

Shavuos ב"ה *Celebration!*

THE PRACTICAL AND SOULFUL
MEANING OF THE HOLIDAY:

**THE TORAH, THE MITZVOS
AND THEIR PURPOSES**

**SIVAN 5-7, 5780
MAY 28-30, 2020**



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NEW WISCONSIN JEWISH ACADEMY

**WHITE HOUSE SPEECH WRITER
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Celebration!

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Dedicated to the Rebbe,

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, OBM, whose boundless love and teachings are an endless source of inspiration and guidance.

SOME Shavuos Thoughts

TORAH AND CORONA

My Dear Friends, Wisconsin Jewry,

Four Questions

1. Does it really matter when I light Shabbat candles? So what if I light them a bit later than sundown, like say when we sit down to dinner? The main thing is I lit them, right?

2. Come on, a mezuzah is a mezuzah. What's the big deal if mine is a printed paper instead of a parchment hand-written by a certified scribe? Isn't the content what really matters? Plus I'd be saving a bundle, which I can really use for more important things, even tzedakah.

3. Kosher? OK I get it, no pork. But let's be real: beef is beef and chicken is chicken. If it looks kosher, tastes kosher and smells kosher that should be enough. Why pay more – a lot more – just because some rabbi blessed it?

4. Now really, will the world come to an end if I miss a day of tefillin? I tried it once and, believe me, nothing happened.

I dearly miss my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, OBM, always. But more so during these terrifying days of the coronavirus. His clear, consistent, inspiring and elevating voice is so desperately needed. The Rebbe always knew how to dispel anxiety and confusion, fear and doubt. And his words were not merely soothing, they came with a consummate sense of direction, allowing us to know exactly what needed to be done, and how to steer ourselves toward the light at the end of the tunnel.

Yes, we must acknowledge genuine pain, suffering and loss. These are legitimate human emotions. Despair,

however, is not. It merely magnifies a problem. Misery prevents us from finding the solace, significance and a sense of purpose that are life-affirming and life-enhancing.

Far be it from me to imagine what the Rebbe would be telling us right now. It would be presumptuous to speculate how he would be offering us comfort and emotional respite. Yet, I have no doubt – based on the Rebbe's teachings, guidance and the example set – that there are profound lessons embedded in this coronavirus pandemic, ones that apply directly to our lives.

Indeed, there are numerous lessons to be learned from the virus' social impact. In addition to the social lessons derived from the corona lockdown (see page 25), there is something infinitely more important to be gleaned from the very nature of the virus itself.

The corona epidemic began with an invisible microbe (measuring 80 billionths of a meter in diameter) that infected whoever came within even a slight contact with it. In almost no time, the virus was able to spread pandemically to the farthest reaches of the globe.

Yes, a single microscopic microbe brought humankind to its knees – corrupting the environment, afflicting millions, felling hundreds of thousands, destroying entire economies, shattering hopes, isolating people and societies.

We are all paying a heavy price for this minuscule creature. Yet it teaches us an enormous lesson about Almighty G-d's infinite power. Just look at the vast destructive power the

The Significance of Shavuos



Our sages tell us that when G-d spoke the Ten Commandments at Sinai, the Divine voice had no echo.

Our mission as a people, entrusted to us at Sinai, is to implement the ethos and ideals of Torah in our world. No matter what the conditions of a particular time or society might be, there is a transcendent, unequivocal, divinely ordained truth and code of behavior to adhere to.

But often one may feel challenged by a seemingly unresponsive and resisting world. It may appear that one or another of the Torah's precepts does not "fit in" with the prevalent reality. So the Torah tells us that the voice which sounded G-d's message to humanity had no echo.

An echo is created when a sound meets with a substance that resists

it; instead of absorbing its waves, the substance repels them, bouncing them back to the void. The voice of the Ten Commandments had no echo, because it permeated every object in the universe. So any "resistance" we might meet in implementing them is superficial and temporary. Ultimately, the essence of every created being is consistent with, and wholly receptive to, the goodness and perfection that its Creator desires of it.

Each of the holidays is a re-enactment and re-experience of the original event. For the same G-dly revelation that occurred then is (spiritually) taking place again. Subsequently, during our celebration of Shavuos, G-d renews the Torah and His relationship with the Jewish people. Once again, with even greater vigor, He makes Himself

available, so that when one studies Torah he unites with G-d.

Shavuos is a time to rededicate ourselves, to seek out G-d and reach out to Him with a renewed spirit by pursuing the study of Torah and the observance of Mitzvos.

Like our ancestors at Mount Sinai, on Shavuos we too reaffirm our commitment and proclaim: "Naaseh V'Nishma" - we will do and obey. Just as the Jewish people in Egypt were determined to accept the Torah, and with this merit were liberated from enslavement. Similarly, at this time, our return to the Torah and its observance will hasten the coming of Moshiach and merit us the true and complete redemption speedily in our own day.

ADAPTED FROM THE WORKS OF THE REBBE,
RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEESON, OBM

Creator of the universe vested in something this small.

Our limitations as humans prevent us from apprehending the sensitivity and full depth of G-dly power. But it behooves us to pause and consider; if this tiniest of the Creator's *creatures* can be so powerful, how infinite and utterly ungraspable are the attributes of G-d Himself.

Perhaps now we can begin to appreciate the power of a single mitzvah. Any mitzvah ordained by G-d provides a tangible manifestation of the Al-mighty's infinite energy and relevance in our lives. As ordinary mortals we are incapable of appreciating this fully, much as we were - but a few weeks ago - incapable of imagining, let alone fathoming, the full might of the minute coronavirus. How much more so are we unable to appreciate the infinite G-dly energy vested in a G-dly commandment, as well as the impact it has upon the individual performing it and on the entire world.

In the words of Maimonides, "...a person should always see

himself as equally balanced... if he performs one mitzvah, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others..."

Celebrating Shavuos, the "Season of the Giving of the Torah," and the countdown leading up to it, is a time to focus on - and appreciate - the Torah and the mitzvot given to us by G-d. For these truly impact on our lives - in a positive way - to a much greater extent than any microbe possibly can. Such an appreciation must enormously impact our daily lives. For indeed, there are good things that can - and must - go viral; Jewish practices such as tefillin, kosher, mezuzot, lighting Shabbat candles at the right time, giving tzedakah daily, etc.

This is the time we accept G-d's Torah, and we do welcome His mitzvot as never before.

Best Wishes for a healthy and happy Shavuos,

Rabbi Yisroel Shmotkin

SHAVUOS IN A NUTSHELL



The holiday of **Shavuos** celebrates the day on which the Al-mighty G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people. It occurred at the very inception of the Jewish people as a nation after their exodus from Egypt 3,332 years ago.

Shavuos is a continuation and culmination of the redemption from Egyptian slavery*. When Moses announced to the Jewish people the forthcoming redemption, he also informed them of G-d's purpose and plan to give them the Torah. The Jewish people eagerly anticipated this event.

On the first of Sivan, the third month on the Jewish calendar, 46 days following the exodus from Egypt, in the year 2448 (1313 BCE), the Jewish nation reached the Sinai Desert and camped near the mountain.

In the weeks following their miraculous exodus and travels in the desert, they experienced open and daily miracles: splitting and crossing of the Sea of Reeds; food from Heaven (manna and quail); sweetening of bitter water; and more. With each passing day, the Jewish people became more conscious of G-d's presence and divine protection.

Following their arrival, G-d told Moses: "Tell the Children of Israel, you have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you close to Me. Now, therefore, if you will listen to me and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasure from among all peoples: and you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

As Moses presented these words to the entire nation, the Jewish people unanimously responded, *Naaseh Venishma*, "Everything G-d has said, we shall do and we shall listen." **Thus, they accepted the Torah outright**, with all its precepts, "with one voice and with one heart."

When the Jewish people voiced their acceptance and eagerness to receive the Torah, G-d told Moses, "Go to the people, and get them ready for the third day: for on the third day the L-rd will reveal Himself at Mount Sinai to all the people."

On the sixth day of Sivan, (the day upon which we celebrate

Shavuos), G-d pronounced the Ten Commandments before the entire Jewish people. Thereafter, Moses ascended Mount Sinai and stayed there for 40 days and 40 nights, during which G-d taught him every aspect of the Torah, and all its applications.

These teachings include the 613 mitzvahs, along with all their details and how each mitzvah would apply throughout the ages, as guided by the Torah.

Finally, G-d gave Moses the two stone "Tables of Testimony," in which the ten commandments were etched, written by G-d Himself.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DAY

The holiday of Shavuos relives the bestowal of G-d's greatest treasure onto humanity and in particular to the Jewish People—the Torah. It was the first and only time that the Creator communicated directly with an entire nation.

It was at that moment that G-d chose the Jewish people as His own. By giving the Jewish People the Torah, G-d entrusted them with a cosmic mission, to bring divine light to the universe. This moment and mission are celebrated on Shavuos, as we rededicate ourselves to this spiritual task.

Shavuos magnifies a direct link, from the birth of a Jewish nation to us today. From Mount Sinai to the world over. From 3,332 years ago and indefinitely into the future. With no less zeal and with ever-increasing energy, the Torah is eternal. It is our lifeline.

THE NAME

Shavuos means "weeks," referring to the seven weeks that our ancestors counted after the exodus from Egypt, anxiously awaiting the giving of the Torah.

Shavuos also means "oaths." Signifying the oaths which G-d and Israel exchanged on the day the Torah was given, to remain faithful to each other forever.

(*FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S REDEMPTION FROM SLAVERY, SEE THE PASSOVER CELEBRATION BROCHURE, 2020, OR ONLINE AT WWW.CHABADWI.ORG). 2020, OR ONLINE AT WWW.CHABAD.ORG).

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE TORAH, & THE MITZVOS

IT WAS THE MOST AWESOME MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD AND MANKIND. On the sixth of Sivan, on the Hebrew calendar 2448 (1316 BC), G-d revealed himself to the Jewish people, millions of them - men, women and children - standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, He voiced the Ten Commandments.

It is this event, the revelation of G-d Himself, without a mediator, that established for the entire nation the truth and eternity of the Torah.

After the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses ascended to the peak of Mount Sinai, and stayed there for forty days and nights. During this time, G-d taught him the entire Torah, as well as the principles of its interpretation for all time. He also gave him the two precious stone tablets, in which He engraved the Ten Commandments. Upon his descent, Moses taught the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah was then taught and transmitted from generation to generation, until this very day.

About The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments (as listed on page 12) concern both laws between man and G-d (such as the Shabbat), and laws between man and man (such as honoring one's parents); laws concerning action and speech (do not utter My Name in vain), and laws concerning thoughts and feelings (do not covet that which belongs to another).



The Ten Commandments function as a summary of the entire Torah. The sages point out that the text of the Commandments contains 620 letters, corresponding to each of the 613 biblical mitzvot and the seven rabbinical laws.

What is the Torah?

The word "Torah" is popularly referred to as "the five books of Moses" written by a scribe on a parchment scroll. Originally transcribed by Moses as he heard it from G-d, it has been copied thousands of times in every

generation in the exact same words and script. It is this Torah scroll that we read in the synagogue.

In addition to the five books, the Torah includes as well the *Nevi'im* (The Prophets) and *Kesuvim* (The Holy Writings), all of which form the "Written Torah." The Torah includes as well the Oral Law.

While the written law forms the "constitution" of the Torah, its interpretation, the oral law, was also given to Moses at Sinai. Both were simultaneously transmitted from generation to generation.

The word "Torah" means instruction or guide. It contains 613 commandments, of which 248 are positive (DOs) and 365 are negative (DON'Ts).

The Five Books of Moses

In *Genesis*, the first book, we learn of G-d's creation of the world and humanity; the life story of the founding fathers and mothers of the Jewish people –



Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, and their families.

In the following book of *Exodus* we learn of the enslavement of their descendants in Egypt; their miraculous deliverance and exodus; G-d's revelation at Mount Sinai, the giving of the Ten Commandments, followed by particular instructions, laws and the building of the sanctuary.

In the third book, *Leviticus*, G-d instructs us concerning the services at the Temple (first during the forty years in the desert and later on in Jerusalem); laws concerning proper conduct between man and his fellow man and between man and G-d.

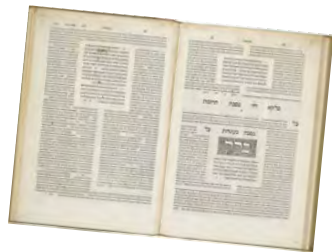
In *Numbers* we learn of the census of the Jewish people; their trials and tribulations during their forty-year travels in the desert.

In the last book, *Deuteronomy*, Moses offers the Jewish people inspiration for years to come, including the promise that regardless of their condition, challenges, trials and tribulations, G-d will never forsake them, and will continue to relate forty-year travels in the desert.

In the last book, *Deuteronomy*, Moses offers the Jewish people inspiration for years to come, including the promise that regardless of their condition, challenges, trials and tribulations, G-d will never forsake them, and will continue to relate to the Jewish people through His prophets; the book includes the setting of the Torah judicial system and Moses' foreseeing of the future.

The Prophets

Following the passing of Moses, as promised, G-d revealed himself to individuals of great piety and spirituality. These are the prophets who related and recorded G-d's instructions and messages. There are 19 books of the prophets. In all, we had 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses whose prophecies were recorded for their everlasting importance.



The Holy Writings

These include the books like Psalms, Song of Songs, Ruth, and Esther, 11 in all, all of which were written for posterity by one of our people of great piety by ruach hakodesh (divine inspiration).

The Oral Law

The written Torah, its narratives and laws are conveyed in an extremely concise fashion demanding elucidation by way of the Oral Law, which contains the details of the Commandments, their meanings, and general principles for the interpretation of the written law.

The Mishnah

The study of these principals and the interpretations derived has been the occupation of the Jewish people throughout the ages. These teachings have been the common study of all of the Jewish people; they have been transmitted orally from generation to generation.

After the destruction of the second temple (in the year 70 BCE) and the Jewish people exiled from Israel, their homeland, having been dispersed all over, the essentials of the oral law were recorded (200 CE) in the form of the Mishnah, as well as other compilations.

These recordings and the Mishnah in particular, excerpted by and agreed upon by the scholars of the time, have become the basis for all studies of future generations.

The Talmud

As time went on, it became necessary to record not only the essential principles and laws, but also the critical elaborations upon these principles. Three hundred years after the writing of the Mishnah (500 CE), the great Torah scholars of that generation compiled and recorded the Talmud. It was accepted by all the scholars of that and future generations as the ultimate authorized book on Jewish law.

