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**RABBI YY JACOBSON**  
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FIGHTING DEPRESSION WITH KINDNESS

The plague of darkness (choshech) is difficult to comprehend. After the first three days, the darkness was so thick the Egyptians could not move and were locked into whatever physical position they were in.

Hashem created a special light prior to the suns creation. It is called Or Haganuz and with it, it would be possible to see from one end of the world to the other, as well as seeing all the hidden secrets of the world.

The Plague of Darkness can possibly be similar to a deep depression, where a person does not want to move or do anything. His confusion and hopelessness is so debilitating it requires extreme effort to simply go through the mundane motions of life.

The Egyptians saw their world turning upside down with no light at the end. They understood that they were spiraling towards total destruction and had no way to stop it.

Regrettably, there are people in our community, friends and family that live today with the plague of Darkness. Engulfed in waves of anxiety, trapped by despair they are lost in their world of confusion

and unable to complete the most mundane chores without immense efforts. How can we help extricate them from their darkness? How can we shed some light in their lives to help them fight this world of dark shadows?

The Torah provides the solution. Immediately following the plague of darkness, Hashem instructs Moshe to "let each man request of his fellow ...silver and gold vessels." Rashi explains the Jews were instructed to ask the Egyptians for silver and gold that was due to them.

Dear friends, this is the amazing cure we have to pull one out from any plague of darkness they may be experiencing. When our communities become stations of kindness and giving, when we reach out to others, no matter how low we may feel, when we offer various applications of chesed, it will fortify a person with self-worth that will vanquish the darkness.

Good Shabbos Rabbi Aaron Lankry

NEW MINYANIM ADDED:

EARLY MINYAN MINCHA FRIDAY 12:39, 1:00, 1:30 ,2:00 2:30

SHABBOS ZMANIM

Table of Shabbos Zmanim including Candle Lighting (4:48 PM), Mincha Alef Tent (4:58 PM), Shchiya (5:06 PM), Shachris Vashikin-Daf Yomi Shiur (6:32 AM), Shachris Ashkenaz 18 Main (8:00 AM), Shachris Main Minyan 18 Tent (9:15 AM), Shachris 20 Forshay Bais Chabad (10:00 AM), New Shachris 18 Forshay (10:15 AM), Mincha (1:45 PM), Pirchei (2:00 PM), Mincha Shalosh Seudos (4:50 PM), Shkiya (5:07 PM), Marriv (5:47 PM 18 Tent, 5:52 PM)

WEEKDAY ZMANIM

Table of Weekday Zmanim including Shachris (20 minutes before Neitz), Mincha & Mariv (12 minutes before Plag), Mincha & Mariv (12 minutes before Shkia), and a schedule for January 29 - February 03 with times for Neitz, Pelag, Shkia, Magen Avraham, Gra-Baal Hatanya, and Marriv.

Zmanim by our incredible Gabbi EPHRAYIM YUROWITZ TZVI BLECH : Gabbai



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Rabbi Coren

PARSHAS BO

TU BISHVAT

There is a powerful passuk in Tehilim which we recite many times in Hallel throughout the year - האמנתי כי אדבר אני עניתי מאד. This is not an easy passuk to translate. The Malbim offers a profound explanation. He suggests that Dovid Hamelech's words, "I believe clearly that what I'm about to say are words of desperation because I was very much afflicted" are his plea to Hashem for understanding and the passuk is a statement of his Eemunah. There is a chasidish pshat that interpret the words as "I believed because or when I spoke" meaning that the more we speak about Eemunah, the more the words will cause Eemunah to fill our entire being. The power of words is very clear in Judaism. The Baal Hatananya quotes the famous concept לעולם דבר -- Everything is standing on words. It is important to point out that tzadikim warn us that this concept should not always be taken simply and that we should never tell ourselves "I'm a Baal Bitachon" when we're not there yet. (See Chovos Halevavos and Bais Halevi).

The importance of constantly reminding our children and ourselves about Eemunah cannot be overrated. At the same time, we must be honest as to where we actually find ourselves on the ladder of Eemunah. There is an easy litmus test that the Bais Halevi in his powerful essay on Bitachon offers us. He posits that a true Baal Bitachon, which is actually the requirement needed for a Jew to be worthy to fight in the Jewish army, is the following: Whatever happens to us, whether from a human being or from a different cause, a true Baal Bitachon is not frightened. He accepts that the harmful words or actions can only occur with the full approval of Hashem. Our reactions, however, depend on each situation and/or the person involved (See Bais Halevi and Chovos Halevavos). Clearly, claiming to be a Baal Bitachon isn't so simple.

Let's take this lesson practically and connect it to this week's Parsha. The first few words of the Parsha which gives it its name is בא לא -- come to Pharaoh. The Chasam Sofer tells us that the reason it doesn't say here "Lech" - as in "go" to Pharaoh is that Hash-

em wanted to teach Moshe that whenever he goes to the Egyptian ruler, he should not think he is going alone. Hashem reminds Moshe that He will always be there with him. This beautiful insight needs some clarification since last week there were pessukim that say explicitly "Lech - go to pharaoh." I thought that perhaps there was a change here in the level that Moshe was reaching. I also considered adding to the Chasam Sofer's interpretation with the last few words of the Passuk. כי אני הכבדתי את ליבו ואת לב עבדיו למען. Hashem told Moshe I want you to know that I'm always with you even when things don't seem to make sense. For even if it seems that the enemy is getting stronger or angrier, I'm the one that is causing this to happen and with a good reason. The passuk finishes off by explaining: "In order to place my miracles upon them and to inspire the Jewish people."

This lesson is also beautifully explained by the Bais Halevi who quotes a famous passuk -- Assyria is the staff of my wrath. Our natural reaction to an attacking nation is fear and panic but we must remember that it is all happening because of Hashem. Hashem is sending us the message and he expects us to rise to the occasion. As part of our Eemunah, we should remember that Hashem is here with us in every painful situation. Hashem doesn't want us to fear; He expects us to call out to Him. He encourages us to contemplate how and where we could improve our efforts and once we accomplish that, the true Bitachon will be to know that this is the best possible experience for us at the exact perfect time.

On Tu B'Shvat we celebrate the time of agricultural appreciation. How do we appreciate? Through words. When we say Baruch Ata - we are speaking directly to Hashem and as Rav Tzadok Hakohen says this is the best formula for reaching a place of Eemunah in Hashem.

May our Brachos help sharpen our Eemunah and may our Eemunah transform into the ultimate level of Bitachon  
Shabbas shalom



RABBI BENTZION SNEH

**והיה לאות על ידכה (יג, טז).** כידוע, מכך שכתוב "ידכה" ולא "ידך", למדים שהנחת התפילין היא ביד שמאל, שהיא היד החלשה (כי המילה "ידכה" נדרשת כ"יד כהה", יד חלשה). אמרו להמליץ, מאי טעמא אמרה תורה להניח תפילין על הידיים, ומדוע דייקא על יד כהה השמאלית? אלא, כי לא הרי הידיים כהרי העיניים והאוזניים וכי, כי אף שגם מהם יש לאדם שניים בכל אבר, מכל מקום בכוחם ובפעולתם שווים הם, כי שמוע ישמע הן באוזן ימין הן באוזן שמאל ללא כל חילוק, כמו כן בי העיניים שווים הם. ובזה נשתנו הידיים, כי עיקר פעולתו עושה האדם ביד ימין, ואלו ידו השמאלית יד כהה היא, חלשה ורפה יותר מן השנייה. ועל כן אמר הקב"ה, בבואכם להניח תפילין, שהיא דבקות בבורא יתברך שמו, הניחו אותם דייקא על היד כהה, להורות כי דייקא מהחלשים, ומזמני הניסיון והחשכה, שם היא עיקר דבקות הבורא, ושם יתגלה יחודו ואחדותו יתברך שמו בעולם."

"כיוצא בזה ביארו דלכן מצד יהלכה למשה מסיני", צריך שיהיו רצועות התפילין שחורות לגמרי, לרמז לו, שהרי התפילין הינם אות בני ישראל לאביהם שבשמים, ודייקא כשנראה לאדם שחשך עולמו לגמרי, משם יזכה לידבק בבוראו".  
ובמקום אחר מביא המחבר טעם נוסף - "יש שננתנו טעם לשבח מדוע הננו מניחים את התפילין על יד שמאל דייקא, שבא להזכירנו את יציאת מצרים שלא היה בידו אדם כלל, אלא רק ע"י הקב"ה עצמו באותות ובמופתים, ובני ישראל היו בבחינת יד כהה שאינה עושה כלום, ורק היה "ימין" ה' נאדרי בכוח ימין ה' יתרעץ אויב, ולכן אמרה תורה ויהיה לאות על ידך ולזכרון בין עיניך, כדי ששיריש בקרבנו אמונה זו לדורות עולם, שאין האדם עושה בעצמו מאומה אלא כל כולו יד כהה, והכול בידו שמים".  
מצות תפילין שכרה גדול מאד, וכמובא ב"משנה ברורה" בשם הטור "שכל המניחם מאריך ימים בעולם הזה, שנאמר ה' עליהם יחיו, כלומר, אותם שנושאים שם ה' עליהם בתפילין - יחיו, ומובטח שהוא בן עולם הבא, ואין אש של גיהנום שולט בו, וכל עוונותיו נמחלים לו", וכן מובא ב"קיצור שולחן ערוך":  
"כל הזהיר במצות תפילין לנהוג בהם קדושה שלא לדבר בהם דברי הבלים ושיחת חולין ... מאריך ימים ומובטח שהוא בן עולם הבא".

