



L'Chaim

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Living with the Rebbe



As we read in this week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, the sons of Jacob found idols among the spoils of their encounter with Shechem. But Jacob told his children to get rid of them. "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and cleanse yourselves," he instructed them. This verse is cited by Maimonides as an allusion to our Sages' decree that idol worship defiles an individual.

At first glance, the very concept of idol worship defies comprehension. How could anything that negates G-d's absolute unity and dominion over His creation even exist? Indeed, this same question was asked of the Seventy Elders by the Greek King Ptolemy, to which they replied that G-d needn't destroy His world "just because there are fools" who worship the sun and planets.

But why did G-d create the world in such a way as to give man the option of worshipping idols? Why didn't He create a universe in which it is patently obvious that He and He alone is in charge?

The answer lies in the above-cited verse, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and cleanse yourselves." The only reason G-d allows for the possibility of idolatry is for Jews to refute it. In other words, G-d wants the Jewish people to demonstrate to the entire world that idolatry has no meaning.

The prohibition against idol worship is essentially different from all other prohibitions in the Torah, as idolatry does not really exist. It is forbidden to eat non-kosher food or chametz (leavened) on Passover; the non-kosher food and chametz are there, but the Torah forbids us to eat them or derive benefit from them. Idolatry, by contrast, is only an illusion. It is simply not possible for anything other than G-d to control or influence reality. A person who serves idols worships a fallacy; his thinking is deluded and false. But G-d doesn't want this to be imposed from Above. He wants man to discover it for himself, and to prove that idolatry has no true existence.

On a deeper level, not only doesn't idolatry have an independent existence, but nothing can exist independent of G-d. Seen in this light, all of creation is part and parcel of His unity, as the concept of "otherness" doesn't truly exist. The function of the Jewish people is to reveal this concept to the world at large, through the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot.

This recognition should serve to encourage us in our Divine service. A person may sometimes encounter difficulties and obstacles that seem to require a superhuman effort to overcome. Not so, the Torah reminds us; they are only an illusion. G-d is the only true existence in the world. All that is necessary is that we "put away" the "strange gods" among us, whereupon the underlying G-dly truth is revealed.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Vol. 30

When Are You Coming?

by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chasidism, writes that he was once granted a spiritual vision of Moshiach. Unabashed, he asked him: "When are you coming?" Moshiach answered him: "When the wellsprings of your teachings spread outward."

Chasidic teachings explains that Moshiach was not giving the Baal Shem Tov a time frame, he was explaining to him the pattern of spiritual causation.

When will Moshiach come? When the world is ready to receive him. And when will the world be ready? When the wellsprings of Chasidut, the Baal Shem Tov's teachings, spread outward.

Chasidut makes us aware of the G-dly spark within our souls and the spiritual reality that permeates the world at large. When the awareness of these factors spreads throughout humanity, the world will be prepared to accept Moshiach.

Two generations later, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chasidism, was imprisoned by the Czarist authorities. He was sending money to Chasidim who had settled in Israel, and the Russians thought that he was conspiring with the Turks (rulers of Israel at that time) to fight the Czar.

While in prison, Rabbi Shneur Zalman had a vision of the Baal Shem Tov and asked him what was the real reason for his imprisonment.

The Baal Shem Tov told him that there were spiritual factors involved. Rabbi Shneur Zalman had been spreading Chasidic teachings without restraint, and this had aroused negative forces in the spiritual realms. "The world is not ready," these forces claimed, "for such a great revelation." And therefore, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was imprisoned.

"If I am released, should I change my approach?" Rabbi Shneur Zalman asked.

"No," the Baal Shem Tov answered. "If you are released, that will be a sign that your approach has been vindicated."

On Yud-Tet Kislev, the nineteenth day of the month of Kislev, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was released from prison. That date is thus celebrated as a festival. For on it was granted the potential for the wellsprings of the Baal Shem Tov's teachings to be spread outward and prepare the world for Moshiach's coming.

The teachings of Chasidut are a foretaste of the wisdom that Moshiach will reveal. This is the reason why the teachings of Chasidut were revealed at this juncture of time.