Shulchan Aruch - Code of Jewish Law

Ever since, the Jewish people have studied the Talmud and applied its wisdom and principles to matters as they arose, eventually leading to the formation of the code of Jewish law.

These elaborations, decision-making, rulings and books are all based on the explicit principles spelled out in the written law – the five books of Moses. It, therefore, carries the weight of Torah itself.

The Kabbalah - Hidden Part of the Torah

The Torah in its origin and essence is G-d's infinite wisdom and will. It is this infinite G-dly wisdom that is

concentrated in the practical laws of the Torah addressing mundane worldly matters that may be comprehended by human logic.



The Torah, as it deals with practical laws, is the revealed part of the Torah. The esoteric and mystical element of the Torah focuses on the G-dly dimension and metaphysical significance of the Torah and Mitzvos. These are the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus. They are, as referred to in Jewish tradition, the Neshama (soul) and essence of the Torah.

Both the hidden and revealed are inseparable parts of the Torah, received from Sinai and transmitted from generation to generation throughout history.



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TORAH

In addition to being a guide for a Jew's life, the inner significance of the Torah is the fact that it is G-d's wisdom. By learning and internalizing the Torah, a person's mind becomes united with G-d's wisdom and through it "embraces" G-d Himself.

Although Torah Law concerns itself primarily with simple, mundane, day to day life matters, nevertheless, therein is vested G-d's infinite wisdom. Analogous to a therapist's simple advice containing the solution for a conflict in the deepest recesses of the patient's soul, or a parent's simple instruction to a child intended to affect the child's future, etc. etc.

The Mitzvot

There are six hundred thirteen (613) divine commandments embracing every facet of our lives, both the duties to our fellow men and the way to worship G-d. The positive commandments, numbering two hundred forty-eight (248), equal the number of organs in the human body, implying that a person should serve the Creator with every part of his being.

The three hundred sixty-five (365) negative commandments are equivalent to the number of blood vessels in the human body, indicating that when we guard ourselves from transgressing these prohibitions – as we might be tempted to do by desires inherent in the blood – each one of our blood vessels remains “unblemished” and pure. The number 365 also equals the number of days of the year.

Seven Rabbinical Mitzvot

In advancing the cause of Torah and furthering a Jew’s devotion and thankfulness to G-d, seven Mitzvot were added by Jewish leaders throughout the ages. Among them: the holiday of Purim, Chanukah, washing of hands before eating bread, Shabbat and holiday candle lighting, and others. These institutions too are considered Mitzvot as we were instructed in the Torah to obey the rules established by the judges and Torah scholars.

Seven Noachide Laws

In the Torah there are also instructions for gentiles; generally described as the Seven Noachide Laws, which include universal civil laws as given to Moses at Sinai.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MITZVOT

Like the hidden depths of the wisdom of the Torah laws, the simple acts of Mitzvot, being commanded by the infinite G-d, contain infinite significance. When we do a Mitzvah, we are “doing the infinite”, the Divine. As physical beings, we cannot feel the depths of each of our Mitzvah acts – such as Tefilin, Shabbos candle lightings, etc. – nevertheless, they are still acts of infinity. Like the simple act of turning on an electric switch without understanding or realizing the effect it may have on, say, an entire city.

Furthermore, Mitzvah literally means commandment; however, it also means companionship, from the Aramaic “tzavta” (companionship). Upon fulfilling a commandment, one becomes united with G-d, who ordained that precept. For, regardless of the nature of the commandment, the fulfillment of G-d’s desire creates a relationship between the creator and the human who executed it. By fulfilling His wish, a person is in “G-d’s company.”

Thus, this is the inner interpretation of our sages’ statement (Avos 4:2): “The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah,” indicating that the mitzvah itself is the greatest reward, for this sets us in companionship with the eternal and infinite G-d. All other rewards are secondary in comparison to this great merit.



The Torah Is...

THE TORAH IS A MANUFACTURER’S MANUAL.

Valuable things come with a book of instructions on how to properly and optimally use them. Lawn mowers, iPods®, minivans have a guidebook. The same applies to the valuable (and complicated) thing we call life – the Manufacturer accompanied it with an instruction book.

THE TORAH IS A CONTRACT. When two parties enter into a partnership, binding their financial futures to a joint destiny, they draw up a contract that spells out their respective duties and commitments. When two people marry, a marriage contract, called a ketubah, is drawn up that does the same. The Torah is our marriage contract with G-d, the document that details the commitments and duties we assumed toward each other when G-d chose us as His people and we chose Him as our G-d at Sinai.

THE TORAH IS IDENTITY. What connects the red-bearded chassid in Moscow with the black-skinned Yemenite Jew? What does the West Coast Jewish filmmaker have in common with his peddler grandfather or his olive-growing ancestor? Nothing. They share no common language, facial features or diet. Any two Jews can be as culturally or even genetically diverse as any other two members of the human race. But the Shema recited today in a Canadian synagogue is the same Shema that was proclaimed in Egypt 3,500 years ago; the criteria for the mikveh built at Masada is the same as for the one in Brazil and Milwaukee. Torah bridges continents and removes generational gaps to serve as our single common expression of our Jewishness.

THE TORAH IS VISION. Why are we here? Where are we going? “An architect who builds a palace,” cites the Midrash, “has scrolls and notebooks which he consults to know how to place the rooms, where to set the doors. So it was with G-d: He looked into the Torah and created the world.” Torah is the divine blueprint for creation, the vision that illuminates the foundations of existence, its purpose and its significance. To study and live Torah is to understand and experience the soul of reality.

WHAT IS A MITZVAH?

If you're familiar with the term "mitzvah," you probably know that a mitzvah is a Jewish thing to do. But what exactly is it?

Is a mitzvah a good deed, like helping an elderly lady cross the street, or visiting a sick neighbor in the hospital?

Is a mitzvah a fancy word for charity, as in, "If it costs you money, but later you feel good about it, you have done a mitzvah?" Is a mitzvah something your parents want you to do, as in, "Bobby, do a mitzvah and help Mom unload the groceries from car"?

Or, is a mitzvah a religious ritual, like wrapping tefillin or lighting Shabbat candles?

If you answered, "All of the above," you're right. But what is the common denominator of all these actions? What does the word "mitzvah" actually mean?

Mitzvah in Hebrew means "commandment." It also means "connection." Let us explore the meaning of both these terms.

Mitzvah means commandment as in "divine command" - something that G-d instructed us to do. At first glance, this may seem a strange, even ridiculous idea. Why would an infinite, perfect, all-powerful G-d care about what goes on in our puny little lives? Does G-d really have nothing better to do than to compose a "to do" list for us, consisting of things like making Kiddush on Friday night and schlepping Mom's groceries from the car?

But when you think of it, why would an infinite, perfect, all-powerful G-d desire to create a world? Was it just an aimless distraction on a lazy afternoon? Did G-d make a world, but not care about what happens in it?

If we do believe that our existence is purposeful, the idea of divine

commandments is not so crazy, after all. We would expect the Creator to communicate to us what He wants us to do with this world that He made and with this life that He gives us.

Which brings us to the second meaning of *mitzvah*—connection. A mitzvah is an act that connects the world with its Creator. When we do a mitzvah, we are taking a small but immensely significant step to fulfill the purpose of our existence.

Now, for the million-dollar question: Are the mitzvot good deeds because G-d commanded them, or did G-d command them because they are good deeds?

Sounds like the classic chicken-or-egg conundrum. In truth, however, G-d is the source of all existence, including the very concept of "good." So, it's really not a question of which came first: the two are synonymous. What G-d desires is right and good for us, and what goes against the divine is wrong and bad for us.

At the same time, we are finite, imperfect beings, biased by self-interest. We sometimes confuse the existential question of right or wrong with what we desire for ourselves right now. That is why we were given a Torah, with its 613 divine commandments. These form a "reality check" for us, guiding us in our positive choices, and raising a red flag when a short-sighted desire clouds our innate sense of right and wrong.

But there is a reason why, in retrospect, we are never truly satisfied with a bad choice, and never regret a good deed. While all sorts of motives and distractions may cloud the surface of our lives, underneath it all, our soul is one with its Creator and purpose.

A mitzvah is how we actualize that connection in our day-to-day lives.

THE EVENT
THAT Transformed
THE WORLD

It was the most radical event in history. Time's most crucial moment, the watershed event of the entire human drama. Erupting in a single place in a single day, it crashed through borders of nation and culture, implanted itself in the minds of thinkers and the hearts of ordinary men and women, surfed over the bumps and barriers of time. Until nothing was left the same, no ruler could set the same rules, no mind could think the same thoughts, no mouth could speak the same words. The landscape was transformed and the innerscape of the human psyche could never return to its original self.

Even now, its echo reverberates through every moment of our day—louder and louder as time goes on. The vision, the sounds, the smell and the trembling are branded onto the very circuitry of our souls.

This event liberated the world from captivity. It allowed us freedom of choice, offered us control of ourselves, freedom from our surroundings and the ability to reach the divine.

Every year, once a year, as sure as the spring that blossoms at that time, we gather to relive that event. The experience that wrought us into a people and forged our consciousness as individuals.

This year, be there. Again.
Shavuot!



SHAVUOS CUSTOMS

Pull an All-Nighter

Our sages relate that our ancestors slept late the morning they received the Torah. How could that have happened? They so anxiously awaited that occasion. They sincerely, but mistakenly thought that they would be best able to receive the Torah if their souls were not constrained by the physical body, and able to tap into subconscious realms beyond the normal human mind.

They didn't realize that ultimately G-d wants us to utilize the mundane, everyday experience, the physical, in order to make this world a holy place where He can "reside."

To compensate for that mistake we stay up the entire first night of Shavuos and study Torah, ready to receive the Torah once more when G-d again offers it to us, this Shavuos, with renewed vigor.

Dairy Foods & Blintzes

It is customary to eat dairy foods on the first day of Shavuos. One of the reasons given for this custom is because the Torah is likened to nourishing milk.

Also, on Shavuos, immediately after receiving the Torah, the Jewish people were required to eat kosher. The only foods available for immediate consumption were milk products.

The Hebrew word for milk is "chalav." When the numerical value of each of the Hebrew letters in the word "chalav" are added together – 8; 30; 2 – the total is 40. 40 is the number of days Moses spent on Mount Sinai when receiving the Torah.

The custom to eat cheese blintzes on Shavuos is based on a play of Hebrew words. The Hebrew word for cheese is Gevinah, reminding us of the "controversy" of the taller mountains, each claiming to

be worthier than Sinai for the privilege of receiving the Torah. They were, therefore, called Gavnunim – "humps" – because of their conceit, while Sinai, small and humble, was chosen for its humility. (See article "The Inside Reason for Cheesecake," page 21).

Ruth

In many synagogues the book of Ruth is read on the second day of Shavuos.

There are several reasons for this custom: A) Shavuos is the birthday and yahrzeit (day of passing) of King David, and the book of Ruth records his ancestry. Boaz and Ruth were King David's great grandparents.

B) The scenes of harvesting, described in the book of Ruth, are appropriate to the Festival of Harvest. C) Ruth was a sincere convert who embraced Judaism with all her heart. On Shavuos all Jews were converts having unconditionally accepted the Torah and all of its precepts.

Go Green

It is customary on Shavuos to adorn the synagogue and home with fruits, greens and flowers. The reason:

Fruits - In the time of the Temple the first fruits of harvest were brought to the Temple beginning on Shavuos.

Greens - Our

sages taught that on Shavuos judgment is rendered regarding the trees of the field.

Flowers - Our sages taught that although Mount Sinai was situated in a desert, in honor of the Torah, the desert bloomed and sprouted flowers.

Additional Names of Shavuos

Shavuos is also called Atzeret, meaning

The Completion, because together with Passover it forms the completion of a unit. We gained our freedom on Passover in order to receive the Torah on Shavuos.

Another name for Shavuos is **Yom Habikurim** or the Day of the First Fruits. In an expression of thanks to G-d,

beginning on Shavuos, each farmer in the Land of Israel brought to the Temple the first wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates that grew in his field.

Finally, Shavuos is also called **Chag HaKatzir**, the Festival of the Harvest, because wheat, the last of the grains to be ready to be cut, was harvested at this time of the year. On Shavuos two loaves of wheat bread from the new harvest were offered at the temple in Jerusalem..



FROM OUR TRADITION

About the TORAH, and the GIVING OF THE TORAH

THE LOWEST MOUNTAIN

We all know that the Ten Commandments were given on Mount Sinai. Why Sinai? Say the sages: Sinai is the lowest of all mountains, to show that humility is an essential prerequisite to receiving the Torah.

Why then on a mountain? Why not in a plain - or a valley? The Code of Jewish Law states at the very beginning: "Do not be embarrassed by mockery and ridicule." For to receive the Torah you must be low; but to keep it, sometimes you must be a mountain.

PURPOSE OF THE TORAH

The Midrash relates that when G-d was about to give the Torah, the heavenly angels argued that He should offer it to them! Upon G-d's request Moses replied, "Have you been in Egypt? Do you have an evil inclination?"

This implies that the Torah was given in order to elevate humanity as well as the world in general. Precisely for those who have an evil inclination and need to be refined, was the Torah given.

KESSER - A CROWN

The Ten Commandments consist of 620 letters, equaling the number of the 613 mitzvot and the 7 rabbinical mitzvot (such as Chanukah, Purim, etc.). 620 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word "Kesser" - a crown. Each mitzvah is considered a part of G-d's crown. When fulfilling a mitzvah a person offers a crown to the Al-mighty.

A TRIPLE TORAH

Everything connected with the giving of the Torah was of a triple nature: the Torah consists of Chumash (the five books of Moses), Prophets, and the Holy Writing (TeNaCH). It was given to Israel, comprised of Kohanim (priests), Levites and Israelites, through Moses, the third child in the family, after three days of preparation, in the third month (Sivan).

THREE KNOTS

The Zohar declares "Three are interlocked together: Israel, the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He."

As One Man, with One Heart

Our sages relate that when the Jews camped before Mount Sinai, they were "as one man, with one heart." Many of their other journeys were characterized by differences of opinion and even strife. However, when they prepared to receive the Torah, the Jews joined together with a feeling of unity and harmony. This oneness was a necessary prerequisite to the giving of the Torah.

LADIES FIRST

To assure that the Torah would be well received and perpetuated, G-d told Moses to first address the women: "Say to the House of Jacob" (referring to the women) was followed by "Tell the sons of Israel" (Exodus 19:3) (referring to the men).

