

Wishing You A Happy Shavuot, May 28-30



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On Shavuot we celebrate the
Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai
exactly 3,332 years ago.

Your ancestors stood at the foot of
the mountain. You, too, stood at the
foot of the mountain together with
your parents and grandparents -
for the souls of all Jews from all
generations came to hear the Ten
Commandments from G-d Himself.

G-d willing, this Shavuot we will
once again reaffirm our Covenant
with G-d and His Torah
with the Reading of
"The Ten Commandments".

As we go to press, we do not yet
know whether we will need to do so
at home or whether we will
be able to attend services.

In keeping with "Tracht gut vet zein
gut - Think good and it will be be
good", we pray, hope and trust that
soon normal life will resume -
better and stronger than before,
and we will again pray and celebrate
together in our synagogues!



(c) Michael Muchnik

CAN THE MODERN MIND FIND PEACE WITHOUT DELUSION?

On the elusiveness of gratitude and confidence in our current times

by Tzvi Freeman

Due to a combination of my respiratory history and my age, before the rest of you were locked up, my wife and children had already put me on the endangered species list. Now, despite living in time-to-get-back-to-work Georgia, I'm still stuck indefinitely at home.

They bring my grandchildren to peer at me through the screened windows, pointing and saying, "That's a grandpa. Don't come too close. Don't touch now."

Soon they'll start throwing peanuts.

And a little nudnik voice from some dim corner of my mind ruminates on, "How long before I can hug one of those grandchildren again?"

This might sound strange, but since being grounded by my kids, I've been finding a lot of comfort in an 11th-century text originally composed in Arabic.

The 7 Prerequisites of Trust of Rabbi Bachaye ibn Paquda

Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda of Saragosa, Al-Andalus (currently Spain) - or "Rabbeinu Bachaye" as he is known - could be called both a rationalist and a mystic. He lived in what we call "The Golden Age of Spanish Jewry," an era when philosophers regularly gathered in private orchards and gardens to discuss the meaning of all things. He was the *dayan* (judge) for Jewish matters in his city, but he was also concerned that the

responsibilities of the human heart had been neglected. And so he wrote "Duties of the Heart" to fill that void.

While very little is known about Rabbeinu Bachaye himself, the popularity of his work has never waned. It has always been a prime book to illuminate the inner life of our hearts - what we love, what we fear, how we think of ourselves - while showing how this must be expressed in our outer life - how we speak to others, how we do business, how we eat and sleep. And how silly it is to fret and worry.

Chapter Two deals with the heart's need to trust and the serenity that trust buys you. To paraphrase, in small part:

When you are small, you learn to rely on your mother to nurse you. As you gain awareness, you realize there is an entire mother there to rely upon. You grow further to discover there is a father upon whom the mother relies. One day, you learn to rely upon yourself.

But eventually, you must discover that you are not in control. Neither is your father nor your mother. Neither is the most powerful person in your country - or even in the entire world - in control. None of them has the crucial combination of qualities and powers that allow you to place all your trust in this one person.

So who is there to rely upon? Only...

1. Someone who loves you.



2. Someone who never ceases to watch over you.

3. Someone who has unlimited power and is unfeatable.

4. Someone who knows what is best for you, spiritually and materially.

5. Someone who has a stellar record of caring for all your needs from the day you were born to this day and will continue to do so.

6. Someone in whose hands you lie, all of you, sheltered and cared for without need of recourse to anyone else - because when you need to trust two people for something, you really don't trust either of them.

7. Someone who cares for you unconditionally, regardless of whether you are worthy or unworthy.

And you discover that only one being can fulfill all these requirements.

R. Bachya elucidates upon each of these at length, in the flowing language typical of classical Arabic prose, rich with metaphor. He demonstrates both rationally and from verses of Torah how each of these prerequisites complements and magnifies the power of all the others, weaving a perfect net of serenity and confidence to the intellectual as to the believer-and how there is no being on earth or in heaven who can truly fit any of these descriptions, other than the single Creator and Director of all things.

So I meditate on this list of seven at night. Then - despite the news I have read that day, despite the precautions I must take to keep myself safe, despite the general frenzy in the air since a tiny little virus has attacked all of human civilization - I can then sleep a good, healing sleep. Almost a thousand years later, Rabb-

einu Bachaye's formula still works.

Or does it?

Trust, Gratitude and the Modern Mind

Let's step back to prerequisite number five, in which Rabbeinu Bachaye invites us to ponder the story of our lives and find divine protection sewn throughout its fabric. Makes sense. Empirical evidence is always assuring.

So generations of Jews who suffered ill-health, persecution, poverty, extreme violence and war, high infant mortality rates, bitter cold homes in the winter and burning hot homes filled with bugs and stench in the summer, plagues, backbreaking labor and often days without bread, followed his advice and saw a divine hand carrying them through every event of their lives.

What did they say? It's right there in the prayer book. But they really meant it:

...In famine You nourished us, and in plenty You sustained us. From sword You saved us; from plague You rescued us; and from severe and enduring diseases you spared us. Until now Your mercy has helped us, and Your kindness has not forsaken us. And You will never abandon us, G-d our G-d, forever...
•Continued on page 10

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THE FAITH OF THE FARMER



Farming, says the Talmud, is an act of faith. The farmer invests a great deal of effort and expense to plow the land and prepare it for sowing. Then he casts grain into the soil, where it will rot and decompose. Why does he do this? Because he believes in the "Life-Giver of the World" - that G-d will make the land yield many times the quantity of his investment.

This statement, of course, begs the question: What is so unique about the farmer's faith? The utility of plowing and sowing is a matter of experience: countless generations of farmers have sown and profited from their toil. Why does the act of farming demonstrate one's faith in G-d any more than the other endeavors, great and small, of human life?