The uniqueness of the era of Moshiach will be the outpouring of the knowledge of G-d. As the Prophet tells us: "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover up the ocean bed." Our existence will be submerged in the awareness of G-d; in every element of our lives, we will sense His presence.

The foretaste of that revelation is an overflow of spiritual knowledge: We gain an understanding of the spiritual forces governing our existence, we learn to appreciate G-d's hand guiding our lives, and we sense the oneness with Him contributed by every element of the Torah and its mitzvot. This is granted to us by the teachings of Chasidut.

From Keeping in Touch, published by S.I.E.

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ת"דב

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*Keynote Speaker*

Rabbi Yehoshua B. Gordon resides in Encino, California where he has been the Spiritual Leader of Chabad of Encino for the past 35 years, he was ordained in 1971 at the Rabbinical College of Canada in Montreal.

In the spring of 1973, he and his wife Deborah were appointed by The Lubavitcher Rebbe as his personal emissaries to the San Fernando Valley region. They established Chabad of the Valley which is comprised of some 30 Rabbis and their families assisted by their support staff in 22 centers throughout the greater Valley. Rabbi Gordon is a well known teacher, orator and lecturer who was endowed with an incredible sense of humor. He has traveled the world speaking to diverse groups in places as distant and as exotic as Anchorage and Fairbanks Alaska, Hong Kong, South Africa, Israel and many cities throughout North America.

For more info contact Rabbi Elimelech Levy @ info@yeshiva.org.au or 0433 549 190

Parsha in a Nutshell

Jacob returns to the Holy Land after a 20-year stay in Charan, and sends angel-emissaries to Esau in hope of a reconciliation, but his messengers report that his brother is on the warpath with 400 armed men. Jacob prepares for war, prays, and sends Esau a large gift (consisting of hundreds of heads of sheep and cattle) to appease him.

That night, Jacob ferries his family and possessions across the Yabbok River; he, however, remains behind and encounters the angel that embodies the spirit of Esau, with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob suffers a dislocated hip but vanquishes the supernal creature, who bestows on him the name Israel, which means "He who prevails over the Divine."

Jacob and Esau meet, embrace and kiss, but part ways. Jacob purchases a plot of land near Shechem, whose crown prince -- also called Shechem -- abducts and rapes Jacob's daughter Dinah. Dinah's brothers Simon and Levi avenge the deed by killing all male inhabitants of the city after rendering them vulnerable by convincing them to circumcise themselves.

Jacob journeys on. Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, and is buried in a roadside grave near Bethlehem. Reuben loses the birthright because he interferes with his father's marital life. Jacob arrives in Hebron, to his father Isaac, who later dies at age 180 (Rebecca has passed away before Jacob's arrival).

Our parshah concludes with a detailed account of Esau's wives, children and grandchildren, and the family histories of the people of Se'ir among whom Esau settled.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN AND SPIRITUAL LEADER

This Tuesday is the 19th of Kislev, the day of liberation of the founder of Chabad Chasidut, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, from imprisonment on false charges of anti-government activities.

In a well-known letter written upon his release, Rabbi Shneur Zalman declared that the happy tidings of his liberation came to him when he was reading the verse (Ps. 55:19):

"G-d has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle against me, for many were with me."

That Rabbi Shneur Zalman was informed of his release precisely at that moment when he was reading that verse is an act of Divine Providence. And it carries a message for every one of us.

Certainly, everyone is in need of a personal liberation from all of the difficulties and hindrances one encounters in daily life, especially since these obstacles often hamper the attainment of both material and spiritual goals and endeavors.

Jewish teachings explain that on the anniversary of a special day, the same spiritual energy that was present on that day is once more brought into the world. Thus, this year, on the 19th of Kislev, the energy that can bring us the ability to experience personal liberation from difficulties and hindrances to material and spiritual endeavors is invested into the world. We can hook into that energy by being aware of it and by using the day for positive actions and a heightened emphasis on Torah study and mitzvot observance.