Women should be knowledgeable in Torah, to learn how to fulfill the Mitzvot in a full Jewish life.

A woman influences and affects her home and environment. It is the mother who primarily instills values in her children, encourages her husband to observe and study Torah, and affects others through her hospitality, warmth and teaching.

SIGHT AND SOUND

The Book of Exodus relates that when G-d gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai, "The people saw the voices." "They saw what is ordinarily heard," remark our sages, "and they heard what is ordinarily seen."

As physical beings, we



“see” physical reality. On the other hand, G-dliness and spirituality is only something that is “heard”—it can be discussed, perhaps even understood to some extent, but not experienced first hand.

But at the revelation at Sinai, we “saw what is ordinarily heard” – we experienced the divine as an immediate, tangible reality. On the other hand, what is ordinarily “seen” – the material world – was something merely “heard,” to be accepted or rejected at will.

BLUEPRINT

The Torah is the blueprint by which the world was designed. Everything that exists can be found in the Torah. Furthermore, “In any one concept of Torah you can find the entire world.”

MITZVOT

The 613 Mitzvot (Commandments) are compared to a thick rope woven of 613 thin strands. They parallel the “rope” of the downward flow from G-d that connects the *neshama* (soul) invested in a human body with G-d. (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

THE TORAH – G-D GIVEN

Rabbi Akiva said: Was Moses an expert hunter (that he knew so much about animals)?! Rather, the Torah recorded this (the detailed names of different species of animals, fowl and fish,) in response to anyone who might claim that the Torah is not from Heaven.

GIVEN IN THE DESERT

The Torah was given to us in the barren, ownerless desert to emphasize that no man may claim any superior right to the world of G-d. It is equally the heritage of every Jew, man, woman and child, equally accessible to the accomplished scholar and the most simple of Jews.

A SCALE

A person should view himself, and the entire world, as being equally balanced between good and bad... By doing even a single mitzvah, he could tip the scales for himself and the entire world for the good, and bring himself and everyone else redemption and deliverance. (Maimonides)



DAILY HEAVENLY ECHO

Our sages declare: “Every day an echo resounds from Mount Horeb (Sinai) and proclaims: ‘Woe to those who insult the Torah...’”

Asked Rabbi Israel Baal Shemtov: Has anyone heard this echo? To what purpose, then, is this proclamation if no one hears it?

But often a person is seized by a feeling that has no identifiable source or cause. He may be struck by a sudden joy, or fear, or regret. He may suddenly resolve to better himself, to rectify a deficient past and turn a new leaf in his life. He may be suddenly driven to embark on a new initiative in his spiritual development. From where do these unprovoked awakenings come?

Every day an echo resounds from Mount Horeb.

49 DAYS OF COUNTING

Upon their leaving Egypt, when Moses related to the Jewish people that G-d will give them the Torah, the Jewish people were extremely eager and impatiently counted the days. Hence the Mitzvah of counting the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot.

G-d's Wisdom:

WHERE CAN I GET IT?

Torah is G-d's wisdom, an expression of His essence. G-d created the universe so that the Torah's ideals could be actualized. The Torah, as we experience it, is divine wisdom distilled for consumption by the human mind. By studying Torah's laws, logic and stories, it becomes possible to wrap our rational human mind around divine concepts.

Torah is the soul's best nourishment. So study whenever you have time, ideally twice a day: morning and evening. The internet is a great place to begin.

For starters, check out www.chabad.org.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE INSIDE STORY AND ITS MEANING TODAY

The Ten Commandments were engraved on two tablets. The five commandments etched on the first tablet deal with man's relationship with G-d; the second tablet contains five commandments which concern man's relationship with his fellow man.

Of the 613 biblical commandments, G-d selected these Ten Commandments for special attention. He directly communicated them to the Jews without using Moses as an intermediary, and inscribed them on the tablets which were placed in the Holy Ark within the Holy of Holies. It is evident that although all the mitzvot are vital, the five carved into the first tablet were chosen because they form the basis of our relationship with the Creator, while the latter five serve as the foundation of our relationship with fellow people. The following is an attempt to delve briefly into the deeper meaning of the Ten Commandments.

FIRST TABLET

1. I am the L-rd your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt:

It isn't beneath G-d—the Al-mighty omnipotent G-d, before whom “all is considered like naught”—to personally interfere in the workings of this world, to liberate a persecuted nation from the hand of their oppressors. We can always trust that He is watching over us attentively and controlling all the events which affect our lives.



It isn't beneath G-d to personally interfere in the workings of this world, to liberate a persecuted nation from the hand of their oppressors

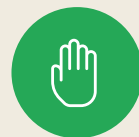
2. You shall not have other gods in My presence:

G-d is the only one who controls all events and occurrences. No other entity—not your government, not your boss, not your spouse—can benefit or harm you, unless G-d has so decreed. Every one of us shares a special relationship with G-d, and no power can interfere with or disturb this relationship.



3. You shall not take the name of the L-rd, your G-d, in vain:

The above-described relationship may indeed be intimate and personal, but you must never lose perspective—He's your Creator, not your buddy.



4. Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it:

Maintaining this relationship with G-d requires effort on our part. All too often, we are so immersed in our daily routine that we forget that in actuality it is our connection with G-d which matters most. Therefore, G-d commanded us to allocate one day every week for “relationship maintenance.” This is the Sabbath, a day to focus on the real priorities in life, and to draw inspiration for the following week.



5. Honor your father and your mother:

Why is this commandment included in the “between man and Creator” tablet? Doesn't this command belong on the second tablet? Perhaps the lesson is that although we owe everything to G-d, we must not forget to express gratitude to those people whom G-d has empowered to help us in our journey through life. As the Talmud says: “The wine belongs to the host, but thanks is [also] said to the waiter.”



SECOND TABLET

Although most of the following prohibitions are admonitions against egregious sins which most of us wouldn't even consider committing, these prohibitions have subtle undertones which are applicable to every person.

6. Do not murder:

Murder is a result of one person's deeming another person totally insignificant. In truth, every human was created by G-d in His holy image, and therefore has an innate right to exist. The first message we must internalize is the importance of respecting every individual. G-d thinks this person is important; so should you. G-d thinks this person is important—so should you.



7. Do not commit adultery:

Misguided love. Yes, we must be loving, kind and respectful to everyone, but love isn't a carte blanche which justifies all. There are guidelines which we must follow. Sometimes, faithful love—to a child, student, member of the opposite gender, etc.—entails being severe and abstaining from exhibiting love.



8. Do not kidnap: *

The essence of kidnapping is utilizing another for personal gain. Focus on being a real friend; don't be in the relationship only



for your own benefit. Be there for your friend even when it is uncomfortable or inconvenient for you.

9. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor:

Every person is a judge. We are constantly observing our acquaintances and friends, judging their every word and action. We must be wary of a tendency to “bear false witness” in the process of issuing our personal verdict. We must always give the benefit of the doubt, taking into consideration various factors of which we may be unaware, ensuring that we don't reach an erroneous judgment.



10. Do not covet your neighbor's possessions:

Be happy for your neighbor's good fortune! All the above mentioned exercises pale in comparison with this final message imparted by the Ten Commandments. After you've trained yourself to intellectually respect your fellows and consistently view them in a positive light, now it's time to get your heart involved. Love them. Be happy with their accomplishments. Share their sorrow during their difficult moments. Don't be afraid of getting emotionally involved—that's what family is all about!



BY RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG

FOOTNOTE * Popularly translated as “Thou shall not steal,” the sages explain that the prohibition here is actually against kidnapping—as opposed to the prohibition against stealing, which is mentioned in Leviticus 19:11.

POST-SINAI

Before Mount Sinai, there was earth and there was heaven. Some people were getting all they could out of earth, others were in a race to get to heaven. But the rules were clear: The more you wanted one, the more you were obliged to abandon the other.

At Sinai, those rules were broken. The mitzvahs of the Torah take earthly objects and everyday experiences and lift them to the heavens. A delicious meal to celebrate the Shabbat, a simple scroll placed on a doorpost, a few coins placed in a needy hand – all these became G-dly acts, ways to find spirituality while keeping your feet on the ground. After all, the Infinite is everywhere and in everything.

Each mitzvah uncovers another spark of the Infinite within another piece of the world. That's why we say that the goal of Torah is not to get to heaven, but to bring heaven down to earth. Until all our world is healed and all those sparks are redeemed, in what will be the era of Moshiach.

THE SPECIALTY OF TORAH

In the introduction to the revelation at Sinai and the Ten Commandments, the Torah begins with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, joining the Jewish people as they encamped at the Sinai Desert after their exodus from Egypt.

The Talmud states numerous opinions as to what caused Jethro to leave his position of honor as philosopher of religion and priest of Midian, surrounded by riches and glory - to travel to the desert.

THE GRANDEUR OF TORAH

“Rabbi Elazar Hamudaei says, he heard of the giving of the Torah and he [Jethro] came.”

Rabbi Elazar Hamudei's point of view is that what enthralled Jethro about the Jewish story was that G-d loved them, and He gave them His Torah. When Jethro heard of the powerful institutions of Judaism-its obsession with education, charity, justice, compassion, loving the stranger, respecting the slave, feeding the poor, honoring the old, giving dignity to the sick and the mentally challenged; when Jethro learnt of the Mitzvot of Torah - Shabbat, Mikveh, Kashrut, Tefillin, prayer, study; when he discovered the ethical foundations of Judaism - that no one is above the law, that each person was created in G-d's image and has infinite dignity, that history has a purpose, and that each of us was conceived in love to fulfill a mission - when the Midyanite chief Pagan priest learned of all this, he fell in love with Torah and joined the People of the Book.

THE SUPER-NATURAL QUALITY

“Rabbi Eliezer says: He heard about the splitting of the sea and he came.”

Rabbi Eliezar takes it a step further. If it was only for Torah itself, Jethro could have remained on his hammock in Midian, sipping a piña-colada and watching a Torah webcast on Chabad.org, or reading a good Jewish book. What inspired him to leave his natural environment to join a crowded wilderness with millions of Hebrews? When he heard of the splitting of the sea.

The splitting of the sea demonstrated to Jethro yet another component of the Jewish story: The people of Israel transcended the laws of nature and the deterministic patterns of history. The largest seas, mightiest oceans, and fiercest tsunamis would not drown them. They would confront many overwhelming seas throughout their history, they would encounter impossible odds, and yet they would cross



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every sea and come out on the other side, stronger, more vibrant, more alive and determined. A nation that endured crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, massacres, gas chambers, crematoriums, and suicide bombings - and yet inexplicably emerged, pulsating with a love for life and a zest for peace, this is a people whose narrative transcends the formulas of natural history.

Jethro understood what the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, articulated in a 1908 article: "The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illuminated with it the entire world. He is the religious source, spring and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions. The Jew is the emblem of eternity. He, who neither slaughter nor torture of thousands of years could destroy, he who neither fire, nor sword, nor Inquisition was able to wipe off the face of the earth. He, who was the first to produce the Oracles of God. He, who has been for so long the Guardian of Prophecy and has transmitted it to the rest of the world. Such a nation cannot be destroyed. The Jew is as everlasting as Eternity itself."

Jethro understood that to experience this immortality he must leave his mansion in Midian and join the nomads in the desert. To become part of a story which transcends nature, you must transcend your own nature and actively join the symphony of eternity.

Jethro was not Jewish. Yet he made an awesome sacrifice in order to join the Jewish people and internalize Torah. We were given this gift by birth. Will we not leave our comfort zones to embrace it, celebrate it, study it, and make it part of our lives?

Now, 3300 years later, we often take for granted the contribution of Torah to the civilization. But Jethro did not. He understood what the Irish Tomas Cahill would articulate in his book "The Gifts of the Jews:"

"We can hardly get up in the morning or cross the street without being Jewish ... The religion of the Hebrews - a tiny, marginal desert tribe - changed the worldview of Western civilization ... The West's most deeply held beliefs about life, human nature, God, and justice are all owed to the ancient Israelites.

"In the ancient world of the 'ever-turning Wheel,' the countless gods and goddesses of the old mythologies played out their dramas in the world above. These gods were lustful, jealous, and greedy, and humans were of little import. Man had no freedom to choose a destiny, and no divinely inspired laws and ethics to guide him." According to Cahill, the Hebrews "have a whole new way of experiencing reality... It may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had."

Many Jews I know would be uncomfortable with these words written by an Irish gentile. We take for granted the quality of life shaped by Torah values and rituals over millennia. Shabbos creates happier homes; Mikveh inspires more stable and meaningful marriages; Torah education creates more balanced teen-agers, less drugs and less suicides. The emphasis on tradition and history diminishes the generational gap between parents and children. The laws of Jewish burial, sitting shivah, and saying kaddish are very comforting during times of loss. The sense of community helps people in times of crisis. All of these concepts were new and novel ideas and Jethro, a brilliant man of ideas, understood the majestic grandeur of Torah. This is what inspired him to link his destiny to the Nation of Torah.



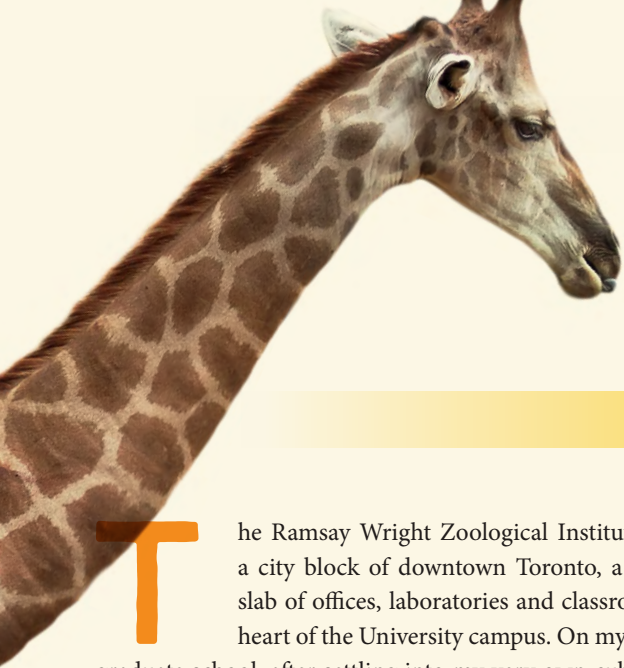
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What I Discovered at the RAMSAY WRIGHT ZOOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

The Ramsay Wright Zoological Institute takes up a city block of downtown Toronto, a tall, broad slab of offices, laboratories and classrooms at the heart of the University campus. On my first day of graduate school, after settling into my very own cubicle on the fourth floor, I went to meet with Roger Hansell, the distinguished professor who was charged with supervising the development of my doctoral thesis in applied ecology.