מסופר על בעל ה"שגת אריה" זצ"ל שהיה רב בוולוז'ין ונסע פעם בכרכרה לעיר אחרת והיה יושב תחת אהל העגלה מעוטר בטלית ותפילין, ולמד שם, וגם העגלון היה לבוש בתפילין והתפלל. כשהגיעו ליד היער, יצאו מתוך היער חמשה גזלנים וביקשו מהעגלון את הכסף שהיה ברשותם? השגת אריה לא שמע ולא ראה אותם עד שהתחיל העגלון לצעוק: רבי, אוי נא לנו, כי בסכנה גדולה אנחנו. הביט עליהם הגאון וברחו מפחד לתוך היער. כששאלו העגלון למה ברחו, ענה הרב: לא מפני הכח הגופני שלי ברחו, אלא מפני עוזו של תפילין שבראשי ברחו, כנאמר: ויראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך, אלו תפילין שבראש, ולכן, כשראו את אור קדושת התפילין שלי ברחו. אמר לו העגלון: הלא גם אני הייתי לבוש התפילין על ראשי, ולא יראו? ענה הגאון: חז"ל אמרו "תפילין שבראש" ולא "על הראש", אצלך היו התפילין רק על הראש, כמצות אנשים מלומדה, וקדושת מצות התפילין צריכה להיות בפנימיות הראש, האדם צריך להניח את התפילין כדין ובכוונה של מצוה, ולכן לא יראו הגזלנים ממך.

בענידת התפילין כראוי הופכים היהודי והתפילין להיות כמין ישות אחת ששם שמים נקרא עליה ועל ידי כך יכול הוא להטיל יראה על אויבי ה', וכשם שמהדרים במצות תפילין שייכתבו בידי סופר ירא שמים ומומחה, לא פחות מכך צריכים להדר במחויבות שלא להסיח דעת מהתפילין, ולא לנהוג בהם קלות ראש.

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Rabbi Reisman

## TALELAI OROS - KOACH HATEFILLA

In the Sefer Talelai Oros they bring a very nice incident, a comment, an anecdote which reflects on the fact that Klal Yisrael is so diverse. Gedolei Yisrael have different approaches to Torah. They bring the following Maaseh. It is a Chassidische Maaseh which was repeated to the Brisker Rav on the Posuk of (וְשִׁמְרֵתֶם, אֶת-הַמִּצְוֹת) which can be found in 12:17.

There is a certain Admor, a certain Rebbe that was making Matzos Mehudarim in the Matzah bakery with all kinds of beautiful Hidurim. At the same time there was a Yehudi Pashut, a simple Jew there who was also making Matzos. (This was not a modern Matzah bakery, we are talking once upon a time where many people could come and use the oven). This Yehudi Pashut was making Matzos and he saw how the Rebbe and his Chassidim were making it so Mehudar. He didn't know how to make it Mehudar he only knew how to mix flour and water, roll it and bake it. He started to cry and the Rebbe heard him say, HKB"H I don't know how to make my Matzos Mehudarim. You please make sure that I get the most Mehudardika Matzos that could be. Then the Pashute Yid put it in the oven. The Rebbe came to this Yid and he said Reb Yid I will trade my Matzos for yours. I want your Matzos. The way you Davened that they should be Mehudar, from Shamayim yours are the Mehudarim, and he traded the Matzos.

This is a Chassidische Maaseh whose intention is to show that the heart that you put into Matzos is really what makes the Matzah special. It was told over to the Brisker Rav. The Brisker Rav said that the lesson of the story is that Hashem answers a heartfelt Tefilla. This Yid Davened that he should have Mehudar Matzos, HKB"H sent him the most Mehudar Matzos which are the ones that the Rebbe was making Mehudarim. HKB"H sent that the Rebbe would want his Matzos.

The point of course is that it is a Chassidische Maaseh and Mitzad Hachassidus it is true. The heart in the Matzah is Mehudar. It is also a Brisker Rav Maaseh. The Brisker Rav says listen it has to be Mehudar Al Pi Din, Al Pi Halacha. Look at the Koach Hatefilla. HKB"H sent him the most Mehudardika Matzos. There is more than one path in serving Hashem.



Rabbi Steinfeld

## BAIS YOSEF OR ARIZ" L

The Rishonim argue that going from town to another town and thereby having the way the letters are written if it is a psul. The Rosh in 3:11 and in the Shiltei Giborim in Hilchos Sefer Torah 3 and the Meiri in Shabbos 104a they all conclude that there is no chashash in switching your letters. On the other hand, the Ramban in Meseches Shabbos writes that all the letters have a special reason why they are the way they are so switching it would make it pasul.

The question arises if one has the masoreh to use ksav Bais Yosef could he be yotzei with tefillin or a Sefer Torah written bichsav Ari or ksav Velish which is the ksav of the Sefardim? What about the opposite? The Rema in 36:1 says that if one changes the ksav it is not a problem but nevertheless there is a great inyan to be chosheish for the Ramban.

At one end we find in the name of the Gra that writes that since the mesorah of Ashkenaz is not to use the ksav Ari. We see the Chazon Ish was very makpid not to use Ari and felt that it would be le'ikuva. The Steipler in Kraina De'Igrasa 2:78 says that one should not believe those rumors that say the Chazon Ish regretted it.

On the other hand, the Maharsham in Maftaichos 2:120 says that the Sefer Torah of the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh was written bichsav Velish. The Chasam Sofer in Yoreh Deah 66 testifies that his Rebbe Rabbi Nosson Adler's tefillin had the letter tzaddik written bichsav Ari. The Mishna Berura in 66:5 brings the Noda BiYehuda 80 that whenever the Ramban was machmir was only the letters that were rooted in the Gemara not letters that are rooted in the Bais Yosef. The Ari himself held that all forms of ksav have their sources.

LeMaaseh, despite the fact that many say in the name of Rav Shach zt"l who advised a grandchild from the Chasam Sofer that he did not need to switch his tefillin to ksav Bais Yosef. Reb El-yashiv Zt"l held to the contrary that if a person does most of his avoda the way the Litvishhe he would need to switch his tefillin to ksav Bais Yosef. The Mesoras Moshe tells a story where a person brought Reb Moshe Feinstein to look at a letter of his tefillin. Reb Moshe said that the letter was no problem but the greatest hiddur is that the person should switch all his parshiyos to Bais Yosef.

Reb Chaim Kanievsky said that this would only apply to tefillin or mezuzos but if one listen to krias HaTorah from a Sefer Torah written in ksav Ari one is yotzei this is even though lekatchila the Sefer Torah should be written in ksav Bais Yosef. Reb Chaim added that even the Chazon Ish says one could be yotzei krias HaTorah and could even make a bracha on an Aliyah. His reasoning was that according to the Rambam one can make a bracha on a Sefer Torah that is passul. Therefore, it would not be a Bracha Levatala. Brisker Rov who held that lekatchilah one should have ksav Bais Yosef when he was on vacation in Kreinitz before the holocaust he would be yotzei from a Sefer Torah written bichsav Ari and would even get an Aliyah.

May we always be careful with what we read from that it should be kehalacha.

*Do you have a topic or discussion you want to read about? Please send comments or questions to [hymanbdsdhevens@gmail.com](mailto:hymanbdsdhevens@gmail.com) or [berachsteinfeldscorner@gmail.com](mailto:berachsteinfeldscorner@gmail.com)*

PARSHAS BO

## DARK MONEY

32:01 "לא ראו איש את אחיו ולא קמו איש מתחתיו שלשת ימים, ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבתם" "מרה"ם שיק)

"No man could see his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place for a three-day period. However, for all of B'nei Yisroel there was light in their dwellings." The Posuk tells us that not only were B'nei Yisroel not plunged into darkness, but there was light for Klal Yisroel. Which light is the Posuk referring to? Why doesn't the Posuk just say that the darkness did not occur to Klal Yisroel?