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When G-d created the world, He established certain laws which delineate the

manner in which the world operates. The world, however, does not operate on its own: every event that transpires in it - from the birth of a child to a leaf turning in the wind - represents a direct and purposeful act of G-d. So the laws of nature are not really laws at all, but divine behavior patterns. The consistency of these behavior patterns - only rarely does G-d depart from them, and when He does we call the event a miracle - creates the illusion of laws, as if there is some inherent necessity that things should continue to operate the way they have in the past. In truth, there exists no such inherent necessity, only the divine desire to continue acting upon the world in a manner consistent with these established patterns. If tomorrow the sun were to rise in the west and water were to begin to flow uphill, this would be no more or less miraculous than today's natural reality. The fact that G-d has thus far chosen to make the sun rise in the east and water flow downhill in no way compels that He continue to do so.

This, of course, is a believer's perspective, the perspective of one who perceives a deeper, more basic reality than meets the eye or than

can be dissected in the laboratory. To a more superficial eye, the laws of nature are axiomatic and immutable - laws that not only guarantee that a certain sequence of actions will produce wheat or put a human being on the moon, but which are also the last word on what is, will and ought to be in our world.

Our mission in life is to "Know Him in all your ways" - to recognize the divine essence of reality and to manifest this truth in everything we do. To live a life that is not subservient to the laws of nature but to their Divine Author. A life in which the natural reality is respected as the divine *modus operandi*, but is neither venerated nor awed. A life in which nature is not the dictator of life but the facilitator of life's purpose to serve one's Creator.

By assuming this perspective and setting it as the guiding principle in everything we do, we penetrate the veil of nature and reveal the divine reality it conceals. Our every deed becomes an exercise in the revelation of G-dliness, a demonstration of the subservience of nature and the all-pervasiveness of the Divine.

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Adapted from the works of
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson,
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by Yanki Tauber



Drip Irrigation in Israel

Every person has his own path through life, her own particular area of the veil to penetrate.

For the veil is not uniform, but contains patches of greater and lesser opacity. The world of the businessman, for example, is far less predictable than that of the assembly-line worker. The business that succeeds against all odds, or the deal that is born out of a dozen incredible coincidences, can be explained in such prosaic terms as market forces and statistical probability, but every businessman has encountered the hand of divine providence behind the monotony of natural law. By the same token, the brain-surgeon's veil is more translu-

cent than that of the dentist, and the physicist bores deeper than the civil engineer.

Therein lies the specialty of the faith of the farmer. The farmer's contact is with the densest, most opaque part of the veil. He is slave to the weather, the contours of the land, the chemistry of the soil; he contends with nature in its rawest, most obstinate, most dictatorial incarnation. So when the farmer recognizes and acts upon the truth that it is the "Life-Giver of the World" who answers his toil with sustenance, this represents the ultimate triumph of faith, the ultimate penetration of spiritual vision through the material haze.



SEEING THE SOUNDS

by Menachem Feldman

As the Jewish people gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, they heard the voice of G-d speaking the Ten Commandments. The Torah describes the awesome experience:

And all the people saw the voices and the torches, the sound of the shofar, and the smoking mountain, and the people saw and trembled; so they stood from afar.

What is the meaning of the

words "and all the people *saw* the voices"? How can voices be seen? The Midrash tells us that there is a disagreement regarding this verse. Rabbi Yishmael believes that the Jews did not see anything unusual. They saw the torches and heard the voices (in which case the word "saw" refers to the torches.) Rabbi Akiva, however, insists that the verse must be read literally - they actually saw the voices. In the words of Rabbi

Akiva: "They saw that which is usually heard, and they heard that which is usually seen."

According to Rabbi Akiva, the experience at Sinai was much more than just receiving ten moral instructions for life. Sinai was a spiritual revelation that changed the way the Jews perceived the meaning of existence. In general, the world can be divided into that which is "seen" and that which is "heard." The concrete, physical needs, desires and experiences are "seen"; they are experienced as the ultimate reality. That which is abstract, theoretical and spiritual is "heard." The intangible spirit is not something we can see with our naked eye. To experience it, we need to "hear" and "listen." We must use our mind to discover truths that are not obvious to the observer.

According to Rabbi Akiva, at Sinai the Jews "heard that which is usually seen." In other words, the physical matter, which is usually perceived as absolute reality, became an abstract idea, while spirituality, "that which is usually heard", became real and obvious.

The experience of Sinai was not merely a one-time event. Every time we study Torah, we are recreating the revelation of Sinai. We are not only hearing the words of G-d being spoken directly to us, but our perception of what is meaningful and worthy is enhanced. When we study Torah, our priorities are realigned. The sublime ideas in life - meaning, holiness, transcendence - become real and tangible. For each time we study Torah, we are standing at Sinai and "seeing the sounds."

WHAT DID THE TABLETS LOOK LIKE?

by Menachem Posner

Question:

I read in the Torah that Moses came down from the mountain with two tablets of stone, but did not see anything about their size, shape, or what kind of stone they were made of. Can you shed some light?



Response:

The Dimensions:

Tradition tells us that they were thick square blocks of stone, six handbreadths tall, six handbreadths wide, and three handbreadths deep. In modern measurements, that is about 18" x 18" x 9". The sages of the Talmud (Bava Batra 14a) demonstrate how tablets of this size fit neatly into the Ark of the Covenant that Moses made as described in Exodus.

It is interesting to note that nowhere is there any mention of them having the rounded tops that are so common in the popular drawings of Moses and the tablets. This design appears to be the invention of non-Jewish artists.

The Material:

The tradition is that both sets of tablets were made of sapphire. After Moses broke the first set, G-d revealed a large deposit of sapphire under Moses' tent. Moses used some of the stone to carve the second tablets, and was permitted to keep the remainder.

The Writing:

The most common understanding is that the first five commandments were written on one tablet, and the other five commandments were on the second.⁴

The Torah describes the writing as "inscribed from both their sides; on one side and on the other side they were inscribed."

This means that the inscription was engraved through and through. As such, the words were clearly legible on one side and written in mirror writing on the other. Now there are two Hebrew letters, the *ayin* and the *lamed*, that are closed from all sides. The centers of these letters, Rav Chisda concludes, must have been miraculously suspended in place.