We were deep in discussion when his office door opened and in sauntered a neighboring professor from down the hall. Jacques Berger, a microbiologist, was as big a man as his subject matter was small. He had come in, it seems, to size up his buddy's new graduate student. He looked me up and down, noting my long ponytail, plaid flannel shirt and threadbare, faded blue jeans, the informal uniform of the non-conformists of the 1970s.

He must have also noticed my ethnically distinct nose, for he opened the conversation with words you normally first hear from a Lubavitcher. "Are you Jewish?" he asked me.

No one had ever asked me that before. It was the last thing I expected to hear. "Yes," I replied tentatively, and, just to be friendly, returned the question, "Are you?"

"No, actually my background is Catholic. But I could prove to you that your Torah is of divine origin."

Why in the world, I wondered to myself, is this non-Jew trying to convince me to believe in the Torah? Back then, I didn't have a beard, kippa or tzitzit. In fact, I was as secular as they get. I remember being distinctly irritated by this odd crusader. Obviously if I'm not religious I don't consider it my Torah. And if it is my Torah, what business did he have meddling in it or in my beliefs? But he was twice my age and three times my size so I just said, "Oh, really. How's that?"

"The fact is that the Torah makes a bona fide falsifiable zoological hypothesis." Noticing that he had caught my attention, Dr. Jacques continued, "You probably know that there are two traits that distinguish kosher mammals. They need to have split hooves and chew the cud. The Torah specifies that there are just four types of mammals that have only one of those two signs – the camel, the hyrax, the hare and the pig.

"Now Moses lived over 3,000 years ago. All he knew was a part of the Middle East and a little corner of Africa. How many mammal species could he have possibly known? 50? 100? Vast regions of the world were completely uninhabited. He would have no knowledge whatsoever of the Americas or Australia. Even Northern Europe and the Far East were quite inaccessible in his day. Yet the Torah went out of its way to claim that there are just these four types. And you know what? By now we have catalogued over 5,000 mammalian species and still no fifth kind.

"How could Moses have been privy to that arcane zoological fact? Obviously that text could only have been composed by One with knowledge of all the world's fauna. Now Who or What might that be?"

Having concluded his little dissertation, he paused, waiting for my response. Professor Hansell looked bemused, wondering what I would say. But all I could muster was, "That's interesting." But truth be told, it wasn't interesting. The whole subject left me high and dry, basically bored. Since I wasn't really looking for Gd, it didn't really matter to me if I found Him, especially not in the Torah.

But what a gentile microbiology professor could not accomplish, an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe could. A few years later, I found myself listening to Rabbi Manis Friedman address a gathering of college students about love, dating and relationships. He showed how the Torah way of life and love preserves dignity and sustains passion compared to how secular relationships basically boom and bust.

Suddenly the Torah was relevant. That's when I needed to have all the scientific questions addressed. I wanted to make sure I wasn't getting sucked into some dumb religion or mindless cult.

Satisfied with the Truth of Torah, I went on to a lifestyle of studying and practicing it. Looking back, I see that mastering the science of living beings is indeed impressive, but it's mastering the art of being alive that is truly compelling.

BY DR. ARNIE GOTFRYD, PHD, ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST, EARNED CANADA'S FIRST DOCTORATE IN APPLIED ECOLOGY. HE DESIGNED AND TAUGHT AN ACCREDITED, AWARD-WINNING UNDERGRADUATE COURSE CALLED FAITH AND SCIENCE.

GUARANTORS



One of my fondest memories of my years learning in Israel is the system of free loans that the boys used to practice in our Yeshiva. Though few of the locals had much money to spare, this was no impediment to kindness. A few of the students would somehow put together a nest egg and then spread the word that they were “open for business.” Anyone low on cash would know that he could have a short-term interest-free loan for nothing but the asking. The system was a lifesaver for anyone in a crisis and even I, the supposedly “wealthy” foreigner, used to borrow occasionally, when waiting for my remittance to arrive from my parents.

The only condition the guy running the scheme would insist on was that a guarantor promise to back the loan in the unlikely event of a no-show by the borrower. It made sense, after all generous people would donate or lend to the gemach (free loan fund), and there is a religious imperative to be scrupulous when managing public monies. And if the principal goes missing, there will be nothing available for the next guy who is in need.


I was occasionally asked to stand surety on a loan. Although I felt no real concern that my friends would do a runner, I still took it seriously. Before agreeing to sign the pledge, I checked to make sure that I had sufficient reserves to meet my marker were it to be called in, and I must confess to a certain sense of unease the whole time a loan was outstanding.

In a way, G-d operated on the same principle. Before giving us the Torah he demanded a guarantor. In the oft-repeated story, the Jews offered him a variety of choices to stand surety, but none were acceptable to G-d. Then, in a stroke of inspired genius, we suggested that the Jewish children could sign on as guarantors. This proved acceptable and He gave us the Torah.

The obvious moral is the imperative to train our youth when young, because only thus can we ensure the propagation of our faith. However, there is another important significance to this episode. Just as a guarantor for a loan knows that he can be called on at any time to make good his pledge, and had better have sufficient funds available at all times, so too we've got to educate children to appreciate and live up to their responsibilities.

We must teach them to learn, live and love Judaism, salting away stores of knowledge and faith, so that when they get called upon to justify the deal we made with G-d, they've got sufficient credit to fully cover their share of the bargain.

BY RABBI ELISHA GREENBAM, SPIRITUAL LEADER OF MOORABIN HEBREW CONGREGATION AND CHABAD OF MOORABBIN, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.



WHO SECURES
THE DEAL WITH
G-D TODAY?

THE CHILDREN!

**THEY ARE THE
GUARANTORS**

Before G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He requested guarantors, who would guarantee that the Torah would be preserved.

The Jewish people offered several possible guarantors, from the patriarchs to the prophets, but G-d was not satisfied until the little children were suggested.

Only our children can guarantee that the Torah would be maintained; our commitment to their education is the best assurance of our continued commitment to a life of Torah and Mitzvot.



It is of utmost importance that the children, the guarantors, should be present when the Ten Commandments is read in the shul on Shavuot.

This year, due to corona, when the likelihood is that many shuls will not be open for services and the reading of the Torah, it would only be right that each family gathers the children and together recites the Ten Commandments. If possible, in Hebrew; otherwise, the translation would be very nice.

For the seriousness of the occasion, it is suggested that the reading be done while standing and respectfully read.

Please see page 45 for a full translation of the Ten Commandments.

EVERYONE HAD A CHANCE

The day drew near when G-d desired to give the Torah to His chosen people, the children of Israel, whom He saw now cleansed of the impurities that had filled their lives in the slavery of Egypt.

But G-d decided that it would only be fair to offer the Torah to the other nations of the earth (although He knew that they would reject it) before offering it to the children of Israel. And so, He first approached the Edomites, descendants of Esau, and offered them the Torah with these inviting words:

“Ye, Edomites, sons of Esau, I bring you a gift - My holy Torah.

Accept it and ye shall be blessed with long life, you and your children also.”

“What is written in Your Torah?” questioned the Edomites.

“It is written in My Torah: ‘you shall not murder!’ “

“But that is ridiculous!” protested the Edomites.

“We are soldiers, men of war who live by the sword! How do you expect us to accept a Torah that preaches against our chosen way of life? No, thank you. Your Torah is no use to us at all.”

G-d then took the Torah to the children of Ishmael and offered it to them:

“Children of Ishmael, accept the Torah which I bring you this day, and if you keep its commandments you shall be blessed with all good!”

“What does Your Torah demand of us?” the Ishmaelites asked

cautiously.

“My Torah says ‘You shall not steal!’ “Replied the Almighty.

“That wouldn’t suit us at all,” replied the sons of Ishmael. We are men of commerce, and such a law would interfere with our business transactions. We are sorry, but we have no use for Your Torah.”

The next people that G-d approached were the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon and all the people of Canaan, to whom He said:

“I bring you a most precious gift - My Torah. Take it and you shall all be blessed with many days upon your land!”

The Canaanites spoke up, saying: “First tell us what is written in Your Torah.”

“In My Torah it is written: ‘You shall have fair scales, correct weights, and give full measure,’ “replied the Almighty.

“We do not want to accept Your Torah which is so finicky about such matters. Your Torah is not for us!” answered the Canaanites emphatically.

And so, after G-d had taken the Torah to all the other nations of the world, who lacked sufficient understanding to estimate its worth, He went to the children of Israel. He was confident that His chosen people would appreciate the Torah and accept it eagerly.

When G-d offered His Torah to the Jewish people, they responded, “Na’aseh V’Nishmah” “Yay! We shall do whatever you ask of us. Now, please tell us what to do.”

Is G-d Religious?

By Simon Jacobson

The polls are mixed on that count. Recent surveys show that as much as 80-90% of Americans will say that they believe in G-d, but 40-50% will say they do not practice a religion.

Indeed, if G-d is all-powerful and infinite, and religion is a set of laws and rituals and a list of things that limit us, it would seem that G-d could hardly be described as “religious.” Nor would it seem that being religious will bring a person closer to the infinite G-d.

If G-d transcends all limitation and definition, why would the way to relate to G-d be to impose further restriction and definition on our already finite and constricted lives?

Yet this paradox is not confined to the religious-spiritual aspect of the human experience. Throughout the ages, whenever man has endeavored to escape the bounds of the mundane and the everyday, he did so by submitting to a structured, even rigid, code of behavior.

My favorite example for this is the discipline of music. There are just so many musical notes on the scale, and no one – not even the greatest musician – can create additional notes or subtract any. Anyone who wishes to play or compose music must conform to this absolute, immutable system.

And yet, by submitting to this framework, the musician will create a piece of music that touches the deepest place in a person’s heart – a place that cannot be described, much less defined. By using this very precise, mathematical formula, the musician will create something that transports the listener to a place high above the confines and fetters of everyday life, high above the strictures of physics and mathematics.

Imagine, then, a musical discipline whose laws are dictated by the inventor and creator of life – by the one who has intimate knowledge of life’s every strength and every vulnerability, of its every potential and its every sensitivity.

The only question remaining is: but why so many laws? Why must this discipline dictate how we are to wake and how we are to sleep, and virtually everything in between?

Because life itself, in all its infinite complexity, is our instrument of connection with G-d. Every “scale” on its “range” must be exploited to achieve the optimum connection.

Music being our metaphor, we cannot but quote the famous anecdote in which Archduke Ferdinand of Austria reputedly says to Mozart, “Beautiful music, but far too many notes.” To which the composer replied, “Yes, your majesty, but not one more than necessary.”

RULES

Before you switch on your laser printer, read this: A laser is a device that produces an intense beam of light of a very pure single color. This beam can be made potent enough to vaporize a diamond, and precise enough to deposit a dot of ink 1/600th of an inch across in exact juxtaposition with tens of thousands of similar dots to produce your office memo in 12 pt. Times New Roman (captions in 14 pt Arial Narrow). Even more precise (and more expensive) are devices that yield a beam exact enough to perform eye surgery.

A laser beam is a beam of optic light—basically the same light produced by the flashlight you keep in the glove compartment of your car. The difference is that while the excited atoms in your flashlight bulb each emit light independently of each other and in many different wavelengths, a laser device stimulates a great number of atoms to emit their light in a single frequency and in step with each other, thereby producing a light beam of great potency and accuracy.

.....

As a rule, people don't like rules. We don't like being told that a food palatable to our taste buds is unhealthy for our body. We don't like being told that something desirous to ourselves is hurtful to another person. We don't like being told that a convenient habit is damaging to our environment. In other words, we don't like being told what to do. We don't like restrictions.

When the Children of Israel came out of Egypt, they were told that, in seven weeks' time, they would be given the Torah. They were so excited that they literally counted the days. At Mount Sinai, their souls flew from

their bodies in ecstasy when they heard G-d proclaim the Ten Commandments.

On the face of it, their joy seems somewhat misplaced. After all, these were a people just emerging from several generations of slavery. The last thing they would want—one assumes—is a set of restrictions on their lives. Basically, that's what the Torah is. Seven of the Ten Commandments are "Thou Shalt Not"s, as are 365 out of the Torah 613 mitzvos (the rest are "Thou Shall"s).

But the Jews wanted the Torah. The Midrash relates how G-d went to all the nations of the world asking them if they want a copy. "What does the Torah contain?" they asked. "Thou shalt not..." said G-d and was met with a no-thank-you before He could finish the sentence. The Jews, however, understood that this was no ordinary set of rules: this was a life regulator designed by the One who invented life, and knows how it is best applied.

At Sinai, all the peoples of the world were given a choice. Take Box A, and you get a life that expends

its energies every which way, in whatever color or frequency that strikes your fancy at any given moment. It'll even be able to do many useful things, like projecting animal shapes on the wall of a darkened room or finding those car keys you dropped in the bushes. Take Box B, and you get a life that focuses its energies on the purpose to which it was created.

Many took the flashlight. We opted for the laser.

From Chabad.org by Yanki Tauber

THE GUARDRAIL



Whoever keeps commandments keeps their life

— PROVERBS 19:16



Eggplant Rollatini

A delicious dairy Shavuot dish.



EGGPLANT AND CHEESE STUFFING:

3 medium eggplants,
about 3 lbs.

Olive oil

16 oz Ricotta cheese

2 cups of your favorite prepared marinara sauce or
create your own.

½ cup shredded Mozzarella cheese

2 garlic cloves, minced

5 basil leaves, shredded

1 egg, lightly beaten

Salt and pepper to taste.

FOR THE EGGPLANT AND STUFFING: Preheat broiler to high. Remove the tops of the eggplants. Cut into ¼ to ½-inch thick slices vertically, from top to bottom. Brush a large baking sheet with a little olive oil. Place the slices, in batches, on the sheet. Season lightly with salt and pepper, drizzle with a little olive oil. Place on rack 4-inches from broiler and broil until lightly browned and softened, about 4 minutes per side. Remove and let cool slightly.

Meanwhile, prepare the cheese stuffing. In a medium bowl, mix together the ricotta and mozzarella cheeses. Add the garlic, basil, eggs, salt and pepper. Mix well to combine.

