

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, Vayechi, Jacob, on his deathbed, makes a last request of his son Joseph. "Bury me not, I pray you, in Egypt!" he implores. "I will do as you have said," Joseph promises his father. But Joseph's promise is not enough. "Swear to me!" Jacob insists, and Joseph does.

Why was Joseph's promise insufficient? Was Jacob worried that his son would not fulfill his promise? What is the difference between a promise and an oath?

An oath differs from a promise in the sense of obligation and urgency it imposes. When a person makes a promise, he most certainly intends to carry out his word when the opportunity presents itself, but he does not spend all of his waking hours thinking about the promise and wondering how to implement it. But when a person utters an oath, it becomes the single most important motivating factor in his life. An oath is so serious, in fact, that the person dare not divert his mind from the matter for even a moment.

Jacob realized that what he asked of Joseph was so difficult and fraught with obstacles that the force of an oath was necessary.

This exchange between father and son also underscores an important difference between Jacob and Joseph: Jacob refused to be interred in Egypt, insisting that his body be brought back to the land of Israel for burial. Joseph, however, before his death, made the Jews swear they would take his bones back with them to Israel when the time for redemption came. His casket remained in Egypt for the duration of the exile.

It is erroneous to conclude that Jacob's request was made for selfish reasons; that he preferred to be buried in the holy soil of Israel while his children languished in Egyptian exile. Rather, Jacob's concern was for the welfare of the entire Jewish people.

"The prisoner cannot free himself from prison," our Sages have declared. The Jewish people, subjugated and enslaved, needed an outside force to free them from exile in Egypt. This outside force was the merit of Jacob, whose rightful place was the holy land of Israel, from where the Jewish people drew strength and spiritual sustenance.

Joseph, however, was exiled in Egypt with the rest of his brethren. His positive influence came from within and was therefore closer and more immediate. When he passed away, his remains stayed in Egypt, affording the Jews an additional merit. Jacob wanted to forestall the possibility that Joseph would want his body to remain in Egypt for this reason, and insisted that he swear to his request.

We learn from this that although the Divine Presence has indeed accompanied us throughout our exile, a Jew must nevertheless cry out for the galut to end and for all of us to be "carried out of Egypt." With faith and trust in G-d we will merit the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption, speedily in our day.

Adapted from Collected Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, vol. 25.

Why It Is Good That Life Is a Struggle

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

As much as we may prefer an "easy" life, and no matter how "perfect" other people's lives look, the truth about life is that it is a struggle — and that's healthy. The "feel good" advertising industry wants us to think that an easy life is one click or one purchase away. That is simply not true — life is meant to be challenging. Here are the whys and hows of embracing it.

STRUGGLE IS THE PURPOSE OF EXISTENCE

It's an illusion to think that life is easy and that faith is bliss. On the contrary — life is a battle. And it is precisely this battle that we were designed to face. Therefore, do not be disturbed or demoralized by your challenges, by your inconsistencies and by your weaknesses. Do not be shaken when you do not live up to your highest aspirations, and often do not actualize or maintain your inspiration. Do not be discouraged — because this struggle is the fundamental purpose of all of existence.

BE HONEST: FACE THE TRUTH OF THE CHALLENGE

So many of us try to fight the fact that life is difficult, and we seek out ways to numb ourselves or find temporary balms to make us feel good. We turn to all sorts of escapes to relieve our pain. But they never last. However, when you embrace the struggle and realize that it is exactly what life was meant to be, you paradoxically get empowered to face your challenges with confidence and

strength. The key is not to deceive yourself into thinking that the world is just fine and you can remain passive and complacent. You must be wise and awake to life's traps and realize that life is a struggle. Make peace with your struggles. The first step to winning your battles is to recognize their value and importance.

YOU HAVE TOOLS TO FACE IT

You must always know that each challenge, no matter how difficult, comes with tools to face that challenge and come out stronger. Since struggle is the purpose of life, and not just some incidental distraction, you are provided with all the resources you need to deal with your struggles. Whatever difficulty and hardship that comes your way, whatever loss or setback you are experiencing, you must always know that you have all the tools necessary to face the struggle and prevail. Not just prevail but thrive and grow, and transform your corner of the world. This is also true about past traumas. You always have the ability to begin at whatever stage you are in your life.