Others teach that the writing was miraculously legible on each side—in other words, although the letters were engraved all the way through, they could nevertheless be read from right to left on both sides. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that this is because the Torah can be understood on two levels, one revealed and one hidden.

☆ Happy Shavuot ☆

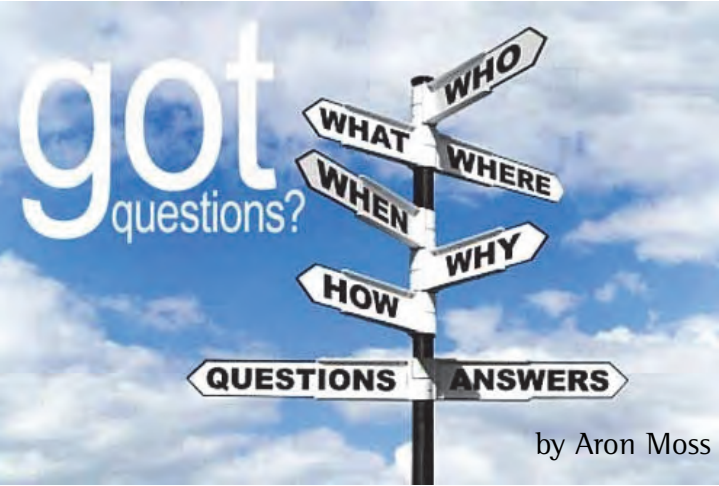
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What Do I Do If I Don't Believe?

Question:

I don't pray every day. Sometimes I'm not so sure that I believe in G-d enough to pray. I just don't think I can have the unwavering faith that other people seem to have. I'll never be so sure. Can you pray and be a good Jew if your faith is unsteady?

Answer:

To be a Jew means to struggle. The very name Israel means "one who struggles with G-d." Faith is not a light switch that you turn on and it stays on. Faith is a fire that you need to tend to and fuel, and sometimes rekindle. It is a wrestle that never ends.

There are days that your faith shines through and everything fits into place. On these days, you feel at one with yourself and G-d, and prayer comes naturally. Then there are days that you wake up and all is dark, your faith seems to have dried up. G-d, soul, prayer, goodness - all seem like annoying insects buzzing in your ear, and you just want to just roll over and go back to sleep.

But even on those days, you have to find the motivation to get up and get on with it. Perhaps your faith won't get you out of bed, so how about trying another

approach. Putting aside your faith in G-d, what about G-d's faith in you?

The last phrase of *Modeh Ani* is, "How great is Your faith."

The faith referred to here is not our faith in G-d, but rather "Your faith" - G-d's faith in us.

The very fact that we have woken up is proof that G-d believes in us. He knows that we are not perfect, is well aware of our failings and knows the mistakes we have made. And yet, in the morning after our sleep, He returns our soul to us and gives us another chance, because He trusts us. He has faith in our ability to change and make today a bit better than yesterday. We may or may not believe in Him, we may or may not believe in ourselves, but G-d believes in us.

Humans are fickle; G-d is constant. His faith in us is firm and unchanging, even if our faith in Him is shaky. That's the faith of an Israelite, one who struggles with G-d. We may be struggling, but we are struggling with G-d - He is always there.

If you woke up this morning, if your soul was returned to you to see another day, then give thanks. Start your day with a prayer, if not out of your faith in G-d, then at least out of G-d's faith in you. He trusts you enough to give you a precious soul. Use it.

I've Lost My Sense of Certainty...

Question:

This coronavirus thing has really thrown me. I feel like I've lost all sense of certainty. No one knows what will happen next. How do we stay sane when we don't know what's lurking around the corner?

Answer:

It is not that we have lost our *sense* of certainty. We have lost our *illusion* of certainty. We never had it to begin with. This could be majorly unsettling, or amazingly liberating. This tiny virus of 125 nanometers has sent the entire world into chaos. All of our plans are up in the air, markets are going crazy, entire countries shutting down, and we have no clue what the future holds.

But that is always the case. We never know what the future holds. We only think we do, and keep getting surprised when things don't pan out the way we expected. Now the mask is off. We have to admit our vulnerability.

What will happen next? We don't know. Our experts don't know. Our leaders don't know. Only G-d knows. And that is the point. Only G-d knows.

Close your eyes and feel the uncertainty, make peace with it, let yourself be taken by it. Embrace your cluelessness. Because in all the confusion there is one thing you know for sure. You are in G-d's Hands.

Keep calm. Panic and fear are also contagious. Take every precaution as advised by health authorities. Wash your hands well.

And every time you do, remember Whose Hands you are in.



Is Déjà Vu Real?

Question:

I often get déjà vu, the sensation that I have already lived this moment before. It has happened when I travel to new destinations with people I have never met, and I feel that I have been there in that place, with the same people, hearing that very conversation before. Is there a Jewish explanation for this?

Answer:

Some suggest that déjà vu is a sign of reincarnation. You feel you were here before because you were, in a previous life. Others explain that you had a predictive dream of the scene before it happened, and now you are seeing your dream materialize.

Maybe. There is a more mundane explanation. In my personal experience, I get déjà vu only when my brain is a little tired. What seems to be happening is that my conscious mind is idle, but my memory is working in the background. So I am feeling the sensation of remembering

the scene in front of me before I actually experience it in the present. It is as if the scene has slipped past my awareness and gone straight into my memory.

There is a simple test to see whether déjà vu means you really have seen this before, or your mind is playing tricks on you. Can you blurt out what someone else is about to say before they even say it? If so, that must come from somewhere beyond intellect. But if you feel like you knew what they were going to say only after they already said it, I'm not so sure it means anything, except that you need to get some rest.

But then there is a far deeper type of déjà vu. It's called resonance. You hear an insight, a teaching, a truth,

and although you have never heard it before, you know it is right. The idea rings true, seems familiar and comfortable. You are at home with it. It's what you always knew, but had never put into words. It resonates with you.

This happens when you study authentic Torah. You hear its message, and you know deep down that it is true. This is because you have heard it before. Our souls are taught the divine truths before we enter this world, but we forget it all at birth. However, an imprint remains, a faint memory, so we will know truth when we find it.