TO ASSEMBLE: Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Lightly grease a 13x9x2-inch baking pan with spray or olive oil. Spread about ¼ cup of the sauce in the bottom of the pan. Spoon about 2 tablespoons of the cheese mixture on the short end of an eggplant slice and roll. Place in baking pan, seam side down. Continue with the remaining eggplant slices and cheese. Spread 1 cup of the remaining sauce on top and bake until hot and bubbly, 20 to 30 minutes. Remove from oven and let rest about 5 minutes before serving.

In the desert there are no office buildings or factories. So if you lived in the desert, chances are you wouldn't have a job. There'd be no boss bossing you, and no underlings under you.

In the desert there are no towns or neighborhoods—you'd be neither on the right nor on the wrong side of the tracks.

In the desert there aren't any department stores or grocery stores—you'd eat manna from heaven and wear the same pair of shoes for forty years.

Which is why, say our sages, G-d gave us the Torah in the desert.

Had He given it to us on Wall Street, He would have had to decide whom to appoint to the board and who should retain a controlling interest. Had He given it to us in the Holy Land, He'd have had to decide if He wants it in religious Jerusalem, mystical Sefad or hi-tech Tel Aviv. Or perhaps He'd have preferred a Marxist kibbutz or even a neo-Zionist settlement?

G-d wanted no shareholders in his Torah, no corporate structure, no social or political context. In fact, no context whatsoever. Just us and the Torah.

Wouldn't it have been great to stay in the desert?

But as soon as G-d was sure that we'd gotten the message—that we understood that the Torah is not the product of any particular age, environment or cultural milieu, and that it belongs, absolutely and unequivocally, to each and every one of us—he sent us to the cities and the towns of His world, to its farms and marketplaces, to its universities and office complexes. He told us that now that He's done His part, it's up to us to make His Torah relevant in all these places and in all these contexts.

Still, it's nice to come back to the desert once in a while. At least for a visit.

BY YANKI TAUBER, CHABAD.ORG

Classic Cheese Blintzes

Blintzes are a traditional dish for the holiday of Shavuos. Top with sour cream, apple sauce, or cinnamon and sugar.



The Inside Reason for Cheesecake

BATTER

- 4 eggs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 cup flour
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 package vanilla sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 1 Tbsp. oil

CHEESE FILLING I

- 1/2 pound farmer cheese
- 4 ounces cream cheese
- 4 Tbsps. honey or maple syrup
- juice of 1/2 lemon
- 1 egg yolk

CHEESE FILLING II

- 1 pound cottage cheese, strained
 - 2 egg yolks
 - 2 Tbsps. flour
 - 2 Tbsps. sugar
 - 1 tsp. vanilla sugar
 - 1/4 cup raisins (optional)
- USE:** 7 inch skillet
YIELDS: 12 blintzes

BATTER: In a large mixer bowl combine eggs, milk, water and blend well. Gradually add flour, then both sugars, salt and oil. Beat well until there are no lumps in the batter.

FILLING I: Combine all ingredients in a bowl and beat well. Or combine all the ingredients in a blender container and blend until smooth.

FILLING II: Combine all ingredients, except raisins, in a bowl and beat well. Or all the ingredients can be combined in

a blender container and blended until smooth. Then add raisins.

TO ASSEMBLE CREPES:

1. Prepare batter and filling of your choice. Using a paper towel or basting brush, apply a thin coating of oil to a 7 inch skillet. Place skillet over medium heat until skillet is hot but not smoking.

2. Ladle approximately 1/3 cup of batter into the skillet. Tilt pan to swirl the batter so it covers the bottom of the skillet.

3. Fry on one side until small air bubbles form, and top is set. Bottom should be golden brown. When done, carefully loosen edges of crepe and slip out of skillet onto a plate.

4. Repeat the above procedure until all the batter is used. Grease the skillet as needed.

5. Turn each crepe so that golden brown side is up. Place 3 tablespoons of filling on one edge in a 2 1/2 inch long by 1-inch wide mound.

6. Roll once to cover filling. Fold the sides into the center and continue rolling until completely closed.

7. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in the skillet and place each crepe seam side down in the skillet and fry 2 minutes on each side, turning once.

VARIATION: Whole wheat pastry flour can be used instead of white flour.

Excerpted from *Spice and Spirit, The Complete Kosher Jewish Cookbook*, published by Lubavitch Women's Cookbook Publications.

QUESTION:

What's behind the custom of eating dairy products on Shavuos? What's the connection between the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and eating milk products? (I'm not complaining, I love cheesecake – I'm just looking for a deep spiritual excuse to eat more.)

ANSWER:

Milk is actually refined blood. In a complex and wondrous process, the mammary glands transform blood into pure white milk.

There's something supernatural about that. To take a liquid as pungent and distasteful as blood, and convert it into a nourishing and drinkable food is nothing short of miraculous.

We can simulate this miracle in our own lives. Blood represents raw animalistic passion and untamed instinct. Milk is a symbol of refinement and purity of character. Making milk out of blood – refining our lower instincts – is our life goal.

The Torah introduced a radical new path to achieve this goal – the divine commandments. Through engaging in simple acts of goodness and sanctity, we can tame our animalistic instincts and align ourselves with the divine. With each individual act we elevate ourselves and our world another step, gradually transforming a rough and untamed existence into a home for G-d. We can turn our "blood" into "milk."

I also love cheesecake. As we eat it, let's remember the message behind it – that the Torah was given to transform our selfish appetites into an appetite for giving; to turn our blood, which is just for ourselves, into milk, the one thing the body produces just to give to another.

ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE BY ARON MOSS
CHABAD.ORG

Strength and Hope in the Most Daunting Circumstances

IN GRATITUDE TO THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON, OBM, GIFT OF LOVE AND UPLIFTING SPIRIT, WE PRESENT TO YOU THE FOLLOWING TWO FASCINATING STORIES.

STRENGTH FROM WITHIN

After the 1967 Six Day War, there was a great deal of tension along the Israeli-Egyptian border, which reached a crisis point when the Egyptians launched the War of Attrition.

In January of 1970, I participated with my paratrooper unit in Operation Rhodes, one of the famous battles that led to ending this war. The operation was successful, but during the battle three of our soldiers were killed and seven were wounded, myself included. I was hit while attempting to rescue my wounded companions, and as a result of this injury, my right leg was amputated.

My rehabilitation process included intense physical activity, which led to my participation in various athletic competitions. In 1976, together with a delegation of disabled athletes from Israel, I competed in the Paralympic Games taking place that year in Toronto, where I won a gold medal for the 100-meter sprint and our team won third place out of the forty countries participating.

On the way back to Israel, the delegation stopped in New York where the secretary of the IDF Disabled Veterans Organization, Yosef Lautenberg, had arranged for us to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

As our buses arrived at Chabad Headquarters in Crown Heights, the Chasidim were waiting and greeted us with great excitement. They welcomed us into the big synagogue, and then they were asked to leave.

When the Rebbe entered, the hall grew silent as a feeling of awe filled the room. He spoke to us in Hebrew, and although at times we found it hard to understand his Hebrew due to his strong Yiddish accent, our impression was that we were in the presence of a very special man who deeply cared about us.

FOCUS ON THE GOOD

My acquaintance with Chabad goes back to the mid-1970s, when the Rebbe's emissaries first came to Yeoville, a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa, where I was born and raised.

I was part of the post-hippie generation trying to find spiritual answers. This search drew us to Chabad where we found Chasidism and rediscovered the depth and beauty of Judaism.

In 1983 I joined a special raffle being held to send a representative of the community to travel to the Rebbe. I won, so my wife and I traveled to New York and we spent Passover there.

The day after Passover, there was a group audience for about thirty people and we had been advised to wait until everyone had left the room, and then to go up to the Rebbe and request a personal blessing. So we did exactly that.

My wife Maureen spoke. She introduced herself and said, "I've written to the Rebbe a few times that I cannot have children. The prognosis from doctors is very bad - they all say that it is hopeless. Yet I'm asking the Rebbe for a blessing for children."

The Rebbe looked at her for a long time. From the videos of the Rebbe that I have seen, I know that his habit was to respond quickly, but this time he didn't. He must have stared at Maureen for at least 20 seconds.

The Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Leibel Groner, seemed to sense that something was wrong and he started to urge her to move. That's when the Rebbe said, "*Gam zu l'tovah*" - a phrase from the Talmud which translates to "This, too, is for the good."

With that we left but my wife, who is fluent in Hebrew, was very upset. It took me about two hours to console her. I kept

saying, “You got a blessing from the Rebbe,” but she kept saying, “When I told the Rebbe I couldn’t have children, he said to me “This, too, is for the good.”

It was a statement that could be interpreted in two different ways — that good would eventually come from this situation and she would become pregnant, or that her inability to get pregnant was from G-d and therefore it must be seen as a good thing.

Soon, the Rebbe’s meaning became clear.

When we returned to South Africa - it couldn’t have been more than two or three weeks later - we were contacted by a social worker concerning an adoption. We were told: “A Jewish mother is expecting and cannot keep the child, so we are looking for Jewish parents. Would you be interested?”

Needless to say, the Rebbe’s words suddenly became obvious, and we immediately agreed to the adoption. A baby boy was born a few months later, our adoption went through and it was indeed a tremendous blessing.

A year later, we received another call from the same social worker. Again, there was a Jewish mother and baby on the way in need of a home - would we be interested in adopting? Of course, we agreed immediately again and ended up adopting another baby boy.



THE REBBE DISTRIBUTING DOLLARS

Another year went by, and the same thing happened for the third time in a row. This time, we adopted a baby girl.

Over the years, as our children grew up, the Rebbe’s blessing has remained with us. At each milestone, we could happily say *Gam zu l’tovah* - this, too, is for the good, whether at a Bar Mitzvah, when my oldest recited an entire discourse by heart in Yiddish or at our children’s weddings. On so many happy occasions, I have told this story, which usually brings tears to the eyes of everyone in the crowd.

There is one more story about the Rebbe that I would like to share - this story is about his behind-the-scenes influence on South Africa, which has been well documented.

The Rebbe’s message to us was that we were heroes, and that our injuries proved G-d had given us unique strengths beyond those of regular people. These strengths - this “special spiritual energy,” as he put it - enabled us “to overcome that which ordinary eyes perceive as a physical, bodily lack.”

“Furthermore,” the Rebbe continued, individuals who are disabled “can demonstrate that they are not only equal to those around them, but have a *greater* spirit which enables them to rise above and beyond an ordinary person, despite their physical shortcomings.”

He then suggested that we should not be called “handicapped” (*nechei*) but “exceptional” (*metzuyanim*).

The Rebbe also spoke about the need to increase security for the Jewish people in the world which begins with what he called “spiritual security.” He said that the *mezuzah* at the doorway of a Jewish home brings G-d’s protection, and he asked us to make sure that our *mezuzot* were kosher. “If you will leave me your addresses, my emissaries in Israel will visit your homes and will assist in checking the *mezuzot* or affixing new ones to the doorposts,” he promised.

(**He made good** on his promise. A *chasid* showed up in my dormitory at Ben-Gurion University, where I was studying medicine, and he put a *mezuzah* on my door there. Since then I have always made sure to have a *mezuzah* at my home.)

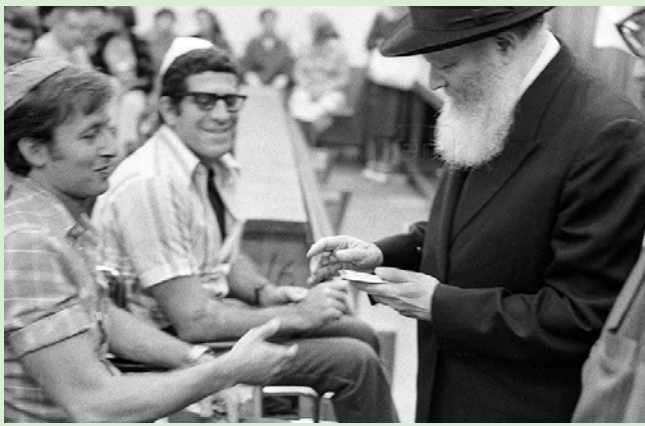
When the Rebbe finished his speech, he came down from the podium and walked between the rows, approaching and greeting each of us, one-by-one. He shook hands, listened patiently to what each of us had to say and responded with a short encouraging message. He also gave every one of us a dollar to donate to charity.

The brightness of his smile and the warmth that he radiated turned the experience of meeting him into something unforgettable. We knew that the Rebbe was a very busy man and that people from all over the globe came to meet him, but he made us feel that he had all the time in the world for us.

When the Rebbe came to me and shook my hand, I told him that I feel I am totally healthy. Although it’s true that I am an amputee, the concept of victory of spirit over matter - which the Rebbe had spoken about - has always been very clear to me. The Rebbe gave me a big smile and a dollar and moved on. I hold this dollar dear and have always treasured it.

As a native of Kibbutz Gal On, I was brought up and educated in an atmosphere that was totally disconnected from religion. So the encounter with the Rebbe — especially his warm and loving approach — was a first of its kind for me. In his speech, he had emphasized the common denominator among Jews, no matter who they are and where they find themselves.





All this made a deep impression on me and started a real transformation in me. It led me to connect to Jewish tradition and religion in a very significant way. And it affected the way that I, as an orthopedist, relate to my patients.

I feel that I am passing on to my patients the Rebbe's blessing to me and that it assists me in healing them. When I see that they are having a very hard time with their injury, I tell them that if I, with my disability, was able to arrive where I am and do whatever I wish to do, they certainly can too. This was the Rebbe's inspirational message - that this ability to go beyond physical limitations is present in all disabled people, and they will find that they have amazing strengths if they try to discover what was gifted to them by G-d.

As a result of the Rebbe's inspiration, I became one of the founders, in 1995, of the *Amutat Etgarim* ("Challenge Association"), which has since grown into a very large organization, assisting people with all kinds of disabilities to rehabilitate and reach high levels in athletics, including extreme sports.

The Rebbe opened the door for me, and I — along with my teammates — left that meeting feeling very uplifted. Even today, nearly forty-five years later, the memory of that astounding event remains with me, as do the lessons that I took from it for the rest of my life.

BY DR. AHARON DANZIGER, AN ORTHOPEDIST, SERVES AS A SENIOR PHYSICIAN AT THE HADASSAH MEDICAL CENTER IN JERUSALEM.

In 1990, I was contacted by Nelson Mandela's organization, the African National Congress (ANC), which was looking for an advertising agency to help reposition the organization from being a liberation movement towards being a political party. Furthermore, they then wanted to hire us as their ad agency for the upcoming general election, the first democratic elections held in South Africa. It was a difficult decision for me because although I was left-leaning and had been brought up in a vehemently anti-apartheid family, it was a challenging situation since many senior members of the ANC were still "banned" under South African law.