START AT HOME

In order to take on life's battles, you need a strong foundation. What is most vital is to create a peaceful oasis — a space, a moment, a corner, in which you have the ability to stock up, gather strength and reinforce yourself before you face the harsh realities around you. This also serves as a solid base and station from which you can engage the often difficult world, and do what it takes to reveal the light in the darkness.

SLICE OF LIFE

NSW Government Launches 'One Mitzvah for Bondi' in Unprecedented Response to Terror Attack

By Moshe New / Chabad.org

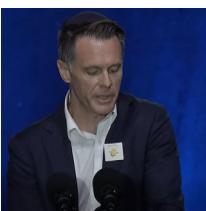
The New South Wales government—the Australian state where the Bondi massacre in Sydney took place last Sunday—has launched a campaign asking all its citizens to perform “one mitzvah” in honor of the 15 people murdered in the Bondi Beach terrorist attack, the dozens injured, and the community at large.

The “One Mitzvah for Bondi” campaign, announced by Premier Chris Minns at the final night of Chanukah celebrations at Bondi Beach last week, represents a departure from typical governmental responses to tragedy. Rather than offering only condolences and increased security, NSW has embraced a distinctly Jewish concept and vocabulary to unite the state in response to an antisemitic massacre.

“A mitzvah is a simple but powerful idea: a concrete act of goodness, something you do that makes the world more just, more compassionate, more humane,” Minns said at the launch. “The One Mitzvah for Bondi campaign is inspired by Rabbi Eli Schlanger.”

Schlanger, 41, the assistant rabbi of Chabad-Lubavitch of Bondi, was murdered at the “Chanukah by the Sea” celebration on Dec. 14. He had long advocated that the proper response to antisemitism was not to hide Jewish identity but for Jews to increase their Jewish observance and for one and all to perform more acts of goodness.

As he told Chabad.org prior to Chanukah 2024, during a spate of antisemitic attacks in Australia: “Be more Jewish, act more Jewish and appear more Jewish.”



NSW Premier Chris Minns announces the 'One Mitzvah for Bondi' campaign.

‘We Have to Increase in Light’

The campaign emerged from an emergency session of the NSW Faith Affairs Council held the day after the attack. Minister for Multiculturalism Steve Kamper convened faith leaders from across the state and posed a direct question: What could the broader community do to support the Jewish community at this moment?

Rabbi Nochum Schapiro of Sydney’s Chabad North Shore responded with two requests: Stand with the Jewish community unambiguously, and do one mitzvah—an act of kindness or charity to bring light into the world.

Rabbi Eli Feldman, rabbi of the Newtown Synagogue and director, with his wife Elka, of Young Adult Chabad, has been instrumental in organizing the campaign. “The minister loved it,” he said of Kamper’s response. “He said: ‘let’s do it!’” The campaign was immediately put to action. The decision to use the Hebrew word “mitzvah” rather than translate it was intentional and significant, said Elka Feldman. “Minister Kamper was inspired to bring the message and mission of the Jewish people to the community of NSW.”

A Governmental First

Governmental responses to terror attacks sometimes focus on much-needed security measures, but more often than not veer towards vigils and generic calls for unity—before life continues and people move on.

“Such a governmental response to a tragedy is unprecedented,” Rabbi Feldman noted. “To take such a proudly Jewish and meaningful concept and apply it so broadly and so explicitly is truly groundbreaking.”

The initiative encourages Australians to undertake concrete actions—donating blood, volunteering, calling someone they haven’t spoken to in a while, buying a neighbor coffee, supporting local businesses or helping those in need—and to share their actions using #OneMitzvahforBondi or by registering at nsw.gov.au/onemitzvah.

“At the core of our faith communities is a commitment to love and compassion,” said Dr. Michael Stead, chairman of the NSW Faith Affairs Council. “The NSW Faith Affairs Council encourages everyone to take part in the ‘One Mitzvah for Bondi’ campaign, to spread warmth and kindness to our fellow Australians.”

Living Rabbi Schlanger’s Vision

Kamper, NSW’s minister of multiculturalism, emphasized the campaign’s roots in Jewish resilience and its applicability to all Australians.

“In the face of this terrible atrocity, our Jewish community has responded with remarkable kindness and compassion,” he said. “This call to action is the remedy our heartbroken city requires at this time.”