The Ribbono Shel Olam brought Choshech upon Mitzrayim so that the Mitzriyim should not see people from Klal Yisroel die. The Yidin who did not want to leave Mitzrayim were killed during the Makah of Choshech. When Moshiach comes, there will be darkness for fifteen days. During those days, all those amongst Klal Yisroel who do not want the ultimate Geulah will die. (דבש לפי)

Klal Yisroel were redeemed from Mitzrayim in the Zechus of their Emunah in the Ribbono Shel Olam. Kabalas Hatorah and Yetzias Mitzrayim hinge upon each other. Had Klal Yisroel not left Mitzrayim, they would not have received the Torah. Torah is called Ohr, as it says in Mishlei - 6:23 "כי נר מצוה ותורה אור". Where did Klal Yisroel demonstrate their Emunah in Hakodosh Boruch Hu to be Zoche to be redeemed? During Makas Choshech, Klal Yisroel could have easily fled Mitzrayim. Nonetheless they did not flee because they believed in Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Klal Yisroel were confident that Hakodosh Boruch Hu would take them out of Mitzrayim at the appropriate time, and that He Himself

would take them out with great Kovod. "ולכל בני ישראל היה אור" - And to all of Klal Yisroel there was light; they followed the will of Hashem. "במושבתם", Because they were listening to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, they remained in Mitzrayim and did not leave Mitzrayim during Makas Choshech.

The Medrash says the darkness was as thick as a golden Dinar. When one becomes obsessed with chasing after money, it causes him to become totally self-centered and makes him blind to the needs of everyone else around him. This person is plunged in darkness where he sees no one but himself. (אבני אזל)

The light that the Posuk is referring to is not the light of day. The light that Klal Yisroel were given during Makas Choshech was the light of Olam Habah. (ש"ך על התורה)

During Makas Choshech two things were happening simultaneously. The Mitzriyim, and the Yidin who did not want to leave Mitzrayim, were punished. At the same time, Klal Yisroel were being taught a lesson for life. Olam Hazez is a dark world. There are times that the bad actions of people create a very thick darkness in this world. There is only one way to find our way in this world - through following the will of the Ribbono Shel Olam by listening to the Torah Hakdosha. If one follows after his desires (Kovod, money, or other desires), he is keeping himself in a very dark world where he can no longer see anything around him. Such a person becomes very haughty and is never able to grow. A person's job in this world is to use the Torah Hakdosha to help him navigate his way through the maze called Olam Hazez. The path is wrought with many Nisyonos, and there is only one way to truly achieve victory. The Torah Hakdosha teaches a person how to do absolutely everything in life. May we be Zoche to utilize the Torah properly, in order to achieve our purpose in this world, and to earn a place in the Next World.

*A Short Message From*

RABBI YEHOASHUA SOVA

## CRYING AND ACTION

When Yosef and Binyamin were finally reunited after many years of being apart, the Torah tells us that they each cried on each other's neck. However, the Torah is specific in how it describes this scene. Binyamin cried on Yosef's "necks," whereas Yosef cried on Binyamin's "neck." Rashi cites the Midrash, explaining that both Yosef and Binyamin foresaw that there would be a great destruction in the future.

Binyamin saw that in Mishkan Shiloh, built in the portion of Yosef in the land of Israel, would be destroyed, and Yosef that both of the Beis Hamikdash, which stood in the portion of Binyamin, would be destroyed. For this reason, Binyamin cried on one side of Yosef's neck, as one edifice—that of the Mishkan in Shiloh—would be destroyed, whereas Yosef cried on both

side of Binyamin's neck, because two buildings of the Beis Hamikdash would be destroyed.

But here's the question, asks the Lubavitcher Rebbe. If each one saw that the other was going to endure a destruction, what about themselves? Why didn't they cry in addition for themselves?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that for others, you must move mountains and cry and pray. With that, you can achieve results. But when it comes to yourself, just to sit and cry is not proper behavior. It's not enough just to cry; action is needed. For others, though, at the very least, your tears and prayers can go a long way.

**UFARATZTA**

### G-D IS MY PILOT

With reference to your writing about doubts and difficulty and about a feeling of insecurity in general, I trust it is unnecessary to elaborate to you at length that such feelings arise when a person thinks that he is alone and can only rely upon himself and his own judgment and therefore feels doubtful and insecure about each move he has to make. And while he also trusts in G-d, this trust is somehow superficial...

But when a person's faith in G-d is deep, and when he reflects that G-d's benevolent Providence extends to each and every person; to each and every detail, each and every minute, surely, he must develop a profound sense of security and confidence...

==== For the entire letter: Chabad.org letter & spirit: overcoming insecurity and self-doubt

Yud Shvat 1950, Yom Hillula of the Rebbe Ra'Yatz.

Yud Shvat 1951, The Rebbe MM accepted the leadership of Chabad.



# Asking Questions

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS - ©TORAH-BOX

**I**t is no accident that parshat Bo, the section that deals with the culminating plagues and the exodus, should turn three times to the subject of children and the duty of parents to educate them. As Jews we believe that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need education. Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted. Unless parents hand on their memories and ideals to the next generation – the story of how they won their freedom and the battles they had to fight along the way – the long journey falters and we lose our way.

What is fascinating, though, is the way the Torah emphasises the fact that children must ask questions. Two of the three passages in our parsha speak of this:

And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians. (Ex. 12:26-27)

In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Ex. 13:14)

There is another passage later in the Torah that also speaks of question asked by a child:

In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. (Deut. 6:20-21)

The other passage in today's parsha, the only one that does not mention a question, is:

On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Ex. 13:8)

These four passages have become famous because of their appearance in the Haggadah on Pesach. They are the four children: one wise, one wicked or rebellious, one simple and "one who does not know how to ask." Reading them together the sages came to the conclusion that [1] children should ask questions, [2] the Pesach narrative must be constructed in response to, and begin with, questions asked by a child, [3] it is the duty of a parent to encourage his or her children to ask questions, and the child who does not yet know how to ask should be taught to ask.

There is nothing natural about this at all. To the contrary, it goes dramatically against the grain of history. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or com-

mand. The task of the child is to obey. "Children should be seen, not heard," goes the old English proverb. "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord," says a famous Christian text. Socrates, who spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young. In Judaism the opposite is the case. It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

Judaism is the rarest of phenomena: a faith based on asking questions, sometimes deep and difficult ones that seem to shake the very foundations of faith itself. "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" asked Abraham. "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people?" asked Moses. "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" asked Jeremiah. The book of Job is largely constructed out of questions, and God's answer consists of four chapters of yet deeper questions: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? ... Can you catch Leviathan with a hook? ... Will it make an agreement with you and let you take it as your slave for life?"

In yeshiva the highest accolade is to ask a good question: Du fregst a gutte kashe. Rabbi Abraham Twersky, a deeply religious psychiatrist, tells of how when he was young, his teacher would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English, he would say, "You right! You 100 procent right! Now I show you where you wrong."

Isadore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to ask: 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist."

Judaism is not a religion of blind obedience. Indeed, astonishingly in a religion of 613 commandments, there is no Hebrew word that means "to obey". When Hebrew was revived as a living language in the nineteenth century, and there was need for a verb meaning "to obey," it had to be borrowed from the Aramaic: le-tsayat. Instead of a word meaning "to obey," the Torah uses the verb shema, untranslatable into English because it means [1] to listen, [2] to hear, [3] to understand, [4] to internalise, and [5] to respond. Written into the very structure of Hebraic consciousness is the idea that our highest duty is to seek to understand the will of God, not just to obey blindly. Tennyson's verse, "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die," is as far from a Jewish mindset as it is possible to be.

Why? Because we believe that intelligence is

God's greatest gift to humanity. Rashi understands the phrase that God made man "in His image, after His likeness," to mean that God gave us the ability "to understand and discern." The very first of our requests in the weekday Amidah is for "knowledge, understanding and discernment." One of the most breathtakingly bold of the rabbis' institutions was to coin a blessing to be said on seeing a great non-Jewish scholar. Not only did they see wisdom in cultures other than their own, they thanked God for it. How far this is from the narrow-mindedness than has so often demeaned and diminished religions, past and present.

The historian Paul Johnson once wrote that rabbinic Judaism was "an ancient and highly efficient social machine for the production of intellectuals." Much of that had, and still has, to do with the absolute priority Jews have always placed on education, schools, the beit midrash, religious study as an act even higher than prayer, learning as a life-long engagement, and teaching as the highest vocation of the religious life.

But much too has to do with how one studies and how we teach our children. The Torah indicates this at the most powerful and poignant juncture in Jewish history – just as the Israelites are about to leave Egypt and begin their life as a free people under the sovereignty of God. Hand on the memory of this moment to your children, says Moses. But do not do so in an authoritarian way. Encourage your children to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyse, explore. Liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Those who are confident of their faith need fear no question. It is only those who lack confidence, who have secret and suppressed doubts, who are afraid.