There are many false ideas and temporary fads that sound interesting and may gain much popularity, but on the deepest level they do not resonate with us. Our mission on earth is to search for the divine message, to put aside momentary distractions and regain that eternal truth, the truth our soul is waiting to hear again.

This is real déjà vu. Have you heard that before?



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When Was Your Last Spiritual?

by Yossy Goldman

I recently went to the doctor for the requisite annual medical examination, or "physical." I went through the routine checkup - height, weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, and stress tests on the treadmill and up and down the little staircase.

But then I wondered, have we ever thought of going for a "spiritual"?

What's our "height"? Do we walk tall? Are we proud and upright Jews, or are we apologetically stooped and bent over by the burden of an inferiority complex?

What about our "weight"? Are we on a well-balanced diet of Torah, the sustenance of our souls, or do we suffer from spiritual malnutrition?

And how is our heart doing? A Jewish heart doesn't only pump blood; it pumps warmth and love. A healthy Jewish heart is the emotional center of the person. It emotes and feels the pain of another. And healthy hearts are inspired by events that point unmistakably to the Hand of G-d in the world. If we aren't feeling what we should be, then we might be suffering from blocked arteries.

When the doctor took my blood pressure, I immediately made the obvious connection - *Tefillin*. I remembered the story of the simple farmer who went for his first medical checkup. When the doctor checked his pressure, he asked what that was all about. The doctor explained patiently that he was checking the heart rate. "But why are you holding my arm if you want to see how my heart is?" "When I check your hand," replied the physician, "I know how your heart is." The hand that gives charity, for example, indicates that it's connected to a healthy Jewish heart.

Then came the stress test - up the stairs and down the stairs, up again and down again, and again and again. How do we handle the ups and downs of life? Are we smug and arrogant when we're up, and dejected and depressed when we're down? How do we deal with stress? Do we trust in G-d that everything has a purpose, and a positive one at that? Or do we become angry and bitter at life's unkind twists of fate?

Finally, there was the treadmill. I really dislike treadmills. After two minutes, I said to the nurse I'd had enough. "The doctor said you must do four minutes," she informed me sternly. "Four minutes?" I cried. "This feels like four hours!"

Life can be a tedious treadmill. We find ourselves running and running and getting nowhere fast. A grueling rat race - all of it leaves us wondering what it's all about and why we are working so hard with no meaningful, consequential reward.

So this year, in addition to going for a physical, why not go for a spiritual? Find a 'doctor', a Jewish spiritual teacher/healer, who can search your soul for its healthy characteristics as well as your necessary growth points, and prescribe a spiritual fitness program tailored for you and your neshamah. May we all be healthy, physically and spiritually.

Be Small, But Stand Tall: A Jewish Paradox

by Hanna Perlberger

Right before the Holiday of Shavuot - when we received the Torah on Mount Sinai - we read the Torah portion, *Bamidbar*, which means "in the desert". The classic reason for this is that the best state in which to receive Torah is when we make ourselves into "a desert", meaning that we nullify our egos and enter into a state of total humility.

This makes a lot of sense. After all, the desert is an appropriate place for encounters with the Divine (think Burning Bush), as well as the setting for many spiritual journeys. In the desert, there are no material distractions, no cultural noise and no exits from its stark reality.

The opening line of the *Bamidbar* Torah portion is: "And G-d spoke to Moses in the desert." The word *midbar* ("desert") and *dibur* ("speech") share the same root, and so the relationship between the desert and speech - Divine speech - is beautifully correlated. For starters, speech represents freedom. The First Amendment, which guarantees free speech, is considered fundamental and integral to a free society. Slaves, on the other hand, have no voice. They are silenced. Their opinion is irrelevant, as they are not seen as people but as property.

On Passover, when we went from slavery into freedom, we read from the Haggadah. The word "Haggadah" derives from *lehagid*, which means, "to tell"; integral to that transition is the telling of a story we retell every year. In her TED talk on vulnerability, Brené Brown, defines courage as the ability to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart.

But speech only works when one is able and willing to both talk and listen. And to listen deeply and truly hear what the other is trying to say requires patience, focus and humility. Therefore, the desert is the ideal location for the Jewish people to be open to this Divine speech for there is no distraction.

We don't have to be physically in a desert to consciously strip away the layers of egocentricity that distort our clarity. By shutting out the noise that distracts us, we can transform ourselves into an appropriate desert of open receptivity.

Back to the opening verse



of the *Bamidbar* Torah portion which ends with G-d's command to Moses to take a census. Rashi, the medieval commentator, teaches us to understand this to mean the following: that G-d loves us and counts us, just like we like to count our prized pos-

Jewish paradox.

In fascinating research done at the Stanford Business School, Jim Collins was able to provide answers as to why some companies are visionary and successful, and others are not. It seems to depend on the companies' ability to choose between seemingly contradictory concepts and the ability to embrace both sides of the coin, adopting a strategy known as the "genius of the *and*" and rejecting thinking characterized as "the tyranny of the *or*." Being limited by either/or thinking isn't good for corporations; it certainly isn't good for people either.

When it comes to *receiving* the Torah, we must humble ourselves, create the space to take it in and learn, at times, to focus on our collective identity rather than our individual identity. But when it comes to *living* the Torah, we must stand tall and be counted, and know who we are. We are created and yearn to reach our highest possibilities. Being a light unto the nations and repairing the world is simply not a job for wimps.

The paradox is that we must always be simultaneously embracing both sides of the coin if we are to understand either side - and that is a lesson not just in preparation for Shavuot, but for any time of the year.

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see page 15



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WHO ARE YOU?

by Moshe S.

It's a simple enough question, but until recently, I haven't been able to properly answer it. "Who are you?"

For years I was proud of who I was. I had no worries in the world. I was making great money, living a life of fun and fancy, and thought that nothing or no one could touch me.

For years I was a professional criminal.

