keep the distance of three days and not more.

Take this to heart: G-d is (at least) three days ahead of us. The path Israel has taken, is taking, and will always take - G-d stays way ahead of us.

Trust the process. Strengthen your faith, strong as a lion, snatch every Mitzvah that comes your way, and do your lioness best to support the effort. May G-d bless Israel, bless our fighters, bless His lions, discourage our enemies, and bless this beautiful world with peace.

SLICE OF LIFE

Sacred Brushstrokes: The Spiritual Journey of a Jewish Artist



Yossi Bitton is a world renowned Israeli artist known for his contemporary Jewish art

In his quiet studio in Israel, Yossi Bitton pauses to study his latest creation—a luminous depiction of Jerusalem's ancient walls that has consumed six months of his life. As his brush glides across the canvas, each stroke feels less like artistic technique and more like prayer, an offering of the soul captured in pigment and passion.

"I'm deeply connected to the figure of Bezalel, who built the Tabernacle," says the 68-year-old artist, whose works now grace homes throughout Israel and across the world. Born in the mystical city of Safed, Bitton's path to becoming a celebrated Jewish artist followed an unexpected route that wove together art, spirituality, and a profound journey of return.

The ancient city of Safed was far more than just his birthplace. "It's not just my hometown and a spiritual center, but the source of my artistic inspiration," Bitton reflects thoughtfully. "I absorbed the connection to art from the great artists who lived there. I would go with a friend to the Artists' Quarter in the city, which was nothing more than a large alley. From a

young age, I was drawn to painting. I would observe the painters at work and learned a great deal from them."

Despite this early fascination with art, Bitton's journey toward religious observance came later in life. "I grew up in a warm, traditional family. My parents, precious and innocent people, sent us to the nearest school, a public school. There, we didn't receive knowledge about Judaism." At home, his family maintained a limited set of traditions: "We experienced Judaism in the form of Kiddush on Friday night and holiday meals, but not much beyond that."

His artistic curiosity led him to Europe, where he met accomplished artists and expanded his technical skills. Upon returning to Israel, however, he experienced a profound realization: "I understood that I actually knew nothing about my own religion." After attending a seminar with the outreach organization "Arachim," Bitton discovered a world that had been hidden from him. "I decided to make a significant change in my life. Several family members had become close to Chabad, which pushed me further toward the world of teshuva (return to religious observance)."

This spiritual awakening guided him to Yeshivat Or Sameach, where he devoted himself entirely to Torah study for many years, temporarily setting aside his artistic talents. The turning point came unexpectedly: "I had a friend in the yeshiva to whom I owed a debt of gratitude. When he got married, I thought about a special gift and painted the 'Baba Sali' for him." This painting reignited his artistic career, though he continued his religious studies in parallel.

After years of learning, Bitton began teaching at a Talmud Torah (religious elementary school), where his artistic abilities found new expression. "I invested heavily in the parent communication sheets. The parents were impressed. I decorated the building's walls." Two years after finishing his work there, the principal enthusiastically told him they were still using his illustrations.

It wasn't until his late forties, about twenty

years ago, that Bitton made the decisive step to make painting his primary occupation. "At first it was for my livelihood, and over time it became part of my heart. I invest my soul in the creations. It's difficult for me to part with each one of them."

When Bitton paints sacred subjects like the Tabernacle and its vessels, he enters a state of complete immersion. "I breathe and truly live the creation. I get excited each time anew at the thought that I'm painting the future redemption that we so desire. That's how I felt when I painted the pilgrimage to Jerusalem."

One of his most profound artistic experiences came when painting the Lubavitcher Rebbe. "When I sat in front of the canvas and began painting the Rebbe, I felt awe. It was a deep experience of connection to a great soul. With each brush stroke, I thought about the values the Rebbe represents: unconditional love for fellow Jews, infinite dedication, and the ability to see the great potential hidden in each person. I invested many weeks in this creation."

In our age of artificial intelligence, Bitton remains confident about the future of authentic Jewish art. "The whole world is excited about artificial intelligence, but I'm convinced it has no chance of replacing authentic Jewish painting. The reason is simple: it lacks the Jewish soul that we, the painters, infuse into our paintings. It can copy, duplicate, but not create an authentic and pure Jewish creation."

As he continues to create vibrant visions of Jerusalem, the Tabernacle, and scenes of redemption, Bitton offers encouragement to those who might possess artistic talent: "Do you have a talent for painting? Don't belittle it. You've received a gift from the Creator—invest in it and use this wonderful gift for good things."

His paintings, infused with spirituality and tradition, serve as windows to a world both ancient and timeless—one where art and faith create a tapestry as rich and vibrant as the history of the Jewish people themselves.

Adapted from Sichat HaShavua

Where the Savannah Meets the City ... Chabad Flourishes



In the heart of Kenya, where the savannah meets the city and wildlife roams just beyond the backyard, Jewish life is flourishing.

Rabbi Levi and Chaya Mushka Notik recently arrived in Nairobi to serve a diverse

and dynamic Jewish population: approximately 500 families in Nairobi, additional communities across the country and thousands of Jewish tourists who visit Kenya each year.