The first time I went to the ANC's Department of Publicity offices, I literally came face-to-face with a massive poster of Yasser Arafat, which covered the wall facing the entrance. This immediately made me question the wisdom of what I was doing, so I decided to ask the Rebbe's advice, informing him that I had been working with the ANC and I stressed that their connections to the PLO were making me question my decision.

The Rebbe didn't hesitate to give me a blessing for success and advised that I should use my influence "to focus on the good." There was a condition, however - that I should keep silent and say nothing about his blessing until after the elections.

I had many opportunities to convince the ANC publicity team to eschew all negative messaging and to focus on building a vision of hope, a vision of a better future, for all the people of South Africa.

At the time there were members of the ANC leaders who were inclined otherwise. I remember a specific ad they had suggested. It read, "They stole your dignity, they stole your land, now they want to steal your vote."

Bearing the Rebbe's advice in mind, I was able to convince the decision-makers at the ANC that we should not be wasting our resources looking back at past wrongs, but forward to a better future. Without much further debate, the ad was rejected as a bad idea.

For the next four years I went into every meeting with a clear and powerful conviction of how to approach the campaign - "to focus on the good."

BY MR. LOUIS GAVIN, A PARTNER AND CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER AT THE OPEN COLLABORATION, A COMPANY BASED IN BENMORE, SOUTH AFRICA.

FROM MY
ENCOUNTER
WITH THE
REBBE SERIES

MY ENCOUNTER
with the REBBE

CORONA LESSONS

RABBI YISROEL BAAL SHEM TOV, founder of Chassidism, whose *yahrzeit* (anniversary of passing) occurs on Shavuot, taught that every occurrence in the universe - even a negative one - can and should provide us with lessons in the service of G-d.

THE COVID-19 VIRUS that began as a localized outbreak in central China has quickly become a global pandemic, bringing the world to a standstill and redefining "normal" life.

AS WE CONTINUE TO FOLLOW health guidelines and pray for the recovery of those infected, here are some insights and lessons, among many others, that may be derived from this global crisis:

1. OUR SHARED HUMANITY

The virus is blind to cultural and ideological differences, infecting people of all races, religions and ages. It distinguishes not between poor and rich, statespersons and ordinary folks, powerful and weak. It teaches us about the equality of all humans in the eyes of G-d; despite our differences, we are one humanity under G-d. As the verse states, "And He distinguishes not between the rich and poor" (Job 34:19).

2. RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Scientists are still examining the nature of this new disease. It is clear, however, that one's presence and condition affects all he or she comes in contact with. Accordingly, it behooves us to utilize this inter-relationship in a positive way. This, in essence, is in the spirit of the statement of our sages, "All Israel are responsible for one another," or as is also translated, "All Israel are interwoven one with the other."

3. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Although we are inter-connected, nevertheless, the virus teaches us about our enormous personal responsibility. For not only does our behavior affect ourselves, but will necessarily affect others as well. In the words of Maimonides, "One's behavior has the power of tipping the scale and affecting himself as well as the entire world."

4. MIRACULOUS CREATION

It illustrates the G-dly wonders vested in creation. It highlights the complexity of any and all creatures, including our own human body. The coronavirus, *one* microbe, a miniscule creature measuring 80 billionths of a meter in diameter, teaches us about the complexity of even one body, composed of trillions and trillions of particles working in harmony, (until something malfunctions). It brings to the fore our sages' statement that "We must thank G-d for each and every breath we take."

5. DEPENDENCY ON G-D

The coronavirus has taught us about the powerlessness of humanity, and that our lives and destiny are completely dependent on G-d and G-d alone. As we say in our daily prayer, "We offer thanks

to You and recount your praise, evening, morning, and noon, for our lives which are committed into Your hand, for our souls which are entrusted to You; for Your miracles which are with us daily, and for Your continual wonders and beneficences."

6. THE INVISIBLE REALITY

Corona brought to the fore the reality and the power of the invisible, of the spiritual and G-dly; a reality even stronger than that which is visible and tangible - affecting every single person in some way. We can't see the coronavirus with the naked eye, nor can we taste, hear or feel it. Still, we feel its effects palpably. The spiritual spheres are indeed far stronger, real and in fact powerful and effective in the physical realm.

7. BEING OURSELVES

With many of us stuck at home (alone or with loved ones), we have temporarily lost the identities we assume as we go into the outside world. We don't have to act for others to define our lifestyle. The pandemic has given us space and time to connect with who we really are. This coincides with the statement of our sages, "In each and every generation, and each and every day, a person should see himself as if he left Egypt today." Freedom is a state of mind to be pursued regularly, wherever we find ourselves.

It is particularly true on the Jewish day of rest, Shabbat. We unplug and focus on ourselves and those we care about and what's really important - family, etc. During this pandemic, we do more of that during the week as well.

8. HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY FOR GOOD

Under the pressure of social distancing and social isolation, we are seeing the awakening of a renewed social consciousness.

Not only have our interactions with others not declined, but they have become more meaningful, more precious, more intentional, more purposeful. People meet and greet, apparently with even greater frequency than ever, not in the flesh, but in the instantaneous ether of cyberspace.

Whether through Zoom video conference, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp messenger, email or telephone, people are using technology to connect, to organize, to help each other, to study together - to better themselves.

9. LOVE BEYOND PHYSICAL DISTANCE

The coronavirus spreads by being in proximity to someone who is a carrier. To avoid contracting the disease, we have been advised to keep our physical distance and self-isolate, which certainly impacts how we feel and behave. Love knows no bounds. Coronavirus has aroused deep feelings of concern for others and the need to connect with others, for our own sake as well as for the sake of our family, acquaintances and friends.

LIGHT IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

A HEAVENLY SIGNAL

When my daughter was recently born I reached out to our wider family group asking if anyone knows of an operating - under present corona quarantine legal - minyan.

My aunt in Johannesburg replied immediately that there is an old age home where everyone is quarantined and they are having a minyan.

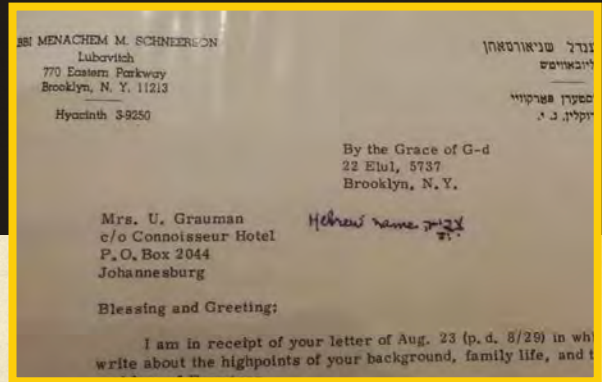
I immediately reached out to the Rabbi there, asking him if he would do the favor of naming our daughter and he immediately replied that he was happy to do it. I gave him the info and by 2:00 am our time (in Canada) the baby was named. She was named Tzivia after my wife's great-grandmother.

I must say somewhere deep down I felt a little awkward that the naming was done somewhere far away without the presence of family and friends, and maybe I should have looked around some more before rushing.

This morning I received a message from the secretary at the old age home in Johannesburg who is one of those who found Judaism through Lubavitch in the 70s.

She related that her English name was Ursula (apparently named somewhat after her Grandfather Hershel, in Hebrew Tzvi). When she became observant she asked the Rebbe for advice what Hebrew name she should obtain. (She didn't tell the Rebbe the reason for her name, Ursula.) The Rebbe replied that she should take the name Tzivia (female version of Tzvi) and atypically wrote it out in his handwriting on the letter (see photo).

Now, of all the places in the world to name our daughter, it was in the very place where someone was literally named by the Rebbe, Tzivia! This of course removed my apprehension for having her named on the other side of the world.



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CURE WITH FAITH AND HOPE

One of the worst diseases during the years 1918-1922 was typhus. Thousands of people were sickened by this terrible disease and there was not a known cure, so many died.

Typhus was also an incredibly contagious disease and people who had contracted the disease were forced to be quarantined.

When typhus was raging through the region, Rabbi Meir Shlomo Yanovsky (the Rebbe's maternal grandfather), the rabbi of Nikolayev, Ukraine, fell ill. The illness was highly contagious and had no known cure. In an effort to contain its spread, the authorities ordered anyone who contracted the disease to be quarantined outside the city and essentially left to die.

Completely isolated from anyone not stricken with typhus—other than a lone doctor who delivered medication and food to the other side of a closed door each day—the gravely ill patients languished in depression and despair. Rabbi Meir Shlomo, too, was forced into this quarantine, where he watched hopelessly and helplessly as the people around him died one after the other, abandoned and alone.

When the Chosid Reb Asher, the local *schochet* (ritual slaughterer), learned that the Rabbi, his friend, was stricken by this illness, Reb Asher did not sit idly by. Determined to help, Reb Asher would travel to the quarantine camp daily. Unable to enter, he would stand beneath a window and read loudly the 11th chapter of *Iggeret Hakodesh*, the third section of the *Tanya* by Rabbi Schneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Lubavitch Movement, known colloquially as “*Lehaskilcha Bina*” (“To enlighten you with understanding”).

The epistle is a somewhat mystical letter that describes how “...no evil descends from above and everything is truly good” so one should view their own sufferings as actual good that has been disguised as the opposite of good. In fact, if one works on oneself enough, one can come to view it as actual good!

“...No evil descends from above, and everything is good. And when man will contemplate his continually coming to exist truly every moment and absorbs this, how can he possibly think he has ever suffered or had any afflictions relating to children, life and sustenance, or any other kind of worldly sufferings...?”

Although he was unsure if Rabbi Meir Shlomo could even hear him, Reb Asher returned every day for thirty days to read to him, hoping to encourage his good friend through those dark days.

Against the odds, Rabbi Meir Shlomo recovered and returned home. When he was able to meet Reb Asher, he thanked him profusely. “You gave me life! Every day, after hearing the *Tanya* I felt stronger and healthier. The *Tanya* you read encouraged and inspired me to stay strong and positive, it sustained my faith and enabled me not to succumb to illness.”

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Why Michael From Siberia Cried on Shavuot

Never mind the games and other playthings, this five-year-old had his eye on the real prize

Mussie and Michael with Michael's new "Torah." It was Shavuot morning. Our synagogue in Tyumen, Siberia, was filled with men, women and many children who had all gathered to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments during the services.

After a lavish dairy Kiddush lunch, we began drawing raffles (in a way permitted on the Jewish holiday) for all the children there. We made sure to get lots of prizes in advance, so that each one would get something. Some kids wound up with small games; others received a book of Psalms, a prayer book or other books.

Finally, there were just two prizes left—the big ones the kids had been eyeing with hope: a scooter and a pair of roller blades. We pulled out the last two tickets. Daniel became the proud owner of a scooter, and Roma—who'd come to the synagogue for the very first time—received the roller blades.

As the children gathered in groups to admire their new items, I noticed that one boy was not joining in the fun. Five-year-old Michael was off in a corner, crying. I assumed that he might have been envious of his brother, Daniel, who had just won the scooter.

It was only after everyone had left that one of our teachers revealed the situation.

"Since Passover," she explained, "Michael's been learning

about Shavuot, which comes after 49 days of counting the Omer. Every day, he eagerly added another sticker to the chart hanging on his classroom wall, preparing to the day when Gd Himself would give His people a special gift—the Torah."

Finally, the big day arrived, and there in the synagogue were stacks of prizes, including Torah books. As the raffle progressed, he waited with anticipation for "his" Torah to be given to him. When the raffle ended and all he had was a game in his hand, he burst out crying. Disappointed, he refused to participate in the rest of the program.

As we walked home from services with our children, my wife, Sterni, and I marveled at this young boy's sincerity.

Suddenly, our reverie was broken by our 6-year-old daughter, Mussie, who'd won a Russian volume of *Kitzur Shuchan Aruch* ("Code of Jewish Law").

"Ima, Abba," she began. "You know what? I want to give my prize to Michael. I already have a Hebrew *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* at home, and I don't really need another one in Russian."

This morning, as soon as they arrived at kindergarten, Mussie handed Michael his new book. The joy on his little face was indescribable. Michael had received the Torah.

ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE IN CHABAD.ORG BY YERACHMIEL GORELIK



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A Letter to My Family

Dear Family Members,

I realize that we, the newly religious can sometimes be perceived as annoying, and even embarrassing.

After all, we were “normal” at some point before we suddenly became religious, old-fashioned, tradition-oriented, complicated, and sometimes, seemingly just plain difficult.

But please consider this: You often boast with pride about Jewish contributions to the world. You take pride in Einstein, Freud, Houdini, and countless others whose names are engraved in history. You clearly identify with Jewish pain and often scan the headlines for Jewish and Israeli names. You worry about the safety of Israel and sympathize with its citizens because many of your relatives live there. You take pride in discussing your grandparents' Yiddish fluency and smile at the memories of your grandmother's cooking. You live up to your family values by investing in your education, being strongly committed to the arts, and, of course, nurturing a deep connection with your Jewish mother.

This is what it means to be a Jew: wonderful memories, intellectual accomplishments, and family ties. But shouldn't we acknowledge that these aren't just randomly shared values? These are the cornerstones of the Jewish foundation, transmitted to our nation by Moses himself when we collectively agreed to become the “chosen” people - chosen, in fact, by G-d, Himself - and to live in accordance with that commitment.

Today, you and I are products of this decision. No one knows how we've been able to survive for 2,000 years, scattered among the nations of the world. Yet today there is an undeniable connection between the Jewish people, regardless of their language, background or social status. We are the only nation with one collective destiny.

What kept us together, separate, “chosen” for more than 2,000 years?

The answer lies in one word: Torah. The Torah - our manual - taught us how to live a life of connection and purpose. It is full of commandments that bind us to our Creator and each other. It teaches us about absolute values of compassion, dedication, morality, justice, human dignity, and uncompromised integrity.

The values that we are all so proud of today come from our Torah. In order to uphold these eternal principles, we need to know their source to go back to their roots.

Many brave people have risked their lives to uphold our G-d-given commandments. At times, these selfless and deeply committed people were an absolute minority, yet they took upon themselves to preserve and transmit the traditions of our fathers. Persecuted, abused and mocked, they remained uncompromising. It is to these humble heroes of Jewish history that we owe tremendous gratitude.

So why don't these heroic acts move us today? Perhaps

it is easier to admire grandiose gestures from afar, rather than make small insignificant steps in our personal lives.