And then my world came crashing down. I was caught. I was found guilty. And I am now serving a twenty-year sentence in the Ramla prison in Israel.

The day I entered the jail, I lost my identity. To the prison system, I was merely a number. I had a name, but no one knew it as I never used it. I had a reputation, but it was for what I had done - and it no longer applied. You can't be a thief when you aren't stealing. You can't be a drug dealer when you aren't dealing. But I only knew how to be a criminal. So behind bars, who was I? What defined me?

I was a prisoner. And when you are a prisoner you have no definition. You have no status in the underworld and no status in the real world. You are nothing.

Then I met Rabbi Fishel Jacobs, the chaplain at the Ramla prison. And for the first time in my life, I began to learn the real answer.

I am a Jew.

I am a Jew who never really cared that he was a Jew. I am a Jew who was raised, like many Israelis, with the basic traditions, but with little care

or understanding as to what any of it meant. Like many other Sephardi immigrants, my grandparents were quite religious, but it was never passed down. What was passed down was the poverty, the illiteracy, and the hopelessness that many immigrant families have experienced. What was passed down was the need to survive and thrive. And that was exactly what I did.

I had no worries in the world. I was making great money, living a life of fun and fancy, and thought that nothing or no one could touch me. For years I was a professional criminal. And then my world came crashing down. I was caught.

I was a great criminal. I knew how to lie, cheat, steal, and essentially get whatever I wanted whenever I wanted. I had no qualms about my actions. I felt I was just helping make the world a little more balanced. It wasn't my fault that I was raised with barely enough food to eat. I couldn't change what I was given, but I could change what I would get. And so, from a very young age, I learned what was profitable. Drugs and weapons were profitable. What I didn't realize was that they were also deadly.



I watched my friends die. Some physically, others emotionally or mentally. I watched them reach a point where nothing mattered. A point that I never wanted to reach and feared that I would.

Few believe this, but I think I really wanted to get caught. Call it pop-psychology, but I think my getting caught was my cry for help. I knew something needed to change, but for the first time, I didn't know how to do it. I only knew how to do wrong. No one had ever taught me what was right.

Getting caught and thrown in jail was a real blessing - and not even so much one in disguise. I really think it saved my life.

But it was Rabbi Fishel Jacobs who saved my soul. He introduced me to who I

was, to who I am, and to who I want to be.

Fishel is the chaplain at my prison. He has many jobs here, from ensuring that our kosher food is always fresh and sanitary, to making sure the sukkah is set up properly, to providing us with classes and learning. At first when I watched him make his rounds, I thought that if he knew what was good for him he'd better stay away from me. Upon mentioning this to a fellow inmate, I was informed that Fishel was a black-belt in karate and if I was smart, I may want to stay away from him.

So, I quickly realized that fighting this rabbi would be a good way not only to end up in isolation, but would be a fight I would sorely lose. I figured I would rely on the age-old idea that if you can't

beat them, join them. He couldn't be that bad if the other inmates liked him so much.

The first time Fishel entered my cell, I realized that this meeting was going to be very different from what I've become accustomed to. Here was someone who didn't care about my criminal past, wasn't impressed with my rap record, and only wanted to focus on what's inside me. No one had ever taken the time to ask or care what was going on in there. He did. He took one good look at me, and his eyes entered a place so deep within - a place I didn't even know existed.

He explained to me that he is a Chabad-Lubavitch chasid, and his job was to help Jews discover what it means to be Jewish. That was it. •Continued on page 14

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IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH ARGUING?

by Levi Avtzon

Chaim came back from a long trip to Minsk. "Minsk is a crazy city!" he told his friends.

"Why?" they asked.

"Well, in Minsk I found a socialist, a communist, a Bundist, a leftist, a rightist, a devout religious man, a secular humanist, a closed-minded in-the-box person and a freethinker!"

His friends didn't understand: "But isn't that a normal community, where you have different people with different ideas?!"

"Ah," said Chaim, "you don't understand: this was all the same person!"

We are a nation that argues. A lot.

From ancient history, when Abraham and Moses argued with the Divine, to the present, where the bricks and cement of synagogues and Jewish social halls vibrate from the sound of verbal battle on the widest spectrum of subjects, from how-cold-is-it-really-outside-including-the-windchill to the solution to world hunger.

Life as we know it: I say yes, you say no.

But then we hear the cries for peace: "Why must we argue?" "All problems arise from disagreement!" "If we would all agree to agree, life would be so simple and harmonious." Tell me about it.

Where did this notion that we must think alike originate

from? Where in Torah or in common sense is there any hint to the notion that we must all think alike?

Yes, there are fundamental premises that are not up for debate. One may not murder. We must believe in one G-d. Adultery is forbidden, Hamas is a terror organization, and Holocaust denial is the work of the Satan and cannot be college campus debate material. On these we all agree. (We better!)

But for almost everything else, from the role of government to the difference between a manager and a leader, and the plethora of other issues that keep our pundits, journalists and talk-show hosts' mouths and pockets loaded - these are part of a healthy society.

When we arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, Exodus 19:1 tells us that "there Israel camped opposite the mountain."

Says Rashi: "At all their other encampments, the verse says *vayachanu* ['and they camped,' in the plural]; here it says *vayichan* ['and he camped,' in the singular]. For all other encampments were in argument and conflict, whereas here they camped as one person, with one heart."

Notice that Rashi uses the expression "one heart." No mention of "one brain." There is no evidence that for the sake of peace the Jews let go of their opinions!

Mouth-shutting due to the fear that "it's gonna cause a debate" is not, and never was, a Jewish concept.

Our history is full of rabbis and teachers debating, arguing, and defending their ideas. The Talmud is but a microcosm of hundreds of years of debate on a myriad of topics. It is a part of our psyche. Jews argue, and that is a good thing.

True, debate must remain in the realm of objective discussion, where we argue about the message, not the messenger. While we may dispute ideas and disagree with the other's opinion, we must always have respect for our opponent as a human being, as a Jew. But within the framework of fair debate - we are lifetime members.