When someone experiences a personal liberation, he helps bring liberation and redemption to our entire people and to the whole world. May we all experience personal redemptions this 19th of Kislev culminating in ultimate and Final Redemption that we are all preparing for, with the revelation of Moshiach.

Pinchas Feldman
Rabbi Pinchas Feldman OAM

Smile its Friday

There was once this fellow who did not own a watch. Whenever he wanted to know the time, he would simply ask someone. "Why don't you just buy a watch?" a coworker finally snapped at him after being asked one time too many. "Why should I buy a watch, when I can simply ask!" "Well," asked his coworker, "What do you do in middle of the night?" "I use a Shofar!" said the fellow. "A Shofar?" "Yes. Whenever I want to know the time, I go to the window, I blow the Shofar, and all my neighbors start yelling, 'What are you doing? It's two in the morning!'"

A Map for a Book by Leon Cohen

One needs a map to travel an unknown territory. But how often does one need a map to travel through a book?

To Rabbi Shais Taub, associate director of adult education for Lubavitch of Wisconsin, one Jewish book is so rich and complex, so absorbing in its details and yet whose overall structure is so important, that a reader or student actually could use a map to navigate it. So he provided one.

That book is familiarly known as the Tanya for the book's first word, a Talmud expression for "it has been taught" and that is used to preface quotations from other Jewish literature.

But its author, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe (d. 1812), called it "Likutei Amarim" ("Compilation of Sayings") or "Safer Shel Beinonim" ("Book of the Intermediate Person" - that is, a person who is between having no impulse control and attaining the highest levels of spiritual development).

This book is the "founding text" of the Chabad Lubavitch Chasidism, said Taub. It develops the fundamental principles and concepts of Chabad mysticism; and Lubavitch rebbes for seven generations "have spent time explaining and teaching it."

But Taub, who has been teaching the Tanya for many years in yeshivas and synagogues, to young students and adults, emphasized that this book is not only for Chabadniks.

Its author "did not write it to teach you how to become a Chasid," Taub said. "The point is to teach a person to develop spiritually to a point where they can

master their behavior and find fulfillment in their divine mission on earth. It is applicable not just to all Jews, but to all humanity."

But few other books are so demanding of a reader, according to Taub's description. The author, known as the Alter Rebbe, took some 20 years to write it; and a story has come down about how the author once told his brother that before he would add one letter to the work, he would review the entire book in his mind.

"From that story, I understood the importance of having a cohesive picture of the Tanya," said Taub. "It was written so every letter is integrated with every other letter and interconnected. We should aspire to read it in that fashion."

The problem, however, is that the work "is so textually dense and introduces so many esoteric and mind-blowing ideas on even a single page" that by the time readers have gotten through a chapter, they are likely to have "lost the flow from the overall context."

And the author demands readers who have exceptional memories, Taub indicated. For example, a question asked in chapter one doesn't get answered until chapter 14; and a metaphor first introduced in chapter 35 turns out to be "crucial to understand the culmination of the book in chapter 53," Taub said.

Therefore, about three years ago, Taub concluded from his own experiences of studying and teaching

that "it was important to create a map that students, while studying in depth, could refer to in order to get their bearings back, to understand the flow of ideas, how the chapters flow and lead into each other, how concepts develop over a series of chapters."

He also believed that readers needed "a visual index of where things are" in the Tanya, so those seeking answers or advice for their specific situations can learn what chapter or chapters to consult, Taub said.

So for about six weeks, working "six or seven hours a day," Taub studied the book and many of the commentaries on it, and sketched a map/chart. He then brought his sketches to a Lubavitch graphic designer, who created the publishable "Map of Tanya."

Taub's map was then picked up by the Lubavitch printing firm, Kehot Publication Society, which began printing it for sale about six weeks ago, Taub said. It comes in a large poster format, about 37 by 26 inches, with one side in Hebrew and the other in English.

Though the map has been available for a short time, Taub said he has heard "only good things" about it, and from "everyone from the most erudite Chasidus experts to just laymen who had dabbled in Tanya."