According to Feldman, the response has been overwhelming. “It’s been well received in the community. People are inspired,” he said. One journalist who reached out to cover the campaign told the rabbi that she was so moved by the concept that she planned to begin lighting Shabbat candles. On social media, particularly in groups like “Jews of Sydney” with more than 10,000 members, photos of people wearing yarmulkes and Magen David necklaces have proliferated, garnering hundreds of comments from people using the opportunity to be as visibly Jewish as possible where in the past they may have been discreet.

At Schlanger’s funeral, Kamper told the Feldmans that he “wants to see Jewish people being more Jewish!”

‘We’re Not Going to Let the Pain Break Us’

For Feldman and the broader Jewish community, the campaign embodies the quintessentially Jewish, and even more so Chabad, spiritual response to violence.

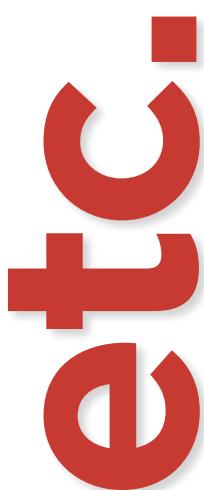
“In the Jewish tradition taught to us by the Rebbes of Chabad, we have to strengthen ourselves,” Feldman explained. “In the spirit of Chanukah, we have to increase in light, and only by increasing in light can we vanquish the darkness. That’s what we need to dedicate ourselves to as the greatest tribute to the martyrs.”

The campaign asks participants to share their acts of kindness with others, creating “a visible record of collective acts of kindness” and “a ripple effect of goodness” across NSW and beyond.

“Our hearts are broken, and we’re shattered, shocked, saddened, angry,” Feldman said. “But we’re not going to let the sadness and the pain break us.”

The ultimate vision, according to Feldman, is to see “millions of kind acts shared across humanity, demonstrating the power of everyday acts of kindness to build connection, compassion and a shared future.”

As Minns, the premier of NSW, said during the celebration of the eighth night of Chanukah at Bondi Beach, standing where Schlanger was murdered just days before: “Even in this period of sadness and evil, there is work to do. Action to confront this hatred. That is the task of every citizen, to seek peace and pursue it.”



Belgian PM Stands with Jewish Community at Antwerp Menorah Lighting

Following the tragic terror attack in Sydney, Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever announced that he was postponing all official engagements to attend the Chanukah event in Antwerp and show support for the Jewish community. Senior government ministers and the Mayor of Antwerp were also in attendance.

The central menorah lighting was led by Rabbi Yossi Slavatitsky, the Rebbe’s shliach in Antwerp. Hundreds of members of the Jewish community—children, youth, and adults—participated.

Speaking with visible emotion, the Prime Minister emphasized that the light of Chanukah represents the triumph of light over darkness and faith over fear. “We are here. We do not surrender. And we continue forward,” he declared.

A Call To Action

Think about and do something on behalf of Jewish education:

“It is the absolute duty of every person to spend half an 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.”

(As quoted by the Rebbe in Hayom Yom)

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

5 Tevet, 5736 (1976)

In reply to your inquiry and request for instructions in connection with the forthcoming Fast of Asara b'Tevet (10th of Tevet), in view of the situation in and around Israel---

You will surely be instructed by the rabbi of your congregation, however, since you have also approached me in this matter, I will set forth, at least, several suggestions--after the following introductory remarks:

Regrettably, there are people who claim that it is necessary to think and act "big," in terms of global dimensions and stupendous undertakings, etc. Surely they mean well; and to the extent that such resolutions are practical and are actually carried out--they are very helpful in improving the situation.

Yet, we must never overlook--indeed, rather greatly emphasize--the so-called "small and unsophisticated" things which each modest congregation, moreover each individual, can and must do--beginning with the old, yet ever-new, Jewish way, collectively as one people and also as individuals. This is the action of "the voice is the voice of Jacob"--Torah and prayer--which G-d Himself has shown us to be the first effective action to nullify the power of "the hands of Esau"--in whatever shape or form they are raised against us.

Certainly this should find the fullest expression in a day which the Shulchan Aruch declares to be a day of fasting, one to which the prophet Isaiah refers as a "chosen fast...a fast and time favored by G-d."