The one essential, though, is to know and to teach this to our children, that not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest. Darwin never knew what a gene was. Even the great Newton, founder of modern science, understood how little he understood, and put it beautifully: "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

In teaching its children to ask and keep asking, Judaism honoured what Maimonides called the "active intellect" and saw it as the gift of God. No faith has honoured human intelligence more.



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## Rabbi YY Jacobson

# Stalin Vs. Schneersohn

*Who Won?*

### A Vain Battle

If there was ever a battle fought in vain, this was it. Or at least, so it seemed at the time.

The year is 1924. Vladimir Lenin, the father of the communist revolution, is dead; over 900,000 people pass through the Hall of Columns during the four days and nights that Lenin's body lay exposed to the public.

Josef Stalin succeeds him as the new leader of the Soviet Union. During the following thirty years, he would murder 50 million of his own people. Jews and Judaism would be one of his primary targets. He sets up a special government organization, the Yevsektzye, to ensure that Russian Jewry in its millions embrace the new ethos of Communism, introducing a paradise constructed of bullets and gulags.

Stalin would rule with an iron fist till his death in March 1953, when four million people would gather in Red Square to bid farewell to the tyrant still revered and beloved by much of his nation and by many millions the world over. At his home in Leningrad (today Petersburg), a 44-year-old rabbi, heir to some of the great Jewish thinkers and leaders of Russian Jewry, summons nine young disciples. He offers them an opportunity most would refuse: to take responsibility for the survival of Judaism in the communist Soviet Union; to ensure that Jewish life and faith would survive the hellish darkness of Stalin's regime. He wants them to fight—in his words—"till the last drop of blood."

They embrace the mission. He gives his hand to each of them as a sign that they are accepting an oath, one that would transform their destiny forever. "I will be the tenth, he says; together we have a minyan"....!

### An Underground Revolution

The nine men were dispatched throughout the country. With assistance from similar minded colleagues, they created an impressive underground network of Jewish activity, which included Jewish schools, synagogues, mikvaot (ritual baths used by Jewish women for spiritual feminine reinvigoration), adult Torah education, Yeshivot (academies for Torah learning for students), Jewish text books, providing rabbis for communities, teachers for schools, etc. Over the

1920's and 1930's, these individuals built six hundred (!) Jewish underground schools throughout the U.S.S.R (1).

Many of them last for only a few weeks or months. When the KGB (the secret Russian police) discovered a school, the children were expelled, the teacher arrested. A new one was opened elsewhere, usually in a cellar or on a roof. One of the nine young men was sent to Georgia. There were dozens of mikvaot there, all shut down by the communists who buried them in sand and gravel. This young man decided to do something radical. He falsified a letter written supposedly by the KGB headquarters in Moscow, instructing the local offices in Georgia to open two mikvaot within 24 hours.

The local officials were deceived. Within a day, two mikvaot were open. Several months later, when they discovered the lie, they shut them down again.

And so it went. A mohel (the person performing the mitzvah of circumcision) was arrested, and another one was dispatched to serve the community; a yeshiva was closed, and another one opened elsewhere; a synagogue was destroyed and another one opened its portals in secrecy. It is a chapter in Jewish history unbeknownst to most.

But it sure seemed like a lost battle. Here was an individual rabbi, with a small group of pupils, staging an underground rebellion against a mighty empire that numbered in the hundreds of millions, and aspired to dominate the world. It was like an infant wrestling a giant, an ant attempting to defeat a military tank. The situation was hopeless.

Finally, in 1927—ninety three years ago—they lost their patience with this man. The rabbi behind the counter-revolutionary work was arrested and sentenced to death by a firing squad. Foreign pressure and nothing less than a miracle convinced the KGB to alter the sentence to ten years in exile. It was then converted to three years, and then—quite unbelievable in the Soviet Regime where clergy and laymen alike were murdered like flies—he was completely exonerated. The 12th and 13th of the Hebrew month of Tamuz, mark the 93rd anniversary since he was liberated from Stalin's

death sentence in 1927.

The individual behind the spiritual mutiny was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), who became the leader of Chabad in 1920, after the passing of his father. He selected nine of his young pupils to wage battle with him. The one sent to Georgia, falsifying the KGB document, was my grandfather, Simon Yakabashvili, my father's father (1900-1953). He, together with hundreds of his colleagues, Chassidim throughout the Soviet Union, was arrested in 1938, tortured mercilessly and given a 25-year sentence in the Gulag. Most of his eight colleagues who accepted the oath never made it out of Stalin's hell. They perished in the Soviet Union.

(My grandfather, Reb Simon, made it out of the USSR, but died several years later at the age of 53 in Toronto. He died on 2 Tamuz 5713, 1953, leaving behind three young sons, Gershon, Bezalel and Sholom. My father died in 2005, my uncle Bezalel died six years ago. Their mother, Freida, passed on in 1954, one year after her husband. She was 44. One child remains, may he enjoy many long and healthy years).

### Investing in Eternity

More than nine decades have passed. This passage of time gives us the opportunity to answer the question: Who won? Stalin or Schneerson?

one century ago, Marx's socialism and Lenin's communism heralded a new era for humanity. Its seemingly endless power and brutality seemed unbreakable.

Yet one individual stood up, a man who would not allow the awesome war machine of Mother Russia to blur his vision, to eclipse his clarity. In the depths of his soul he was aware that history had an undercurrent often invisible to most but discernible to students of the long and dramatic narrative of our people. He knew with full conviction that evil might thrive but it will die; yet goodness, holiness, G-dliness—embodied in Torah and Mitzvos—are eternal.

And he chose to invest in eternity. He probably did not know how exactly it would work out in the end. I am not sure he believed he would survive. But he knew that his mission in life was to sow seeds, though the trees were



being felled one by one. Cynics scoffed at him; close friends told him he was making a tragic mistake. Even many of his religious colleagues were convinced that he was wasting his time and energy fighting an impossible war. They either fled the country or maintained a low profile. Some great rabbis at the time felt he was trying to do the impossible and it was futile.

But 90 years later, this giant and what he represented have emerged triumphant. Today, in 2020, in the republics of the former Soviet Union stand hundreds of synagogues, Jewish day schools, yeshivot, mikvaot, Jewish community centers. Since communism fell, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (the son in law of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe who was liberated in 1927) sent hundreds of ambassadors to create a Jewish renaissance. They span the entire length and breadth of the country, from Siberia to Tashkent; from Tbilisi till Krasnoyarsk. Over the last 30 years they have built more than one hundred (!) full-time Jewish day schools, in which more than 100,000 Jewish children received a Jewish Torah education. As this summer season began, dozens of Jewish day camps opened up throughout the former Soviet Union with tens of thousands of Jewish children who will enjoy a blissful summer coupled with the celebration of Jewish life.

I have a cousin, Rabbi Yerachmiel Garelick, who serves as the Chabad ambassador to Western Siberia. Jewish women had to travel for seven hours to visit a mikvah. He just completed building a magnificent mikvah in Tuman, Siberia!

And the Chabad couple in Birobidzhan, located on the Trans-Siberian Railway, near the China-Russia border, where Stalin wanted to exile millions of Russian Jews, opened a Glat kosher restaurant there.

Last Chanukah, a large menorah stood tall in the Kremlin, casting the glow of Chanukah on the grounds where Stalin walked with Berya and Yezhov. On Lag Baomer (a Jewish holiday), thousands of Jewish children with kippot on their heads marched the streets of Moscow with signs proclaiming, "Hear oh Israel... G-d is One." Jewish life is bustling in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, Uzbekistan, etc. Visiting Russia last summer, Russia's chief Rabbi, Berel Lazar, pointed to a massive Jewish school he built in Moscow stretching over a full block. "Right across from here were some of

the main offices of the KGB, where the orders to decimate Judaism came from," he said.

Across the street was a massive Jewish museum, one of the nicest I have ever seen, attracting thousands of weekly visitors, telling the story of the Jewish people and its heritage. "How did you get the money for this?" I asked Rabbi Lazar. He smiled and said that the first million came from the private charity of Vladimir Putin. "The rest was easy."

I then entered two streets over, the Marina Rashtze synagogue in Moscow, a massive and beautiful 8-story structure. Hundreds of Jews were praying and studying Torah. Comrade Stalin is dead; communism has faded away as hopelessly irrelevant and destructive. The sun of the nations is today a clod of darkness. The ideology of the Soviet Empire which declared "Lenin has not died and Stalin will not die. He is eternal," is now a mockery. Stalin and Lenin are as dead as one can be. But the Mikvaot built by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1927, they are still here, from Siberia to Moscow, to Tashkent.