A smaller folded version of the map has also been published that students can use as a bookmark for their copies of the Tanya, Taub said.

Reprinted from the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle

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Moshiach matters

We can gain awareness of Moshiach through the study of the Torah's mystical dimensions, and in particular, through the study of the subjects of redemption and Moshiach. This process will open the eyes of our mind, so that as we live our daily lives, we will remain constantly attuned to the concept of redemption. Furthermore, the increase in our awareness of the nature of the Redemption will serve as a catalyst, that will hasten the day when we can actually open our eyes and see that we are in the Holy Land, and in Jerusalem, and, indeed, in the Holy Temple, with the coming of the Redemption. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 9 Kislev 5752-1991)*

It Happened Once

Reb Moshe Meisels was a loyal Chasid of the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism, and was ever ready to undertake any mission the Rebbe would assign to him.

In the year 1812, when Napoleon invaded Russia, Reb Moshe received a secret letter from the Alter Rebbe. In the letter, the Rebbe informed his trusted Chasid that it was most important for the spiritual well-being of the Jews that Czar Alexander win the war against Napoleon.

When Napoleon's armies reached the gates of Vilna, Reb Moshe "found himself" in the occupied zone. He became friendly with the French officers who were impressed with his wide knowledge of languages and general education. When an interpreter was needed to question captured soldiers and officers, or to deal with the local populace, or to issue public notices and proclamations, Reb Moshe was much in demand to help carry out these tasks. It did not take long before Reb Moshe enjoyed the fullest confidence of the French general staff.

Thus, Reb Moshe was able to learn many important military secrets, and through his connection with other Chasidim of the Alter Rebbe, he was able to transmit important information to the Russian generals on the battlefield.

Once, when Reb Moshe happened to be in the French Generals Headquarters, the generals were making plans about their next attack. Huge maps were spread out on the table, and the generals debated heatedly about the various possibilities of distributing their military forces on the battlefield in order to give the Russians an unexpected blow.

Reb Moshe pretended not to hear or see what was going on, and the generals paid no attention to him.

Suddenly the door burst open and in came Napoleon. The generals sprang to their feet and stood at attention. With one glance Napoleon took in the whole scene.

"What is this stranger doing here?" he demanded, pointing to

Reb Moshe. Without waiting for a reply, Napoleon rushed up to him, exclaiming, "You are a spy!" Saying which, he pressed his hand to Reb Moshe's chest to feel if his heart was beating rapidly at having been unmasked.

But Reb Moshe's heart was not pounding and his face did not pale, as he calmly replied in perfect French:

"Your Majesty, your generals appointed me to be their interpreter, and I await their orders."

His cool manner and calm voice completely disarmed Napoleon, and his suspicions were immediately dispelled. Reb Moshe was saved from certain death.

When Reb Moshe related the episode of his encounter with Napoleon, he declared that the "alef-beit" (most basic teachings) of Chasidut had saved his life at that particular moment. He explained:


"The Rebbe has taught us that the 'alef' of Chasidut is that a Jew has to use his natural powers for the service of G-d. One of these natural powers is that the brain rules the heart. In other words, according to the nature which G-d created in man, reason is basically stronger than feeling; a person has the power to control his emotions. However, it is not enough for a man to know this; he must persistently train himself to exercise this power in his daily life and conduct, until it becomes a natural habit with him. In actual practice this simply means that whenever one feels a strong desire for something, one should say to oneself, 'I can do without it.' The exercise of such self-control is the 'alef' of Chasidut and having mastered this 'alef' one can steadily advance further.

"Thus I have schooled myself to achieve absolute self-control, so that in everything I think, speak, and do, I let my mind rule my heart. And where it is important for the heart to express its feelings, the mind, too, must have its say, to make sure that the feelings do not get out of control.

"And so I trained myself to control my feelings, not to get excited under any circumstances, and not to be overwhelmed by anyone or anybody.

"And this 'alef' of Chasidut saved my life."

Dedicated in
Loving memory of
Leon Grojnowki
13 Kislev


Candle Lighting Times
Friday 12 December 2008

City	In	Out
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