A Divine Sign

by Chana Perman

She has a sign on her wall,
much like The Writing on Wall
saying (as she's praying):
'This too shall pass'

She has a sign on her wall
as being driven up said wall:
'Stop and smell the roses'
knowing (even owing)
a debt of gratitude for the gifts
so plenty, oh many.

She has a sign on her wall:
'Drop but just one ball
one can juggle six not ten'
repeat, once again,
six not ten
(maybe only five)

She has a sign on her wall:
'The Seven Habits of Highly
Effective People',
a copy from the book
she's got no time to read
for the life she wants to lead
but first things first
it's always first things first

She has a sign on her wall:
'The Food Pyramid with a Twist'
and a fifty-item grocery list
'cause you are what you eat
and you eat what you are
cookies, cake and blue-frosted
candy bar

She has a sign on her wall:

'I'm looking for a Sign'
not cry, shriek nor whine
simply, easily, painlessly
. . . Divine Sign

Just One Sign
for she
from Omnipotent He

On One Wall
a Western Wall
for wailing walls of her soul
(buried under other signs of
other walls)
'Hear O Israel the L-rd our G-d
the L-rd is One'

She has One sign on The Wall
the finest of signs
for all days and times
its vision a thrill,
eyes turned eastward
(past the clutter, peanut butter,
and hungry sparrows on the sill)

She has One sign on One Wall
whispering through it all,
With me you can stand tall
incorrigible, invincible
wailing, western
G-dly Wall

Smiling through dark night
illuminating light
an endless, eternal blessing:

It's going to be all right.



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The Holiday of Shavuot

Shavuot is the second of the three major Jewish festivals, (the others are Passover and Sukkot) commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai 3330 years ago. Shavuot marks the beginning of the Jewish people as a nation. It is the time when G-d pronounced the Israelites as His “chosen people” and “a holy nation”.

The Torah was given seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt, and is considered the culmination of the “birth” of the Jewish people, which began at the exodus on Passover.

The word Shavuot means weeks, for it marks the completion of the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot during which the Jewish people were extremely eager, counted the days and prepared themselves for the giving of the Torah. During this time they cleansed themselves of the scars of slavery and became ready to enter into an eternal covenant with G-d with the giving of the Torah.

Now, too, as commanded in the Torah, we count the 49 days between the first day of Passover and the festival of Shavuot.

Shavuot also means “oaths”. The name indicates the oaths which G-d and Israel exchanged on the day of the giving of the Torah to remain faithful to each other forever.



The Torah is the very essence of the Jewish people. It is our way of life and the secret of our freedom, our nationhood and our existence. Even before the redemption from Egyptian bondage, G-d told Moses that He would redeem the Jewish people in order that they would receive the Torah. For there can be no true sovereignty for a Jew without Torah.

The Ten Commandments, The Torah, & the Mitzvot

At Mount Sinai, the entire Jewish nation, millions of men, women and children, witnessed the revelation of G-d as He spoke the words of the Ten Commandments. It is this event, the revelation of G-d Himself, without a mediator, that established

Shavuot Calendar 5780-2020

Times are for the Rochester area only

- | | |
|--------|--|
| May 28 | Eruv Tavshillin
Light the Yom Tov candles at 8:22 p.m. and recite blessings 1 & 2.
Tikun Lail Shavuot during the night. |
| May 29 | Everyone should attend services in the morning & hear the reading of the Ten Commandments.
Light the Shabbat & Yom Tov candles from a pre-existing flame* at 8:2 p.m. and recite blessings 3 & 2. |
| May 30 | Yizkor is recited during services.
Shavuot ends at 9:33 p.m. |

*A pre-existing flame is a flame burning continuously since the onset of the Shabbat such as a pilot light, gas or candle flame.

BLESSINGS FOR CANDLE LIGHTING

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Boruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sheh Ki-de-sho-nu Be-mitz-vo-sov Ve-tzi-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Shel Yom Tov. |
| 2 | Bo-ruch A-to Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom She-heh-che-yoh-nu Vi-ki-ye-mo-nu Ve-he-ge-o-nu Liz-man Ha-zeh. |
| 3 | Boruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sheh Ki-de-sha-nu Be-mitz-vo-sov Ve-tzi-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Shel Shabbat V'Shel Yom Tov. |

Shavuot Holiday

Be There With Your Children

Hopefully, this year, on Friday, May 29, in synagogues across the world, the Jewish people will stand together once again to experience the Giving of the Torah with the reading of the Ten Commandments. Wherever you are, you are invited to take part - just as you did 3332 years ago.

Our Sages recount that when the Jewish people came to receive the Torah, G-d asked for guarantors. They offered every responsible party they could imagine, but G-d was not satisfied; until they declared, “Our children will be our guarantors!”

So make sure to bring along your guarantors - the children, right down to the newest sponsors - when you come to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments at the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot.



for all of the people, 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.

What is the Torah?

The word “Torah” means instruction or guide. The Torah is composed of two parts: the Written Law and the Oral Law. The written Torah contains the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. Together with the Written Torah, Moses was also given the Oral Law, which explains and clarifies the Written law, much like a constitution and its bylaws. It was transmitted orally from generation to generation and eventually transcribed in the Talmud and Midrash.

The Torah & Its Commandments

The Torah relates how G-d created the universe, how the human race came into being from Adam and Eve, how our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob fared, how the Jewish people became a nation, chosen by G-d to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ through receiving and observing the Torah. The Torah contains 613 commandments, of which 248 are positive (what to do) and 365 are negative (what not to do). Masorah (Tradition) In addition to the precepts, commandments and prohibitions written in the Torah, G-d taught Moses more laws, which he was to memorize and orally convey to his successors, who in turn were to uphold this tradition from generation to generation. Many laws and customs have thus been practiced by us traditionally, as if they were actually written in the Torah.