Despite the fact that we no longer need to risk our lives to uphold Jewish traditions, many of us simply walk away from the source of our binding truth and values. We walk away from the Torah, as if it is no longer relevant or applicable.

Do we scoff at old-fashioned traditions and think we've outgrown them? Is that fair? The only reason we survived is because of the meticulous observance of our Jewish way of life! Connecting our lives to Torah is the only way to ensure that our children will identify with and celebrate their Jewish heritage.

Now I get to the personal and rather painful part of this letter. You see, as you read about heroes of olden days or modern times - such as the Soviet Jews who attempted to hijack a plane to escape from the former Soviet Union to Israel (“Operation Wedding,” June 15, 1970) - you feel pride and admiration.

These were dedicated people who withstood pogroms, persecution, inquisition, crusades, anti-Semitism, communism and all other calamities during Jewish history and still remained committed to the Jewish way of life. It is this type of persistence that assured our survival as a nation throughout history.

But when someone in your life is trying to uphold a kosher diet, keep Shabbat or fulfill any other Jewish commandment from the Torah, your initial reaction is to criticize or dismiss them.

Such commitment deserves respect. Yes, it can be difficult and inconvenient, and the person making those changes should be polite and respectful. Yet the things that are important and truly meaningful in life require certain sacrifices.

So if you have people in your life who have “become religious” (or rather, “returned to the values of the Jewish people”), please don't mock them, but instead learn with them. Let them be a source of inspiration, your personal light in your spiritual journey.

As we embrace our Jewish identity, let's remember that we are a living autograph of the brave and humble heroes who fought for our survival, such as Queen Esther or King David. G-d put a stubborn courage in their hearts so that they would not fear or surrender. As descendants of these brave heroes, we have the courage to stand up for G-d, for our people, and for our heritage.

We are a link in the chain of the Jewish collective story. Our heritage is not “his story,” it's “your story.” Don't surrender; let us add our link to the eternal chain of our people.

BY SOFYA TAMARKIN

BORN IN THE SOVIET UNION, SOFYA LIVES IN PHILADELPHIA, RUNS AN ORTHOPEDIC COMPANY, AND HOLDS AN MBA DEGREE. SHE TEACHES TORAH, TRAVELS THE WORLD, AND IS INVOLVED WITH RAJE.

MAILBOX



Rabbi Shmotkin,

Thank you so much for always keeping me in mind and sending me gifts for holidays. This year I did my first Passover Seder at my home and matzo you sent was used. My 14 year old daughter said it best, "Mom, why don't we do this every year?" I think out of all of this we have a new tradition. We always relied on being invited into others homes. Being a single mom I was able to still bring this amazing tradition to my 17 year old son... and 14 year old daughter... all thanks to you.

Your friend,

NB

Dear Rabbi Shmotkin,

I hope you had a happy Pesach. We enjoyed the shmurah matzah at our Seder—thank you! You do so many important programs in the community. Hopefully this small contribution will help.

Be well,

JS

Dear Rabbi Shmotkin,

Thank you so much for your extremely kind, heartfelt, and thoughtful note that you wrote me several months ago. Though I haven't responded until now, please know

how much it meant to me, and how I still reflect on it. It means far more to me than any donation would.

I am grateful for your and your family's support and encouragement. I still look back with fondness at the hospitality you showed me during my initial years back in Milwaukee, and I look with admiration at your and Lubavitch of WI's good work and accomplishments in the last 20 years.

Thank you again, and wishing you, Rebbetzin Shmotkin, and your family good health, nachas, and hatzlacha.

J

Can't imagine what the Jewish world would be without Chabad.

M.B.

... The Pesach Celebration issue certainly addressed the unique time and circumstance with which we all found ourselves in, leading up to and including, the holiday.

The emphasis was on the individual, rather than the community... And you equipped everyone with all the tools to get it done. You armed us with the history, the practical how-to's, the inspiring stories, and the motivation

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to take advantage of this incredible opportunity to confront our own self imposed limits, fears, complacencies, and addictions that restrict us from stepping up and doing what is necessary to assist G-d in this final part of His magnificent plan.

To feel and to know that we have one foot still in the Diaspora and one foot in redemption. And to know that all we have to do is take that leap. We felt the excitement of coming to the first two seders, the weekdays and the Moshiach meal, because we had no distractions, and did have the awareness of having been gifted with a private, one on one, up close and personal festival with Him. Instead of feeling alone, or lonely, or frightened, we felt hopeful and confident. We felt proud and capable. Despite (or maybe because of) all of the difficulties and chaos out there, we focused our thoughts, speech and actions on the inner and inward. We studied, we learned, we scrutinized ourselves, we prepared our homes and ourselves. We stepped up.

Thank you, Rabbi
J.

Former Obama Speechwriter Speaks on Her Discovery of Judaism

Article originally published by eJewish Philanthropy on February 22, 2018

Sarah Hurwitz served as a senior speechwriter for President Barack Obama and then as a chief speechwriter for First Lady Michelle Obama.

While at the White House, Sarah Hurwitz connected with Judaism, exploring the wisdom of Jewish law, the power of Jewish spirituality, and the lessons of Jewish history.

Excerpts from a speech by Sarah Hurwitz.

...I want to thank her for... hosting this event to talk about how to help people engage with rich, meaningful Jewish content... I don't think there is any more urgent and important issue for the Jewish people today, and I also think that there's really no more challenging issue.

And I say this not as a rabbi... or Jewish professional... or scholar – I'm none of those things – I say this as a regular Jew whose own story really illustrates the many difficulties of connecting Jews to meaningful Jewish content.

I had what I think is a pretty typical non-Orthodox American Jewish upbringing. I went to Hebrew school where many hard working Jewish educators did their best to make up for the fact that neither I nor any of my classmates had any kind of meaningful Jewish practice going on at home. And I didn't really enjoy it.

"This wasn't the boring Hebrew school or services I'd grown up with – it wasn't dull or stale or offensive... it was moving, and insightful, and incredibly relevant to my life today."

My family attended High Holy Day services at our local synagogue... and they were excruciating. Plodding through those awkward responsive readings, reciting our lines on cue in that old-timely language, honestly, it felt like we were all bit players in some kind of depressing historical re-enactment, and it left me feeling like Judaism was something to be endured rather than enjoyed.

And once I had my bat mitzvah, beyond grudgingly attending an occasional High Holy Day service, I was pretty much out.

Then, about four years ago, I broke up with a guy I had been dating, and I suddenly had all this time on my hands that I was looking to fill... and I got an email advertising an eight week intro to Judaism class. I signed up for this class not to fulfill some deep existential longing, but really just to fill my Wednesday nights.

And while there was nothing particularly special about the class itself, I was absolutely blown away by the material we were studying.

The texts on Jewish ethics and values articulated my ethics and values, but in a way that was far deeper, and more insightful than I ever could have done myself.

Seen through adult eyes, practices like Shabbat struck me as utterly brilliant and profoundly counter-cultural in a way that we desperately need right now. In our consumerist society which tells us that we never have enough money, possessions or success and we should just keep working harder and spending more, to have a tradition that insists that for 25 hours each week, we say, “No boss, I’m not going to answer your emails; no Facebook, I’m not going to sit around liking things, being advertised to, and feeling bad about my life. Instead, I’m actually going to spend time with my loved ones, stop trying to bend the world to my will, and actually appreciate what I have.” That’s pretty amazing.

That initial class led to other classes... a lot of reading on my own... and my first Jewish meditation retreat, which was where I was exposed to a kind of Jewish spirituality which I found to be incredibly powerful and unlike anything I’d ever experienced in a synagogue.

This wasn’t the boring Hebrew school or services I’d grown up with – it wasn’t dull or stale or offensive... it was moving, and insightful, and incredibly relevant to my life today.

And I think my story perfectly illustrates a key problem here: the fact is that the only points of contact many Jews have with Judaism are with its least accessible, most-off putting parts.

If all you see of Judaism is your mediocre Hebrew school and two High Holy Day services a year, and you don’t have the extensive learning necessary to understand the depth and complexity of Jewish liturgy, then these services basically seem to depict a G-d who’s a king on a throne in the sky, who rewards and punishes people entirely according to their merit, is all powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, and really enjoys our repetitive prayers to him.

Few people, including your rabbi, actually believe in this kind of G-d. But how would you, as an average Jew, know that?

And why would you walk away from such an experience thinking, “You know, I really think Judaism can help me cultivate a meaningful spirituality, and explore my big questions about what it means to be a good person... do good in the world... and lead a meaningful, purposeful life. I really think this is something I want to teach to my children.”

And I find this to be maddening, because all of this is exactly what Judaism has to offer people.

But they have no way of knowing that.

It’s this epic communications problem where we never convey to the average Jew precisely the things about Judaism that they would find to be most meaningful and relevant to their lives.

As a result, many Jews know very little about Judaism, like shockingly little. It reminds me of those surveys where they ask Americans to name the three branches of government, and a surprising number of people can’t name a single branch.

If you did a similar survey of the Jewish people, I bet you would find that while they might know the Torah is the thing on the scrolls in the cabinet at the front of the synagogue, they have no idea what it actually is. Ditto for the Talmud.



“...the fact is that the only points of contact many Jews have with Judaism are with its least accessible, most-off putting parts.”

If you asked them what Jewish values are, they'd probably say something like "social justice." Which is nice, and certainly true, but that also happens to be a Christian value... and a Muslim value... and a Buddhist value... and a secular humanist value.

There is certainly a unique Jewish understanding of, and approach to, social justice, but they have no idea what it is.

If you asked them what the Jewish conception of G-d is, they likely won't know that that's a trick question – that there is no one accepted definition or theology of G-d in Judaism.

If you ask them what Judaism says about what happens after you die, chances are, they have no idea.



"It's this epic communications problem where we never convey to the average Jew precisely the things about Judaism that they would find to be most meaningful and relevant to their lives."

And these aren't nitpicky questions about obscure points of Jewish law – these are some of the most important questions that we grapple with as human beings.

So this is the first problem – people know very little about Judaism, and it's unlikely that they'll ever have any reason to remedy that lack of knowledge.

But let's just say that, like me, they somehow get inspired and decide that actually, Judaism does have something to teach them, and they really want to learn it.

Honestly, I wish them luck.

I have two degrees from Harvard, I've written speeches for the President and First Lady of the United States, and while I have many flaws and weaknesses, being stupid is not one of them. But trying to learn about Judaism has been one of the hardest things I have ever done. It makes working in the White House seem incredibly easy.

And I'm not talking about becoming a renowned scholar – that was never my goal – I'm talking about just grasping the basics.

I'm talking about just knowing enough to even begin learning.

One of the biggest challenges about Judaism is that everything is hyperlinked to everything else, and if you don't have basic background and context, it can be incredibly confusing.

So let's say you're a Jew like me five years ago, and someone presents you with a text study.

Ok, for starters, who exactly are these "Rabbis" who seem to be arguing with each other in this really old-school language? Oh, right, those are the scholars who had to re-imagine Judaism about 2000 years ago when the Temple was destroyed.

Sorry, the Temple? Yeah, so Jews back in the day used to worship G-d by sacrificing animals at a large Temple in Jerusalem.

Ok, but where does the text they're arguing about – something from Exodus – where does that come from? Oh, that's from the Torah.

Ok, so the Torah is? And so on.

Jewish holidays and life cycle rituals and ethics are linked to Talmud and Torah which is linked to Jewish history – and you kind of need to know a little about all of it to really understand any of it.

And it's not easy to get that knowledge by reading on your own.

And I'm not just talking about Talmud or other ancient texts. I'm talking about modern secondary sources as well. I've found that many of the smartest, most interesting and inspiring books about Judaism generally require some basic background. I really couldn't understand them until I'd spent a considerable amount of time working my way through introductory classes and books. And not everyone has that kind of time or motivation, or those kinds of resources.

I want to share what I've found that's been meaningful and transformative for me... and I want to show people that Judaism absolutely has something to offer them as well... but they have to be willing to go study... they have to be willing to actually do some learning on their own.

The truth is that a lot of Jewish engagement opportunities, especially for young adults, are pretty thin on the content...

And I have to be honest, a lot of Jewish engagement activities are like Soul Cycle, but without any pedaling.

It's like: let's get together and bake fun flavors of challah for Shabbat, or let's have a party for Rosh Hashanah and make apple and honey-tinis... but let's not discuss the incredibly profound spiritual, moral and cultural lessons of these Jewish holidays and practices.

It's fun, but you don't walk away transformed.

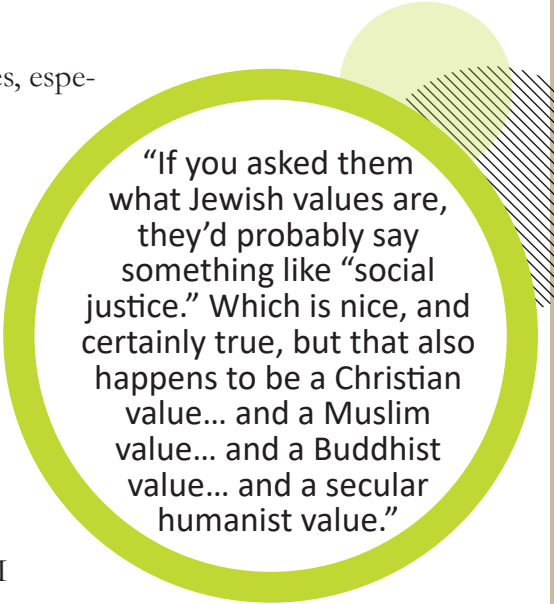
And I think that's too bad, because I actually don't think people are just looking for things that are fun and easy – I think they're looking for things that are meaningful too.

And I certainly don't have the solutions here – I'm hoping that all of you will figure this out...

But if you're willing to be innovative, and take some risks, I think you can make a huge difference here.

And I don't use the word "huge" lightly – I would urge you to think big. Like Birthright big. Think about what could happen if we invested that kind of passion and commitment – and that level of resources – into a kind of Birthright experience that exposes people to powerful Jewish ideas and practices and shows them how the wisdom and worldview of Judaism can transform their lives.

Just for me personally, discovering rich Jewish content changed how I see the world and how I live my life, and it's led me to want to inspire others to have the same experience. And I think if you all can find a way to reach more Jews like me, you can have a tremendous impact on our Jewish future.



"If you asked them what Jewish values are, they'd probably say something like "social justice." Which is nice, and certainly true, but that also happens to be a Christian value... and a Muslim value... and a Buddhist value... and a secular humanist value."