If you will visit Russia, I am not sure you will find anybody celebrating the life and vision of Stalin, or even Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Andropov. But you will find tens of thousands of Jews celebrating the liberation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1927 and the narrative of one holy man's triumph over one of the greatest mass-murderers in human history, sharing his vision, committing themselves to continue saturating the world with the light of Torah and Mitzvos.

So, lift up your glasses and say L'chayim! L'chayim to a Rebbe who inspired such heroism in so many disciples, many of them who paid the ultimate price. L'chayim to the incredible Jews of Russia who maintained the embers burning for seven decades, and then—when opportunity came—fanned them into glowing flames. L'chayim to my dear Zeide, Reb Simon, whom I never met but whose life-story is engraved in the core of my heart. Today, we have many battles to fight, and plenty of darkness to conquer. It is easy to become cynical or depressed, leading to emotional paralysis. But our greatest leaders always knew better. They never allowed the mask of evil to define the narrative of history; they ensured that another story would dominate our imaginations and actions. So can we.

## *A Sign*

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# Stories for Shabbos



## Tipping the Scales of Justice

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

The phone rang in Ben Meed's office; Ben picked up the receiver. A restrained, sorrowful voice asked to speak to the president of WAGRO (Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization). "Speaking," responded Mr. Meed. The gentleman's voice continued: "My father, Mr. Abraham Bachner, asked me to call you. The name won't mean anything to you; you didn't know him. My father just passed away. During one of my last visits to the hospital, he requested of me that when his time came you would attend his funeral. "You see, Mr. Meed, my father attended all the annual Warsaw ghetto memorial services, the ones that your organization sponsors. It was his wish that you attend his memorial service. My father was a Holocaust survivor." He gave Meed the place and time of the funeral. Just as Ben Meed entered the funeral chapel, he met Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld of Young Israel of Kew Garden Hills, who addressed him, "I didn't know you knew the deceased," "I didn't," answered Meed, and told Rabbi Schonfeld about the telephone conversation with Bachner's son. The rabbi responded, "Ben, I am really grateful that you came. You don't know how meaningful it is to all of us who knew Abraham." The casket was brought in, covered in black with a Hebrew inscription saying "He makes death to vanish in life eternal." Rabbi Schonfeld began to officiate. "As you know, it is prohibited, according to Halacha (law), to deliver a eulogy on a holiday and we are in the midst of Hanukah. Instead, I will share with you a conversation I had with Abraham Bachner during one of my visits to the hospital. "Rabbi," he said to me, 'I have been a member of your congregation for the past thirty years. I tried to be an honest, observant Jew. I attended services regularly on Shabbat and weekdays, no matter what the weather. I know that my time is up and I will soon be summoned before the heavenly court. I want to be buried not in tachrichim (white burial garment), as required by Jewish law, but rather in my concentration-camp uniform, the one I wore in Auschwitz, the one in which I was liberated.' "I could not understand his strange request and asked for an explanation. Abe said to me, 'You see, Rabbi, when I reach the seat of justice on high, the heavenly prosecutors probably will have a list of grievances against me upon which they will base my guilty verdict. "But, when they place my transgressions on one side of the scales of the heavenly court, I will place on the other side my concentration-camp uniform. The hunger, the fear, the humiliation I suffered each minute for years while I was a katzernik (inmate) will surely tip the scales of justice in my favor. I hope, Rabbi, that you understand. I must be buried in my uniform. It is my defense case, my melitz yosher (righteous intercessor).'" At the conclusion of the services, as the casket was being taken out of the chapel, Ben Meed walked over to Rabbi Schonfeld and asked him, "And what was your decision, Rabbi?" "The concentration-camp uniform is there with him, in the coffin," responded Rabbi Schonfeld. When the thirty-seventh commemoration of the uprising of the Ghetto Warsaw took place on May 3, 1981, Ben Meed told the story of about Abraham Bachner's last request. "In this gathering, here on earth, there was no doubt that the scales tipped in favor of Abraham Bachner when he stood before the heavenly court. For there is nothing more

holy in this world than a broken Jewish heart in a concentration-camp uniform."

## The Power of the Yeshiva

By Rabbi Reuven Semah

Rabbi Yaakov Bender explains, there is something about a yeshivah. The ideal yeshivah situation is when a young man lives in the yeshivah and visits his family on occasion. A certain spirit and life that emanates from within the Bet Midrash has the capacity to warm a person for life. There are those that are privileged never to leave, fortunate enough to live near the well-spring itself, able to draw from its source. There is something about children who grow up breathing yeshivah air, those whose parents live near and pray in the yeshivah. A yeshivah is holy and brushes all those exposed to it with holiness. There was an elderly Talmid Hacham who sat in the library at the Yeshivah Gedolah in Montreal, and learned Torah. Rav Yaakov Moshe Magid was an elderly student of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Europe. He was a retired shochet and continued to say classes to a group of devoted students, within the walls of the yeshivah until his final years. Someone once asked him why he doesn't move to another Bet Midrash, which might be more spacious. He explained that in 1939 he was learning in the Mirrer Yeshivah and he traveled home to his family. The students were allowed to go home and be with their families as war was breaking out. His parents were overjoyed to see him. "But no," said his father, "Your place is with the yeshivah. Whatever fate will meet the yeshivah will be yours as well." With tears in their eyes, his parents encouraged him to leave them and return to his place – the yeshivah, knowing that they might be saying a final goodbye. That courageous decision would save his life, because that yeshivah – Mirrer Yeshivah – was miraculously spared, carried on an extraordinary journey to safety. He eventually landed in Montreal, a living testimony to the power to his father's advice. "Your place is with the yeshivah." Of course, he never left. There was a young man who learned in Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, who was moving to Israel. He went to Rabbi Ruderman, the Rosh Yeshivah, for a berachah. The Rosh Yeashivah wished him well and made a suggestion. "Whatever you do, wherever you live, make sure to be connected to a yeshivah. The Commanding Officer Mocked the Idea of G-d Years later this young man was called to do military reserve duty. The commanding office delivered a speech to his men. In his address he mocked the idea of G-d, speaking of the power of man and the might of the Israeli Army. The reservist was deeply hurt by his words. Bursting with rage, he could not find the courage to protest. As he stood there seething with rage, a voice came from the other side of the room. "Kefirah!" came the pained cry. "How dare you speak with such arrogance? There is a reality that there is a Master of the Universe. He is in charge, and not you!" The protester, a Sephardic gentleman, kept shouting and was thrown into a military jail for several days. When he was allowed to rejoin the unit, the yeshivah graduate hurried to welcome him back and asked, "How is it that I, who learned in yeshivah and still learn seriously, could not bring myself to speak up, and you, who do not appear to be a Kollel man, did not even hesitate? What do you

do for a living?" The Sephardic man nodded, "I am the cook in the Ponevezh Yeshivah," he said simply. In a flash, Rav Ruderman's advice of years earlier came back. "Remain connected to a yeshivah." There, one is able to be connected to life itself. *Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin*.

## The Tzadik and the Tailor

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

Rav A. L. Scheinbaum writes a story. A young man, a budding R' Shmuel Strashun of Vilna (the Rashash) was known as a Torah giant and a wealthy person. He also administered a gemach (free loan fund). R' Zalman the tailor once came to borrow money as he was in desperate need of 300 rubles. The Rashash granted him the loan, to be repaid in one year. The transaction was recorded in the Rashash's ledger. One year later, to the day, R' Zalman appeared at the home of the Rashash with the money. Deeply involved in a sugya, the Rashash did not wish to be disturbed. R' Zalman, who knew the loan was due that day, quietly handed him the money. The Rashash, wishing to minimize the interruption, tucked the money into the back-cover flap of the sefer he was using, with the intention of removing it later on. But when he finished learning, many hours later, he replaced the sefer into the shelf, forgetting to remove the money. A few weeks later, the Rashash reviewed his ledger and saw that the loan to R' Zalman had not been crossed out, and was apparently overdue. He asked R' Zalman about it, and naturally, R' Zalman claimed that he had repaid the loan on the very day it had been due. Yet there were no witnesses, no receipt, and no notation in the ledger. The Rashash had no recollection of the matter. It was decided that both parties would go to a din Torah to settle the matter. News spread like wildfire that the simple tailor, R' Zalman, was involved in a din Torah with the revered Rashash. People were outraged that anyone would have the audacity to contradict the great Torah giant. The tarnishing of R' Zalman's character and reputation had begun. The Beis Din ruled that since there had once been a debt and it was now the word of one man against the other. R' Zalman would have to swear that he had indeed repaid the loan, and thus be absolved of the debt. The Rashash did not want to take a chance of a fellow Jew possibly swearing falsely, so he relented and dropped the case. Anger and bitterness were cast upon the tailor. People stopped patronizing him, and R' Zalman and his family became the objects of mockery and degradation. R' Zalman gave up his business and moved to a hamlet out of town, a broken and sorrowful man. A year later, the Rashash once again learned from that sefer and noticed the money tucked into it. Suddenly it struck him – this was the money R' Zalman had repaid! He immediately traveled to R' Zalman to make amends. R' Zalman was living in a dilapidated shanty in a desolate area. "Please forgive me," pleaded the Rashash, "I just found the money in the sefer and I realized that it was you who was right, not I." "What good is forgiveness?" said R' Zalman bitterly. "My business is gone; my money is lost. I have nothing. I am the laughing stock of the community." The Rashash said, "Not only will I return your money, but I will go to every shul and announce from the bimah that it was my mistake and that people should restore their proper respect towards you." R' Zalman sadly replied, "People will only say that the Rashash is a tzaddik, and it is his compassion that compels him to act in this manner. They will never believe that I was really right." The Rashash was perplexed, for he understood human nature and knew that R' Zalman was right. People wouldn't believe him after such a long period of doubt and rebuke. The Rashash thought a moment about how to rectify the situation and then said, "I have a daughter... now if I take your son as a son-in-law, which means that you would become my mechutan, then no one would doubt that you are indeed a respectable man." R' Zalman agreed to this proposal. The prospective kallah and chosson agreed as well, and a marriage was arranged between R' Zalman's son and the Rashash's daughter, and R' Zalman regained his former status in the community. (*The Maggid Speaks*) *The Weekly Vort*.