Now, in answer to your inquiry, and since the Fast of Asara b'Tevet is specially

connected with the Holy Land and the Holy City of Jerusalem (recalling the siege of Jerusalem), my suggestion --in addition to the regular "observances" on fast days, as set forth at length and in detail in Poskim [halachic adjudicators] and in books of Mussar and Chasidut--is as follows:

During this day--expressly for the sake (zechut) of the security and strengthening of the Holy Land, materially and spiritually, and for the material and spiritual benefit of all Jews wherever they are--in the Holy Land as well as in the Diaspora--and particularly for the benefit of our brethren behind the "Iron Curtain"--a special effort should be made in the spirit of "Old Israel"--in the areas of Torah, tefila, and tzedaka.

Especially after davening (both in the morning and at Mincha) one should learn (and where there already are daily study groups, to add) a subject in Torah, including halacha pesuka (final ruling). Immediately following the davening, even before learning, one should say several chapters of Tehillim [Psalms] (in addition to the regular portion).

Before and after davening--one should give tzedaka (in addition to the regular donation), including tzedaka for a sacred cause or institution in the Holy Land, the "Land of Living."

Needless to say, one who repeats the above again and again in the course of the day is to be praised.

And the more one does it (in quantity and quality), the more praiseworthy it is.

And, as in all matters of holiness, it is desirable that all the above be done b'tzibbur (with at least a minyan).

May G-d accept, and He will accept, the prayers and supplications of Jews wherever they are.

And soon, in our very own days, may the Promise be fulfilled that "These days will be transformed into days of rejoicing and gladness," with the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Talmud explains that G-d grants reward "measure for measure." It thus follows that to merit that the revelations of

the Era of the Redemption be internalized within the world itself, our divine service cannot be "above the world," but rather must be integrated within the day to day realities in which we live.

(From Dawn to Daylight by Rabbi E. Touger)

"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

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism, whose yahrtzeit we will be commemorating later this month on 24 Teves, taught that "a Jew has to live with the times" -- the "Jewish times" being the eternal Torah in its weekly Torah portion readings.

This week's Torah portion begins with the words: "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years." According to our Sages, these were Jacob's best years.

It is related that when the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Chabad Rebbe, learned this Torah portion as a boy, he asked his grandfather, Rabbi Schneur Zalman: "How could our father Jacob have lived his best years in a place like Egypt?" (Egypt was known for its crass materialism and depravity -- utterly foreign to the spirit of our Patriarch.)

Rabbi Schneur Zalman replied: "In the preceding portion we are told that Jacob had sent his son Judah ahead of him to Goshen (in Egypt) to establish a Torah center for the twelve tribes and their children and grandchildren. Thus, wherever the Torah and mitzvot are studied and observed, a Jew can live his best years, even in Egypt."

Today we stand at a point in history, after the Rebbe had declared that "The time of the Redemption has come" and "Moshiach is on his way," we prepare each day for the Messianic Era. And yet, we must live with the times. We must continue to learn from our Patriarch Jacob, and continue to establish centers of Torah study for young and old. In addition, the Rebbe has enjoined us to learn about the Redemption and Moshiach, so that even those places of study established long ago should "live with the times" and enhance their learning with the study of these subjects.

As the Rebbe expressed, "This is the way to hasten the Geula." May it happen immediately

Shmuel Butman



L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA

לזכרון חייה 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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The era of the First Holy Temple was replete with both the greatest wonders and the greatest temptations. Although miracles were daily occurrences, the people succumbed to the temptation of idol worship which prevailed among the nations of the world at that time. Destruction came upon the Jewish nation slowly, and though the prophets begged the people to return from their sinful practices, it was to no avail.

In the year 3228 (533 b.c.e.), Menashe, the evil son of the righteous King Chizkiyahu, rose to the throne of Judea. Through his insidious influence idol worship spread through the land. The next half century saw the great struggle between the arch-rivals Babylonia and Egypt encroach into the Jewish kingdom, as Judea became a vassal king of King Nebuchadnezar.

The year 434 b.c.e. saw the first wave of exiles, the elite of Jerusalem, leave for Babylonia. These men included the greatest leaders and scholars of the time: Mordechai, Daniel and Ezekiel, men who would be instrumental in bringing about great miracles in the future. Only the poor were left in the land, and the future clearly pointed to the exiled community which was to grow and flourish in Babylonia.

Eight years later, the end came as the forces of the Babylonian commander besieged Jerusalem and battered its defences. The Holy Temple, the king's palace, as well as the rest of the city was burned and laid waste. The remaining leaders were executed and the people forced into exile under torturous conditions.