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Free online Jewish learning

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We are pleased to announce a major new initiative - the opening of The Wisconsin Jewish Academy. The Academy offers over 50 classes on a variety of Jewish topics - with more being added every day!

In response to hundreds of inquiries from throughout the Wisconsin Jewish Community, Lubavitch and its affiliate Chabad-House branches are launching the Wisconsin Jewish Academy with the goal of enriching and deepening our Jewish perspective, learning and knowledge.

Below is a detailed list of just a small sampling of the classes offered. You can view the complete semester as well as register for sessions by visiting www.Learn-ChabadWI.org.

All educational programs are FREE and open to the general public. While a one time, 10-second sign up is required, no affiliation is necessary.



A five-part Jewish literacy series about how Judaism is observed at home, which is particularly relevant at this time. Sundays at 10:00 am and Wednesdays at 6:00 pm.



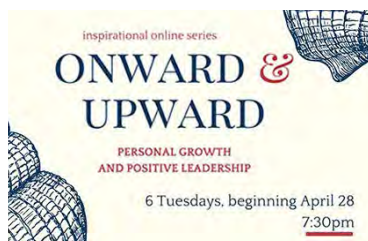
A four-part series on Pirkei Avot-Ethics of Our Fathers, offering Jewish wisdom on life, morality, and character development. Wednesdays at 1:00 pm.



A five-part series, Tuesdays at 7:15 pm. Demystifying lesser-known Jewish holidays of the Jewish calendar. This series will enrich your appreciation of these special days.



A six-week course, Mondays at 12:00 pm. Explore the ways in which the Holocaust continues to affect our generation and colors what it means to live as a Jew today.



A six-week course, Tuesdays at 7:30 pm. Onward & Upward: Personal Growth and Positive Leadership. An inspirational online series.



We have over 50 classes and are adding more each week. Explore classes on topics such as the weekly Torah portion, Mysticism, Jewish Law, Jewish history, and more!

Visit www.Learn-ChabadWI.org

Lubavitch of Wisconsin Pesach 2020 by the Numbers

When we came to the realization that we would not be able to host Community Seders, Lubavitch of Wisconsin, along with its affiliates (Chabad Houses throughout the state), were concerned for many families about how they would celebrate Pesach this year.

What ended up happening was nothing short of a miracle!

We had our largest Communal Seder ever!

Hundreds & Hundreds of participants!



2,000
homes
received
matzah



Hundreds
of Seder items
(including matzah,
wine, haggadahs,
and kiddush cups)
delivered



1,000
meals prepared
and packed



\$87,000
distributed
as financial
assistance for
the holiday



What have our schools been up to?

Bader Hillel High



- 110 hours spent prepping lessons each week.
- 1600 emails, texts, IM's between parents and students each week.
- Pesach care package sent to every student by the BHH staff.

From our Students:



"My first day back went really really well. The changes to the schedule are super duper helpful. Thank you for that, and all your hard work."



*School: "BHH will not resume in-person school after Pesach".
Students: "Noooooooooooo!"*



*"I LOVE THIS SCHOOL
SOOOOOOOOOOOOOO MUCH"*





Jewish Beginnings Lubavitch Preschool

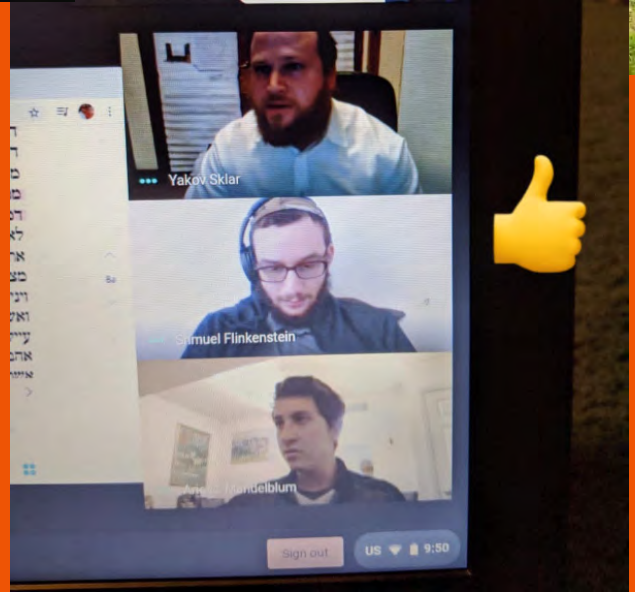


- Created 310+ videos for storytime, nature walks, music class, physical education, davening, art projects, science experiments, math exercises, and more.
- Delivered 88 educational and art packages to children's homes.
- Weekly online classroom gatherings attract over 110 children each week.

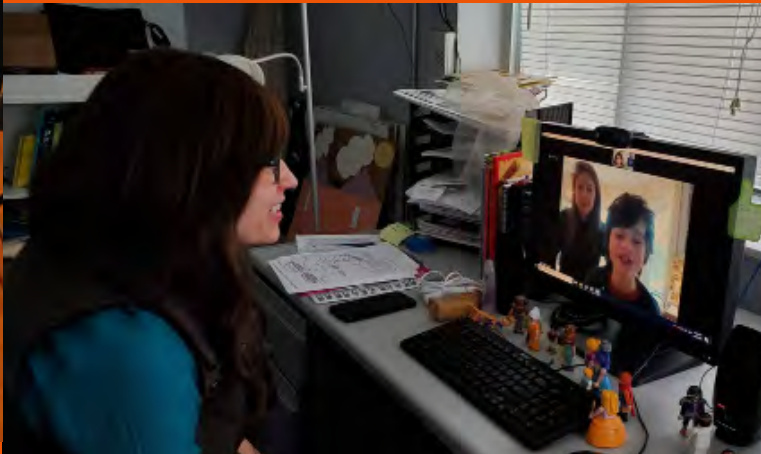
From our Parents:

- "It made my daughter's day to see her Morah visit her at our window."*
- "The art package our Morahs delivered was unreal! Hours of projects, activities, and fun for our kids. Amazing."*
- "We love every interaction within our JB WhatsApp group. We don't feel alone in this."*
- "JB connects with us daily. We're so grateful to our Morahs and staff who continue to teach and engage our children in new ways. The support is unbelievable."*

BADER HILLEL HIGH (ZOOM CLASSES)



THE SHUL - BAYSIDE (PESACH MEALS & HEBREW SCHOOL)



FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE (SERVING, CONNECTING, & CHEERING)





With sincere and immense gratitude to Mr. Josh Becker for his gracious and tireless contributions to this Shavuot Celebration guide.



BADER HILLEL ACADEMY



BADER HILLEL ACADEMY

As Milwaukee's original day school, Bader Hillel Academy's intellectually rigorous dual curriculum empowers and cultivates each student in mind, body, and soul. Through the teaching of Torah, critical thinking, and openness to new ideas, Bader Hillel Academy inspires our students to achieve academic and personal excellence, preparing them for the ever-changing world beyond.

A caring community that fosters the joyous practice of Judaism, BHA's graduates are instilled with the confidence to navigate life's journey with a strong moral compass and to apply their passions, knowledge, and skills to the betterment of the Jewish people, the United States, and the world.

Bader Hillel Academy's welcoming approach is one of acceptance and student equality. Our students come to know the impact they are capable of, both at school, at home, and in their community. Changing the world for the better is not just something they study in books, it is something they embrace and act upon every day.

Students develop a love and thirst for knowledge and for Judaism which they integrate and express in all aspects of their lives. They grow a sensitivity, love, and understanding that there is a Jewish way to do things that inform their choices, shapes their values, and defines and guides their present lives and their future.

The Ten Commandments

Translated



1. I am the Lrd your Gd, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

your maid-servant, your cattle, and your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the Lrd made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lrd blessed the Sabbath Day, and hallowed it.



2. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any manner of likeness of anything that is in heaven above, that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them. For I the Lrd your Gd am a jealous Gd, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments.



5. Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long upon the land which the Lrd your Gd gives you.



6. You shall not murder.



7. You shall not commit adultery.



3. You shall not take the name of the Lrd your Gd in vain; for the Lrd will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.



8. You shall not steal.



9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.



4. Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lrd your Gd. On it you shall not do any manner of work—you, your son, your daughter, your man-servant,



10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his manservant, his maid-servant, his ox, his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.

KIDDUSH FOR SHAVUOS



MAY 28

FOR THE FIRST NIGHT

Attention!

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of vine.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, Who has chosen us from among all nations, raised us above all tongues, and made us holy through His commandments. And You, L-rd our G-d, have given us in love festivals for rejoicing, holidays and seasons for gladness, **this day of the festival of Shavuos and this festival of holy assembly, the season of the Giving of our Torah**, a holy assembly commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us from all the nations, and Your holy Festival in joy and gladness, you have given us as a heritage.

Blessed are You, L-rd who sanctifies Israel and the festive seasons.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

MAY 29

FOR THE SECOND NIGHT

The sixth day. And the heavens and the earth and all their hosts were completed. And G-d finished by the Seventh Day His work which He had done, and He rested on the Seventh Day from all His work which He had done. And G-d blessed the Seventh Day and made it holy, for on it He rested from all His work which G-d created to function.

Attention!

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of vine.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, Who has chosen us from among all nations, raised us above all tongues, and made us holy through His commandments. and You, L-rd our G-d, have given us in love Sabbaths for rest and festivals for rejoicing, holidays and seasons for gladness, **this Shabbat day and this Day of the Festival of Shavuot and this festival of holy assembly, the season of the Giving of the Torah**, in love, a holy assembly commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us from all the nations, and Your holy Shabbat and Festivals in love and good will, in joy and gladness, you have given us as a heritage.

Blessed are You, L-rd Who sanctifies the Shabbat and Israel and the festive seasons.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

MAY 28

EIRUV TAVSHILIN



PREPARING FOR SHABBAT

This year, the first day of Shavuos falls on Friday. Generally, on the festivals we are only permitted to prepare (cook, bake, etc.) foods necessary for that day. How then are we to prepare for the following day-Shabbat?

An Eiruv Tavshilin allows us to join Friday's Shabbat preparations to those begun on the eve of the Festival. On the eve of each holiday, before sundown, we set aside one baked item (a Challah) and one cooked item to accompany it (such as meat, fish or eggs) as designated for Shabbat.

Now, any further food we prepare for Shabbat on Friday is regarded as a continuation of this initial preparation.

WE RECITE THE FOLLOWING BLESSING:
BARUCH ATOH ADO-NOI, E-LO-HEI-NU MELECH HO'LOM,

ASHER KI-DE-SHA-NU BE-MITZ-VO-SOV, VE-TZI-VANU AL MITZ-VAT EI-RUV.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us by His commandments, and commanded us concerning the mitzvah of Eiruv.

THEN DECLARE:

BY MEANS OF THIS EIRUV IT SHALL BE PERMISSIBLE FOR US TO BAKE, COOK, PUT AWAY A DISH TO PRESERVE ITS HEAT, KINDLE A LIGHT (FROM A PRE-EXISTING FLAME) AND PREPARE ON YOM TOV EVERYTHING WE NEED FOR SHABBOS.

IMPORTANT

The food from the Eiruv should be put aside to be eaten on Shabbos. The best time to eat it is on Shabbos afternoon.

SHAVUOS CALENDAR

5780 / 2020



CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

	Blessing	Kenosha	Milwaukee	Waukesha	Beloit	Madison	Green Bay	Wausau	La Crosse	Eau Claire
MAY 28	1&3*	8:02	8:03	8:05	8:06	8:10	8:09	8:17	8:19	8:24
MAY 29	2&3**	8:02	8:04	8:05	8:07	8:10	8:10	8:18	8:20	8:25
MAY 30	End of Holiday	9:13	9:15	9:16	9:17	9:21	9:23	9:32	9:32	9:39

* If lighting after sunset, light only from a pre-existing flame.

** Light only from a pre-existing flame.

A pre-existing flame is a flame that has been burning continuously since the onset of the Shabbat and/or festival such as a pilot light, gas or candle flame.

CANDLE LIGHTING BLESSINGS

1 BO-RUCH A-TOH ADO-NOI E-LO-HEI-NU ME-LECH HA-OLOM ASHER KID-ESHO-NU BE-MITZVO-SOV VETZI-VONU LE-HAD-LIK NER SHEL YOM TOV

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded to kindle the Yom Tov light.

2 BO-RUCH A-TOH ADO-NOI E-LO-HEI-NU ME-LECH HA-OLOM ASHER KID-ESHO-NU BE-MITZVO-SOV VETZI-VONU LE-HAD-LIK NER SHEL SHABBOS VE'SHEL YOM-TOV.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded to kindle the Shabbos and the Yom Tov light.

3 BO-RUCH A-TOH ADO-NOI E-LO-HEI-NU ME-LECH HO-OLOM SHE-HECHI-YONU VE-KI-YE-MO-NU VE-HIGI-O-NU LIZ MAN HA-ZEH.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

SHAVUOS SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, MAY 28

- **We do Eruv Tavshilin** (see page 46)
- **We light Yom Tov candles** (for time and blessings see the candle lighting schedule) and say both blessings.
- **Like every Shabbos and Jewish festival**, we sanctify the day and welcome the festival with the Kiddush, (see text on page 46) and the family is treated to a festive meal.
- **At night we stay up** and recite *Tikun Lail Shavuos*.

FRIDAY, MAY 29

- **We attend services in the morning** and hear the reading of the Ten Commandments. This year, due to the coronavirus situation, we will [most likely] recite the prayers at home. It is highly recommended that we read the Ten Commandments, if possible in Hebrew, or in English. For everyone's benefit, we have published the translation of the Ten Commandments on page 45.
- **As on other holidays**, we celebrate with a festive meal. No work may be performed.
- **It is customary to eat dairy foods today.**
- **As every Friday before the Shabbat**, today too we light the Shabbat and Yom Tov candles at the prescribed time (18 minutes before sunset, see lighting times above).
- **Once more**, we recite Kiddush in the evening and the family is seated to partake in a festive meal. Please note, this year as the second eve of the holiday falls on Shabbat, the Kiddush text includes the Shabbat and Yom Tov together (see page 46).

SATURDAY, MAY 30

- **We attend services in the morning.** This year, due to the coronavirus situation, we will [most likely] recite the prayers at home.
- **Yizkor is recited** during the morning services, in remembrance of the deceased. In the absence of a minyan, we recite it at home.
- **Again we celebrate with a festive meal.** No work may be performed.
- **At the end of the Shabbat/Holiday**, we recite the Havdalah.

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Shavuot
Celebration!

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