## In Just 90 Seconds!

The well-known speaker, R' Shabsi Yigal, tells of a chance encounter with R' Yehoshua Hartman shlit'a in which the latter saw R' Chaim Kanievsky zt"l literally comb through all the works of Chazal in ninety seconds. He tells the story as follows: I saw a familiar face one Friday morning. It was my old rebbe, R' Yehoshua Hartman, who had just recently edited a new edition of the Maharal's writings. He had been my rebbe in Maarava. I hadn't seen him for years. I had heard he had moved away to a different country. That's why I was so surprised to meet him, especially in Raanana, my hometown, on a short Friday, in the middle of the winter. After a few friendly words, I asked my rebbe what he was doing in town. He said that his in-laws had made aliyah from Brazil and settled in Raanana, and he and his Rebbetzin were there to visit them. When I found out that R' Hartman was going to spend Shabbos in our city, I didn't waste a moment - I immediately asked him if he could come speak in the shul where I daven, both during davening and at a kiddush afterwards. I remembered the fascinating lectures he'd delivered during my yeshivah days, and was anxious to experience them again, to hear him expound on wonderful principles of the Maharal, and to share this treasure with my friends. R' Hartman gave me his phone number so I could get his answer later in the day, and we said goodbye. When I phoned him later that day, shortly before Shabbos began, he told me he would be able to come and speak. Of course, I was more than thrilled. During the kiddush, R' Hartman said an exquisite dvar Torah and then told over one of the most amazing stories I'd ever heard about a talmid chacham of our generation and his incredible breadth of Torah knowledge. While editing Gur Aryeh, R' Hartman came across a Maharal on Parshas Vayechi that states as follows: "During techiyas hameisim, all the dead will stand in Mearas Hamachpeilah, as is written in Chazal." However, the Maharal never cited his source. An editor's job is to find sources. There were no search engines in those days. Bar Ilan's program hadn't been created yet, there was no Otzar Hachochma or any other comprehensive collection of Torah writings. There were plenty of talmidei chachamim steeped in the writings of Chazal, though, so R' Hartman approached quite a few of them to see if they knew the source of this Maharal. He asked many people, but none of them had any idea. In the end, R' Hartman added a footnote on this piece of Maharal. "I don't know the source of this Chazal." Shortly after R' Hartman's Gur Aryeh was published, he found himself in Bnei Brak, and as he was walking down a random street, he chanced upon R' Chaim Kanievsky walking by himself. That was still possible in those days. R' Hartman decided to grab the opportunity. He approached the tzaddik and asked if he could ask a question. Being given permission, he queried, "The Maharal writes in Gur Aryeh, Parshas Vayechi, that during techiyas hameisim, all the dead will stand in Mearas Hamachpeilah." "Is that what he says?" R' Chaim asked, in a tone that sounded surprised. Apparently, this was news to him, too. "That's what he says," R' Hartman affirmed. "However, right afterwards, the Maharal writes that Chazal mention this fact, as well. Does the Rav perhaps know where this Chazal is?" "Then the most amazing thing happened," said R' Hartman. "I watched as R' Chaim continued walking, but he was murmuring to himself. I walked behind him, trying to hear what he was murmuring. I heard him say, "Talmud Bavli? No. Yerushalmi? No. Midrashei Halachah? No. Midrashei Aggadah? No. Zohar? ...." Then R' Chaim looked at me and mentioned a place in the Zohar that might be interpreted to mean that. "When I got home, I opened a Zohar to the place he'd mentioned, and bingo! It was right there!" R' Hartman said. "It was incredible. I saw R' Chaim Kanievsky scan the entire literature of Chazal in ninety seconds!"

*Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's Torah Tavlin.*

# JOKES

## A GREAT SALESMAN

A man named Donald bought a horse from a farmer for \$250. The farmer agreed to deliver the horse the next day. The next day, the farmer drove up to Donald's house and said, "Sorry, son, but I have some bad news. The horse died." Donald replied, "Well, then just give me back my money." The farmer said, "Can't do that. I went and spent it already." Donald said, "Ok, then just bring me the dead horse." The farmer asked, "What ya gonna do with him?" Donald said, "I'm going to raffle him off." The farmer said, "You can't raffle off a dead horse!" Donald said, "Sure I can! Watch me." A month Later, the farmer met up with Donald and asked, "What happened with that dead horse?" Donald said, "I raffled him off. I sold 500 tickets at five dollars apiece and made a profit of \$2495." The farmer said, "Didn't anyone complain?" Donald said, "Just the guy who won. So I gave him back his five dollars." Donald is moving into the White House later this month.

## SIGN OF THE TIMES...

A woman met her husband at the train station after work for the ride home. He looked haggard, so she asked, "Rough day?" "You bet it was," he groaned. "Our computers were down, and we had to think all day long."

## TEXAN FARMER TRAVELS

A Texan farmer goes to Australia for a vacation. There he meets an Aussie farmer and gets talking. The Aussie shows off his big wheat field and the Texan says, "Oh! We have wheat fields that are at least twice as large". Then they walk around the ranch a little and the Aussie shows off his herd of cattle. The Texan immediately says, " We have longhorns that are at least twice as large as your cows". The conversation has, meanwhile, almost died when the Texan sees a herd of kangaroos hopping through the field. He asks, "And what are those?" The Aussie asks with an incredulous look, "Don't you have any grasshoppers in Texas"?

## I ALWAYS LIKED YOU

I recently ran into an old student of mine, who said, "I always liked you. You never had favorites." "Why thank you," I replied. Then he concluded with, "You were mean to everyone."

## WASH THE DOG

A young boy, about eight years old, was at the corner grocery picking out a large size box of laundry detergent. The grocer walked over and trying to be friendly asked the boy if he had a lot of laundry to do. "Nope, no laundry," the boy said, "I'm going to wash my dog." "But, you shouldn't use this to wash your dog. It's very powerful and if you wash your dog in this, he'll get sick. In fact, it might even kill him." But, the boy was not to be stopped and carried the detergent to the counter and paid for it, even as the grocer still tried to talk him out of washing his dog. About a week later, the boy was back in the store to buy some candy. The grocer asked the boy how his dog was doing. "Oh, he died," the boy said. The grocer, trying not to be an "I-told-you-so" said he was sorry the dog died, but added, "I tried to tell you not to use that detergent on your dog." "Well, the boy replied, "I don't think it was the detergent that killed him." "Oh? What was it then?" "I think it was the spin cycle!"

## ONE OF LIFE'S LESSONS

While preaching about forgiving ones enemies, the preacher asked for a show of hands of those who were willing to forgive their enemies. About half of the congregation raised their hands. The minister continued his lection and again asked for a show of hands. This time, 80 percent of his congregation raised their hands. Not giving up, the minister continued for fifteen more minutes. When he again asked for a show of hands, all members—except one—raised their hands. "Mr. Jones," asked the minister, "are you not willing to forgive your enemies?" "I don't have any." Mr. Jones, that is very unusual. I know you are 96-years-old. Would you please come down to the front and explain to all of us how you have lived so long without making a single enemy in the world?" Mr. Jones teetered to the front and briefly explained, "It's easy. I've outlived every one of them."

## THE STORMY SEA

As the storm raged, the captain realized his ship was sinking fast. He called out, "Anyone here know how to pray?" One man stepped forward. "Aye, Captain, I know how to pray." "Good," said the captain, "You pray while the rest of us put on our life jackets. We're one short."