The Prophets

Following the passing of Moses, as G-d promised, He revealed himself to individuals of great piety and spirituality. These are the prophets who recorded G-d’s instruction and messages. In all 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 by one or another of our prophets by divine inspiration (“Ruach Hakodesh”)

The Revealed & Hidden Parts of the Torah

The Torah in its origin and essence is G-d’s infinite wisdom and will. And it is the infinite G-dly wisdom that is concentrated in the human logic and practical laws of the Torah addressing mundane worldly matters.

The Torah, as it deals with practical laws, is the revealed part of the Torah. The internal and mystical element of the Torah, focuses on the G-dly dimension of the Torah and mystical significance of the Mitzvos, which are the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidut. They are, as referred to in Jewish tradition, the neshama (the 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 our history.

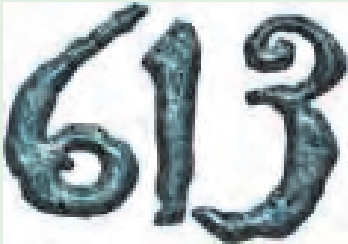


The Mitzvot

There are 613 Divine commandments embracing every facet of our lives, both the duties to fellow man and the way to worship G-d. The positive commandments, numbering 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 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 negative commandments also equal the number of the 365 days of the year.



The Significance of Mitzvot

Mitzvah literally means commandment. However, it also means companionship (from the Aramaic tza-vta - 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 accomplishes an infinite purpose and is in G-d’s “company”.

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

Guide 5780 - 2020

From Our Tradition About The Torah & The Giving Of The Torah

Kesser - A Crown

The Ten Commandments consist of 620 letters, equaling the number of the 613 Mitzvos and the 7 Rabbinical Mitzvos (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 Almighty.



the Jews joined together with a feeling of unity and harmony. This oneness was a necessary prerequisite to the giving of the Torah.

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.



Shavuot Customs

Tikun Lail Shavuot

On the first night of Shavuot, it is customary to stay up all night and study Torah. Our sages relate that on the night of Shavuot the Jewish people went to sleep, in preparation to receiving of the Torah. At day break, when G-d appeared to give the Torah they were sleeping. In contrast, we now prepare ourselves by studying Torah all night, ready to “receive the Torah” once more when G-d again offers us the Torah with renewed vigor.

Dairy Foods & Blintzes

It is customary to eat dairy products on Shavuot. A number of reasons have been given for this custom. Among them: the Torah is compared to milk. Also on Shavuot, immediately after receiving the Torah, the Jewish people were required to eat kosher. The only foods available for immediate consumption were milk products.

The custom to eat cheese blintzes on Shavuot 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.

Ruth

In many synagogues the book of Ruth is read on the second day of Shavuot. There are several reasons for this custom: A) Shavuot 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 Shavuot all Jews were converts having unconditionally accepted the Torah and all of its precepts.

Fruits, Flowers & Greens

It is customary on Shavuot 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 Shavuot. Greens- Our Sages taught that on Shavuot 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.

Yizkor

On the second day of Shavuot the Yizkor memorial service is recited



Additional Names of Shavuot

Shavuot 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 Shavuot.

Another name for Shavuot is Yon Habikurim or the Day of the First Fruits. In an expression of thanks to G-d, beginning on Shavuot, 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, Shavuot 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 Shavuot two loaves of wheat bread from the new harvest were offered at the temple in Jerusalem.

Cheese Blintzes

Cheese blintzes are a special favorite on Shavuot when it is customary to eat a dairy meal. They are served hot, with sour cream or applesauce.

Batter:

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 1 Tbsp. sour cream
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 package vanilla sugar
- pinch of salt

Filling:

- 16 ounces cottage cheese
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 Tbsps. margarine or butter, melted
- 2 Tbsps. sugar
- 1/4 cup raisins (optional)
- 1/3 cup oil for frying

Batter: Combine eggs and milk. Add sour cream and blend well. Add flour gradually. Mix well until batter is smooth. Heat on a low flame a small amount of oil in an 8 inch frying pan, until hot but not smoking. Ladle a small amount of batter (approx. 1 ounce) into pan, tipping pan in all directions until batter covers the entire bottom of the pan. Fry one side until set and golden, (approx. 1 minute). Slip pancake out of pan and repeat until all batter is used. Add oil to pan as necessary.

Filling: In another bowl mix all ingredients for filling. Fill each pancake on golden side with 3 Tbsps. of filling. Fold in sides to center and roll until completely closed. Replace rolled blintzes in pan and fry for 2 minutes, turning once.

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.

“Na’aseh V’Nishmah”

Our sages relate that when G-d was about to give the Torah, He offered it first to all of the nations of the world. After inquiring what was written in it, each of them found in the Torah something not agreeable to their system and way of life. When He offered the Torah to the Jewish people, without even asking what it contained, they immediately exclaimed, “We will do and listen.” This unconditional devotion and acceptance of G-d’s law, prompted G-d to give them the Torah.

A Triple Torah

Everything connected with the giving of the Torah was of a triple nature: the Torah consists of Chumash (the five books), Prophets, and the Holy Writing (TaNaCH). 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.”

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.

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,

PEACE WITHOUT DELUSION?
Continued from page 2

That's them. Modern man, on the other hand, with more than twice the longevity and a thousand times the wealth, looks back and only sees reason to kvetch. And to worry about the future.

What happened?

Okay, it's not as though there are no real concerns, especially considering the current situation. People have lost parents and loved ones. Our lives have been turned upside-down.

Then there's the economy- 26 million people in America alone lost their jobs and as many as 7.5 million small businesses are now at risk. That affects all of us. Yes, we are a resilient and resourceful nation. But we can't blame anyone for being worried.

Rabbeinu Bachaye tells us to look at the record. The Author of this universe took care of us all this time. Why would He stop now?

We want to listen. We want those words to soothe our soul. But all some of us can remember are the disasters. So lots of people think "apocalypse." For Jewish people especially, there's a noisy channel in the back of our minds playing "Crusades, Spanish Expulsion, Cossack Revolt, Holocaust..."

The medicine's not working. What went wrong?

It would be nice to blame it on the modern mind's perspective of historicity. Or our scientific objectivity.