Although the destruction had been bloody and crushing, the Jewish exiles in Babylonia gradually rebuilt their lives and communities. The Babylonian rulers permitted the Jews considerable independence to reconstruct Jewish life in the new environment. The adjustment was made easier by the fact that the earlier exiles were now well established.

The exiles thought that their stay in Babylon would be a short one. They waited and longed for the day on which they would return to the Holy Land. However, it was decreed differently: The prophet Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) told them that it was decreed in Heaven that they must remain in Babylon. "Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat their fruit...Increase there...Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to G-d for her, because through her peace, you will have peace."

And so, the exiled Jews settled down in Babylon. But how could they retain their Jewishness in a foreign land, bereft of the Holy Temple and its Divine service, and surrounded as they were by idol worshippers? The guidance of the Sages of the time set the pattern for Jewish life for all coming generations by establishing the foundations of Torah study, assuring the continuation of the Jewish people both in and out of exile.

One of the early exiled Jews mentioned above was Daniel. Together with three companions, the fifteen-year-old Daniel was amongst those chosen to attend the king in the royal palace. True to their upbringing, Daniel and his friends resisted the temptations of the royal lifestyle. Refusing to partake of non-kosher food, they were given beans and water, but in spite of this meager diet, they remained robust. The wisdom of the Jewish youths attracted attention, and Daniel and his companions were appointed to high positions in the royal court. Nebuchadnezzar had reached the pinnacle of his power, but he began to worry about the future.

One of the most remarkable episodes in the life of Daniel occurred when the king had a terrifying dream. When he awoke, the king was unable to remember the dream that had so frightened him. His terror and anxiety mounted, and he summoned his advisors, and ordered them to reveal to him both the dream and its meaning. But even under the threat of death, they couldn't explain a dream which the king himself couldn't recall.

Then, the king called upon Daniel. In response to his prayers, G-d enabled Daniel to describe and interpret the dream. His explanation was as follows: The king saw in his dream a towering statue whose head was made of gold. The golden head represented

Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the known world at the time. The chest and arms were silver, which symbolized Persia and Media, weaker kingdoms, which would, nevertheless, replace Babylon. The thighs of the statue were copper, representing Greece, the third and weaker empire in the chain. Its legs were of iron, this symbolic of the cruel rule of Rome, the fourth empire. The statue's toes were partly iron and partly earthenware. This represented the two kingdoms which would follow Rome: the Holy Roman Empire and the Moslem rule and the many smaller kingdom's which would result from their fragmentation. As the dream continued, a small stone rolled toward the figure and smashed it. Then, the small stone grew into a huge mountain. This small stone represented the King Moshiach, who would overthrow these kingdoms and rule in the end.

The king accepted Daniel's interpretation and raised him to even higher rank. A succeeding king, Belshazzar was to have another, even more astonishing need for Daniel's interpretive powers when Hebrew words mysteriously appeared on the wall of his palace during a drinking orgy. He interpreted those words correctly, as well, predicting the demise of his kingdom, which occurred that same night.



Until Shiloh comes (Gen. 49:10)

Rashi comments that the above words refer to Moshiach. In addition, the Baal HaTurim points out that the Hebrew words meaning "Shiloh comes" have the same numerical value as the word "Moshiach." The word "comes" (yavo) contains a profound allusion to the means by which Moshiach can be brought. For yavo is numerically equivalent to the word echad--one. When there will be unity among Jews, and in particular, when Jews will unite in speaking about Moshiach, they will succeed in drawing down and realizing the ultimate Redemption through the Righteous Moshiach. (*The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe*)

Benjamin shall be a wolf that rends (Gen. 49:27)

The task of Benjamin, referred to as ben-acher--"another son"--in the Torah, is to elevate the "other," the animal soul of man, until it is in the category of a "son" of G-d. For this reason Benjamin is likened to the wolf, which rips into its prey and rends it into pieces. (*Ohr Hatorah*)

G-d will surely remember you (Gen. 50:25)

When Joseph told the Jews that the time for their redemption was near, he gave them a sign by which they would recognize their redeemer. "G-d will surely remember you (pakod yifkod)," he said, doubling the verb "to remember" for added emphasis. For true redemption must free both body and soul, liberating the Jews from physical and spiritual enslavement. Physical freedom alone is not enough; even return to the Holy Land is insufficient without the spiritual component which signifies true redemption. So it was in Egypt, and so is it today...

(*Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin*)



4:22 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area

13 Tevet / January 2

Torah Portion Vayechi

Shabbat ends 5:26PM