Since their arrival, the Notiks have established a welcoming Chabad House that offers Shabbat meals, Torah classes, children's programming and holiday celebrations. They've distributed hundreds of mezuzahs, many individuals have acquired tefillin, and a strong Jewish community presence continues to expand throughout the region.

ETHICS CHAPTER ONE

He would also say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

Shammai would say: Make your Torah study a permanent fixture of your life. Say little and do much. And receive every man with a pleasant countenance.

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While the Holy Temple stood, G-d gave the Jews a way to purify themselves from even the grossest impurity, and that was through sprinkling upon them the ashes of a red heifer. But finding such a cow was no easy matter. First of all, it had to be completely red, with not even the slightest admixture of another color.

Secondly, it had to be a cow which had never borne a yoke on its neck, that is, a cow which had not yet been used for any work. Such a heifer was rare, and, therefore, every valuable, and the Sages would go to great lengths to procure one.

So, when the Sages heard that a red heifer was owned by a certain gentile, they travelled to see him and to examine the heifer. Upon close examination, they saw that the cow was completely kosher and they offered to buy it. "We would like to buy this cow from you and we will gladly meet your price. How much do you want?"

The gentile was very agreeable and answered, "If you pay what I'm asking, I will sell it to you." The man realized that this was his chance to make a good profit. He said, "I'm asking three, no, four gold coins."

Although the price was high, the Sages didn't haggle. They agreed at once, saying only that they had to return home for the rest of the money.

When they left, the gentile began to think: Why did the Jews want this particular cow? What was so special about it? And if something was so special about this cow, perhaps he should have asked a higher price. He thought and thought, until he remembered that the Jews needed a red calf for their Temple. He decided to renegotiate when they came back.

The rabbis returned shortly, expecting to make the purchase and return home, but the gentile refused to sell the animal! He demanded a much higher price--a thousand gold coins! The rabbis were shocked, but acquiesced and returned home to get the enormous sum of money required.

The gentile, however, wasn't satisfied. Now he decided to have one up on them. He would put a yoke on the cow's back--why, they would never know and he would get the money anyway! What he didn't know was that there were two signs distinguishing a cow that has never worked from a cow which has borne a yoke: there are two hairs on a cow's neck that stand up straight before a yoke is placed upon it and a cow's eyes look straight ahead. Afterward, its eyes tend to cross and look to the side.

The Sages returned, money in hand, ready to bring the precious heifer back to Jerusalem with them. They examined it for a final time, but they couldn't believe their eyes! The telltale hairs on the heifer's back were now flat and crooked. They checked the heifer's eyes, and they were crossed and gazed to the side. They understood that they'd been duped. The cow that had been priceless in value was now worthless.

Meanwhile, the gentile, never suspecting a problem, was impatiently waiting to receive his money. His mouth dropped open when he heard the words: "We have no use for your cow now, since by putting a yoke in it, you have made it invalid for use in our Holy Temple. We will have to look further for a red heifer." With those words, the rabbis turned and sadly made their way

back to Jerusalem without the coveted cow?

The gentiles were shocked by what had occurred. He had thought to play a joke on the Jews, but he had never dreamed that he would be the one to suffer. His opinion of the Jewish Sages changed to one of respect and admiration. How had these holy men been able to discern any difference in the heifer? The man suffered from his great disappointment to such an extent that his health suffered and he was never the same again.

THOUGHTS

THAT COUNT

On the Ethics of our Fathers

"All Israel have a share in the World to Come" (Intro to Ethics of the Fathers)

In Hebrew, the verse literally says, "All Israel, they have a share in the World to Come." The plural is used to indicate that it is only because of their brotherhood and unity that the Jewish people is deserving of reward. According to Maimonides, a person who is otherwise totally scrupulous in religious observance but separates himself from the Jewish community is not worthy of a portion of the World to Come. (*Blossoms*, Rabbi Yisroel Rubin)

"Moses received the Torah from Sinai" (Ethics, 1:1).

Why doesn't the verse say, "Moses received the Torah from G-d"?

Just as the Jews received the Torah at Sinai with awe and reverence, so too must all Torah study be approached with the same respect. Furthermore, the Torah in its entirety was revealed at Sinai, including those commandments which G-d had previously given the Jewish people. All mitzvot are done solely by virtue of their being given at Sinai. (*Biurim L'Pirkei Avot*)

"And passed it on to Joshua" (Ethics, 1:1).

Just as Moses passed on to Joshua the complete body of Torah knowledge, so too must we impart the entire Torah to future generations. Because all Jews inherit the Torah from Moses, as it states, "The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Jacob," we must likewise emulate his actions as well. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe, shlita)

"Whoever engages in excessive talk brings on sin" (Ethics, 1:17).

Rabbi Abraham Yaakov Sadigorer used to say: "The train was invented to teach us that every minute in life is important; a person may miss the train if he arrives even one minute late. The telegraph was invented to teach us that our every word is precious, numbered and accounted for. And from the telephone we learn that everything that is said is also heard..."(*Fun Unser Alten Otzar*)

לעילוי נשמת
רחמים בן שרה

Dedicated in memory of
Raymond Braha OBM

ת"צ'רה
By Victor Braha



8:05 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
22 Tammuz / July 18
Torah Portion Pinchas
Ethics Ch 1
Shabbat ends 9:11 PM