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# KIDDUSH LEVANA

## PART I

In this week's parsha, we read about the new moon, so it is a good opportunity to discuss some of the halachos of Kiddush Levana. Let us start with the earliest and the latest time for reciting kiddush levana.

There is a rabbinical mitzvah called birchas halevanah, or what we call kidush levana. Kiddush levana, as the Derech Pikudecha writes, is considered – to some degree – an extension of the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh, the establishing of Rosh Chodesh, based on the appearance of the new moon, which is the very first mitzvah in the Torah.

### EARLIEST TIME

The Rambam (Brochos 10:17), the Yad Rama (Sanhedrin 41b), and the Smag (Asei 27) write that one can recite kidush levana at the very first opportunity, even on the first night, as soon as the moon becomes visible. Their reasoning is simple. Since the Gemara does not give any specific time for the earliest when to perform the mitzvah, it seems that anytime is fine.

When is the earliest that one can see the moon? Rashi says that it is possible to see the new moon after 6 hours, but the Rambam says it can be up to 24 hours.

The poskim do not follow this opinion, at all. But, if one did recite the brocha before three days, Rav Shlomo Zalman (Halichos Shlomo – Tefilah 1:108) ruled that he is yotzei.

Most poskim rule that one must wait until a time frame of three full days – 72 hours – from when the molad has passed to recite the brocha. This is based on the words of the Meseches Sofrim that one can only recite kiddush levana when the moon is shining enough to enjoy its light, which is not possible until a few days into the month.

This Meseches Sofrim – that one can only recite kiddush levana when the moon is shining enough to enjoy its light – would seem to be in variance with the Rambam, who allows reciting it as soon as it is visible. The Igros Moshe (C"m 2:47) explains that the Rambam may have understood that this is only a preference, but since the brocha is not on the enjoyment, it can be recited earlier.

The final opinion is quoted by the Mechaber that one must wait seven days before reciting kiddush levana. As the Beis Yosef explains, this is based on Kabala. The Rama Mipano explains that the reason for seven days is similar to waiting seven days before a baby's bris, which the Midrash explains is so that it will first have gone through a Shabbos.

The Chasam Sofer (Siman 102) also writes that the custom is to wait until seven days.

When we say seven days, does it mean a full seven days, or is it enough to recite kiddush levana on the

seventh day? The Rama Mipano and the Eliyahu Raba (s"k 14), quoted by the Pri Megadim (M"Z s"k 3) rule that one can recite it on the seventh day, and it does not need to be a full seven days.

However, the Shiyrei Kneses Hagdolah and the Shaarei Teshuva (s"k 10) quoting the Birkei Yosef, as well as the Matei Efraim (581:10) maintain that one should wait the full seven days

The sefer Mishmeres Shalom adds that if Motzei Shabbos falls on the 7th day, or it is a cloudy time of the year, one can recite it on the seventh day, and not wait for the full seven days. The Kaf Hachaim, however, rules that one should always wait seven full days.

The Igros Moshe (O"C 1:143) explains an interesting omission of the Mechaber. As we recite in kiddush levana, this mitzvah is comparable to kabals pnei hashchinah, having a meeting with Hashem. The Gemara adds that, due to the great significance to this mitzvah, it should be recited standing, as would befit a meeting with the King of all kings. The Mechaber, however, does not make mention of this requirement and even the Rama quotes it in the name of the Tur. This seems quite puzzling, since it is an explicit Gemara.

The Igros Moshe explains that it is possible that the Mechaber understood that the requirement to stand is only if one is reciting the brocha bizmanah at the moment it appears. It is possible that only that beginning moment is like greeting the King. Since the Mechaber rules that one should wait until later in the month – which is no longer this opportune moment – this equation no longer applies.

### IN CONCLUSION

Most poskim rule that kiddush levana can be recited after three days, but there are many who wait for seven days.

What happens if the three or seven days come in the middle of the week: Should one wait for Motzei Shabbos or recite then and there? To be continued...

*Comments and questions are welcome and can be sent to: RabbiScheiner@18forshay.com.*

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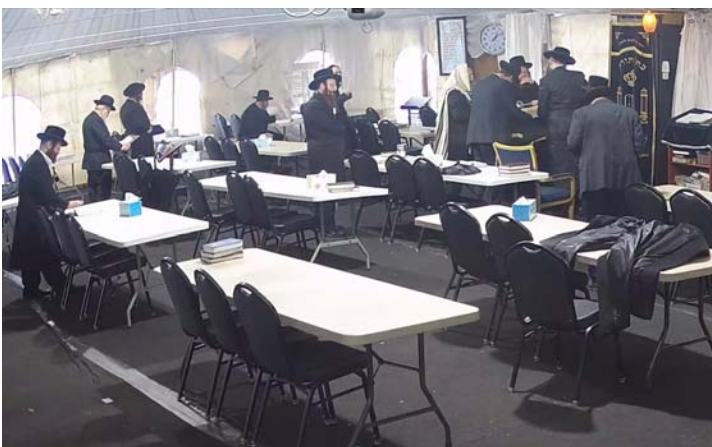
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# It's the Same Story

In Sefer Bereishis, HaShem gives Avraham a glimpse into the future. He is told of an exile that his progeny will experience. How they will be "ger – strangers in a land, v'avadum – they will be enslaved, v'inu – they will be oppressed..." (Bereishis 15:13). Generations later, the words were realized. "Yosef, all his brothers, and that entire generation passed." (Shemos 1:6). The end of an era. A new king arises. A pharaoh who didn't want to know of Yosef, nor recognize all the good which he had done for Egypt. That animosity extended to all of the Jewish people. It came in stages, escalating from bad to worse. Bnei Yisroel were made to feel like strangers in the land. They became enslaved to the Egyptians and experienced pain and affliction.

Shlomo HaMelech teaches us in Koheles, "Ain kol chodosh tachas hashemesh – There is nothing new under the sun." The story of life in Egypt has been repeated countless times throughout the ages. As the Chumash tells us, "They filled the land..." In country after country, as our nation grew, we made valuable contributions and had a positive effect on virtually every aspect of life. Yet, we were made to feel like strangers.... and worse. Ger yiheyeh – strangers they will be. Was this not the story of the Holocaust? Strangers in the land. Stripped of all civil liberties. Jews had to wear a yellow star, emblazoned with the word "Jude". Libraries, schools, public transportation, all off-limits to Jews. Jewish businesses forced to shut down. Jewish-owned stores looted and destroyed. In Egypt, and then time and time again, strangers in the land.

V'avadum – and they will be worked. Stage two. This too was part of the Holocaust. So many of our people taken to labor camps, forced to live under the most horrific conditions. How ironic, that the sign over the entranceway to Auschwitz reads "Arbeit Macht Frie – Work makes one free". Echoes of the words of the Egyptians, who spoke to our ancestors with guile, saying that if the Jews were truly loyal citizens, they would voluntarily work for the good of Egypt. A work that became slavery. V'inu – and they will be tortured. Words that became a reality in Egypt. Words that aren't enough to describe the horrors of the Holocaust.

In this week's parsha, Va'eira, we learn of the plagues that HaShem sent upon

the Egyptians. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch teaches that the plagues were not haphazard happenings. He cites Rabbi Yehuda's teaching in the Haggadah, who divided the ten plagues into three groups. Rav Hirsch teaches that the plagues in each group correspond to the three stages of anti-Semitism and suffering experienced in Egypt: Estrangement, Enslavement, and Affliction.

The plagues affected only the Egyptians, forcing them to experience a taste of the misery and pain that was inflicted upon the Jewish nation.

## GROUP ONE – D'TAZCH:

Dahm – blood. All the waters of Egypt turned to blood. The Egyptians couldn't even drink the water -- feeling like strangers in their own land.

Tz'fardayah – frogs. Forced labor is a loss of pride. The frogs croaked day and night, entering their homes, and even the palace of the king, jumping onto the pharaoh himself. The Egyptians felt diminished, helpless, leading to a loss of self-esteem and pride.

Kinim – Lice. The Egyptians' bodies were covered with lice. True bodily affliction.

## GROUP TWO – ADASH:

Arov – Wild Animals. Once again, strangers in the land. The Egyptians were confined to their homes, unable to venture outdoors due to the fear of roaming animals.

Dever – Pestilence. To the Egyptians, their horses and cattle were their pride. This plague brought death to their livestock. Another loss of pride.

Sh'chin – Boils. Their bodies were covered with painful boils. They suffered immensely. Affliction.

## GROUP THREE – B'ACHAV:

Barad – Hailstones. Once again, Egypt was in lockdown. The entire population forced to remain indoors, taking shelter from the giant and dangerous hailstones that were raining down upon the country.

Arbeh – Locusts. The Egyptians' crops were destroyed by swarms of locusts. Another blow to their pride.

Choshech – Darkness. A darkness so black, so thick and intense, that the Egyptians became immobilized, as if chained to the very spot they were in. A painful experience. And finally, the last of the ten plagues. B'Choros – Death of the firstborn.

The ultimate punishment which finally broke the Egyptian spirit. The culmination of the plagues, leading to the redemption of the

Jewish people.

This coming Tuesday, 2 Shevat, is the yahrzeit of my beloved father, HaRav Meshulem ben HaRav Osher Anshil HaLevi zt"l. My father experienced first-hand HaShem's words to Avrohom, living through the inhumaneness of the Holocaust.

He became a stranger in his land. He experienced forced labor. He was subjected to beatings and much affliction.

I often wonder (more so as I am getting older), how my father managed to always be happy, and have the biggest smile on his face. To never "lose it", but always speak with the most gentle voice and kindest of words. He came to this country after the war as an orphan, alone, without family. Yet, there was never sadness or despair. To Abba, every day was a good day. Every day was an opportunity to show appreciation for the gift of life.

It is now twenty-seven years since my abba was niftar. I turned to Psalm 27, and received my answer. The secret of my father's survival. The essence of our nation's survival. To live with the words of Dovid HaMelech, "HaShem is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? HaShem is my life's strength, whom shall I dread?... Though an army would besiege me, my heart would not fear, though war would arise against me, in this (emunah – belief in HaShem) I have trust... Deliver me not to the wishes of my tormentors... Hope to HaShem, strengthen yourself, and let your heart take courage..." HaShem told Avraham about the pain that his children will endure. But He also promised judgment and retribution upon their oppressors, and for the Jewish people, a life of blessing in the future. My father lived his life with emunah and bitachon, never looking back, and always thanking HaShem for enabling him to not only survive, but to use every fiber of his strength in a positive way, to build a family, and instill Yiddishkeit in countless Jews who were brought to a life of Torah and mitzvos. We are still in galus – exile, we are not yet out of the woods. We are surrounded by Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism. But we too have the faith and belief of our ancestors. As we say in the Thirteen Principles of Faith, "Ani ma'amin b'emunah sheleimoh – We believe with complete faith in the coming of Moshiach, and even though he may delay, we await his coming every day." May we all merit to witness an end to this exile, and may the words of Psalm 27 be a source of strength to all of us.



RABBI FRAND

# THIS NEW MOON IS FOR YOU — HACHODESH HAZEH LACHEM

**T**he first mitzvah in Parshas Bo is the mitzvah of “This month for you shall be the first of the months.” This is the commandment to the Jewish court to establish the new month and to implement the lunar calendar system, which is the basic mechanism of tracking the Jewish holidays.

Our Sages say that the Greek-Syrians (Yevanim) tried to uproot three basic Jewish commandments: Shabbos, Milah [Circumcision], and Kiddush haChodesh [Sanctifying the New Month]. If we were to take a survey as to what are the “Top Ten Mitzvos” in the Torah, many of us would say Shabbos and many of us would say Milah, but I don’t think any of us would say that Kiddush haChodesh ranks up there in the top hierarchy of Torah commandments. And yet, the Yevanim did focus precisely on this mitzvah (along with Shabbos and Milah) in their attempts to eradicate the fundamental practices of Judaism from their empire. Why was the mitzvah of Kiddush haChodesh so fundamental that it was so important to abolish it?

I saw a very interesting interpretation by the Arugas haBosem. The Arugas haBosem asks: Is it not peculiar that the Ribono shel Olam, who is the essence of that which is eternal and is the essence of Emes [Truth], should create a celestial body like the moon, which waxes and wanes. The moon is here, it gets smaller, then it disappears and then it comes back again. This is sort of “out of character” for a Divine creation. The sun is always present, the forces of nature are always present, and gravity is always present. What is it about the moon that it is present, it grows, it diminishes, it disappears, and then it reappears? Why would He make something like that?

The Arugas haBosem answers that there is something about the moon that is fundamental to the Jewish people and fundamental to every single Jewish person. The moon is a symbol to us that people go through life with periods of growth and decline. They go through periods in which they are ascendant and then they go through periods in which they are descendant. However, just like the moon waxes and wanes — it becomes big and diminishes and almost disappears, it always reappears — “HaChodesh hazeh lachem”: This rejuvenation cycle of the moon is crucial to what being a Jew is all about both collectively and on an individual level.

During our history, we experienced so many times when the Jewish people were ascendant, like in the times of Shlomo or like in the period of the “Golden Age of Spain.” And yet we also experienced periods when we have been the most down trodden and beaten up people on the face of the earth. When people are in that type of situation, it is so easy for them to give up hope.

That which is true on a national level is true on an individual level as well. There are periods in life when things go very well. A person feels his future is bright and big. Then people suffer reversals and go through periods of decline. However, “HaChodesh hazeh lachem” — Chazal say that the Jewish people resemble the moon. This is why the Master of the World made such a celestial phenomenon. He wanted it to provide His people with an ethical lesson — a model for their destiny.

This is how the Arugas haBosem explains the text of the blessing of the New Moon: “Poel Emes she’peuloso Emes”. G-d who creates Truth and his actions are Truthful (and Truth is always forever), nevertheless “v’la’levanah amar she’tischadesh ateres tiferes l’amusai baten” — to the moon He commanded that it should go through these cyclical patterns as an ethical lesson (mussar haskel) to the Jewish people “she’hem asidim l’hischadesh k’mosa”, for they are destined to renew themselves as it does. Even though it is “out of character” for the Almighty to create something that is not static and is not stable, He did so because the lesson is so vital to the Jewish people, for they are destined to emulate the pattern of the moon and rejuvenate themselves as well.

This is the reason why the nature of the moon is such and this is the reason why the Yevanim wanted to nullify not only Shabbos and Milah but also Kiddush haChodesh. Even if they were successful in uprooting Shabbos and stripping it away from the Jews and even if they were successful in eradicating circumcision, if the Jews still had the concept of Kiddush haChodesh, they could look at the cycles of the moon and they would not give up hope. The Syrian-Greeks were not only attempting to strip the Jews of these mitzvos. They were also attempting to take away the possibility that the Jews would rejuvenate. The Yevanim wanted them to lose hope. Therefore, Kiddush haChodesh was so crucial to the Yevanim. It was not because of the mitzvah itself, but because of what it represented.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon once mentioned a thought he heard from Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt”l, which the latter always said when he recited Kiddush LeVanah. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once met a holocaust survivor and asked him “How did you hold out? How was it you were able to not give up?” The Jew told Rav Chaim that in the camps, they could not fulfill mitzvos. Not Lulav, not Succah, not Chanukah, nothing. However, there was one mitzvah they performed regularly. Even on the pain of death, they left the barracks at night to fulfill this mitzvah. This was the mitzvah of Kiddush LeVanah. There was always a moon.

“We looked up at the moon and we took to heart the lesson of ‘they are destined to be renewed like the moon.’” This is what gave this Jew hope. That is why Kiddush LeVanah and Kiddush haChodesh is so crucial. It is the story of the Jewish people and it is the story of individual human beings, waxing and waning, growing and declining.

There is an amazing Gemara [Shabbos 147b] that I always had trouble understanding and I still don’t fully understand. Rav Chelbo stated that the wine of Purgeesa and the water of Deyumsis corrupted the Ten Tribes. There is a place where the wine is terrific, extremely intoxicating and extremely alluring. There is another place that the hot springs are other worldly. The Gemara says that the Tanna Rav Elazar ben Arach went to these places with the superb wines and the superb baths and was drawn after them. He started really enjoying them to the extent that he forgot his learning. When he returned, he misread the pasuk “HaChodesh hazeh Lachem” [Shemos 12:2]. He read the words as “Hachresh hayah libam” [their hearts were deaf]. Simply, the great Tanna got so into the physicality of the wine and the hot springs that he forgot how to read Hebrew! The Gemara concludes that the Rabbis prayed for mercy on his behalf and his learning was returned to him.

The Arugas HaBosem comments on the symbolism of the story.

Out of all the pasukim in the Torah, why did he misread “HaChodesh hazeh Lachem” as “Hachresh hayah libam?” The answer is that Chazal are trying to tell us that the words “Hachresh hayah libam” also contain “HaChodesh hazeh lachem.” The capacity to get so low that one cannot even read the words right does not mean that all is lost. With only the slightest modification to “Hachresh hayah libam,” the words turn into “HaChodesh hazeh lachem.” Therefore, as low as Rav Elazar ben Arach sunk, he was able to return. The power of “This New Moon is for you” is the power of the celestial sphere that is emulated by the Jewish people. They are destined to renew like it. The capacity of rebirth, the capacity of rejuvenation, and the capacity of renaissance, define the Jewish people. We all have that capacity.

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