But intellectual integrity doesn't allow us. Jews were always historically oriented- the rest of the world got it from us. Even before an event had unfolded, Moses was already telling his people to "remember this day." Over and over, we are told, "Remember the days of eternity. Understand each generation".

As for objectivity, our ancestors were far from delusional. They were hard - playing merchants in a tough world. Bachya himself was a rationalist who certainly knew that humanity's history was no Grimm Brother's storybook.

And, indeed, the phenomena are not exclusive to the modern mind. Go back yet another thousand years or so before Rabbeinu Bachaye and you'll find the prophets of the Bible chiding the people for just the same syndrome: When you're needy, then you remember your need for your Creator. As soon as those needs are taken care of, you go looking for someone else to serve.

Like Moses put it, "When Yeshurun (another code name for the Jewish people) gets fat, he gets sassy."

But the weird part of it all is that - as R. Bachya points out - confidence in the future

**We want to listen.
We want those words to soothe our soul. But all some of us can remember are the disasters. So lots of people think "apocalypse." For Jewish people especially, there's a noisy channel in the back of our minds playing "Crusades, Spanish Expulsion, Cossack Revolt, Holocaust..." The medicine's not working. What went wrong?**

is so dependent upon gratitude for the past. Feeling grateful to Someone Who's In Charge of Everything kills worry.

The Yeshurun Complex

So let's call it the Yeshurun Complex. The more we get, the harder it gets to feel grateful. The less grateful we feel, the more we worry. The more we worry, the less likely we are to be happy. Which renders many financially comfortable people unhappy.

I believe it all has to do with a person's self - concept. What is our place in this universe? How powerful are we? How vulnerable are we?

If I see myself as a frail creature that entered this world as a tiny baby, naked and utterly helpless on its own, I will feel very grateful that I survived more than an hour, that some wolf didn't come to eat me. But human nature is such that as soon as we've managed to pile a few blocks one on top of the other, we see ourselves as the vortex of all life, the crown of existence, deserving all things.

Moses again: "And you say, 'My own power and the might of my own hand have won me all this success!'"

That's when all the blocks come tumbling down. Because deep down we know the truth, that we're not in control of anything. We know we can't trust ourselves. We're leaning on a bubble in the air.

Ironically, it comes out that the more power we attribute to ourselves, the more vulnerable we render ourselves. The more we realize just how fragile we really are, the more we will put ourselves in divine hands, with gratitude and serene confidence and trust.

What's Your Default?

I find that answer very helpful. It provides me a turnkey solution to end worry and attain gratefulness - and

thereby the serenity of trust promised by Rabbeinu Bachaye. I simply need to switch my default self-image to something more minimalistic.

For me, personally, that's the memory of my time trekking and hitchhiking across Canada, America, Israel, Europe and the UK as an adolescent in the early 70s. I carried only a sack with a cheap sleeping bag, often sleeping beneath the stars. I was young, naive and easy prey to the wolves of human society. Without a doubt, thousands of miracles were needed to keep me alive through those years.

And how many more, then, to keep me to this day.

Now, as I lie in bed, I can say, "I have a pillow under my head. A miracle! I have a bed upon which to lie. A miracle! There is a wooden floor beneath me, four walls and a roof that does not leak. How many miracles!"

And I go on counting from there - counting miracles too innumerable to count, wonders too awesome to describe, divine gifts so unabatingly reliable that the kindness and compassion they demonstrate is beyond comprehension.

We sit nestled in the loving, caring hands of "the One who spoke and the world snapped into existence." He has blessed us until now with

His goodness.

How on earth could we be worried?

Rebuild With Confidence

As with an individual, so too with a nation. King David advised his heir, Solomon, "If G-d doesn't build a house, its builders are wasting their time. If G-d doesn't protect a city, security is laboring in vain."

As the Rebbe often said, America is blessed because it stamps on its money the words, "In G-d we trust."

It's that trust that grants us the confidence in the future to go out into the world and stake out our living. Farmers know this well. The Talmud says that farming requires faith, that it's only because "the farmer has faith in the Life of the World" - meaning the One from whom all life extends - that he has the confidence to sow a field and expect a crop the next season.

Rebuilding an economy after a lockdown requires even greater faith.

America, trust in G-d, and go out and rebuild your country.

The same with every nation that knows its true place under the heavens. Trust in G-d and build.



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Today Is Not Yesterday

by Yossy Gordon

Today is not yesterday. Isn't that pretty obvious?

One of my favorite personalities among the great chassidic mentors is Rabbi Shmuel Betzalel Sheftel, known as Rashbatz (circa 1829-1905).

Rashbatz served as the childhood tutor of the sixth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn (1880 -1950). One of the stories he particularly enjoyed telling his young charge had an important lesson:

In a small town in Russia lived a porter who made his living by transporting people and packages to and from the train station. The porter had a young son who assisted him with his work. Every morning the two would awaken very early, recite their morning prayers, eat breakfast, prepare the horse and wagon, and hit the road. During the summer months, when the sun often rose as early as 3:00 am, the porter and his son awoke even earlier.

A summer fast day arrived on the Jewish calendar. The porter roused his son at the usual time, and off to the synagogue they went. When they had finished praying, the porter informed his son that today there would be no eating due to the fast.

The day wore on. The son grew hungrier and hungrier. He began to ask his father incessantly when they would finally eat. Finally, the day ended and his hunger was satisfied.

The following morning, the boy refused to budge when his father tried to wake him. With an air of indignation the boy told his father, "I do not want to get up, and I do not want to work. I am afraid that you will not let me eat anything today either!"

"Ah, my son, have no fear," replied the porter. "Today is not yesterday."

Whenever Rashbatz told this story, he would tap his listener on the shoulder, as if to exclaim, "Get up! Get up! Today is not yesterday!"

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Surviving The Fall

by Eli Landes

"The hardest part of climbing is the fall."

I'm standing with my instructor at the foot of a snow-covered mountain. Strong winds wail as they rush by, hurling small beads of snow in their passing and slapping my face with the icy cold. I huddle deeper into my thick down coat.

I look at him in surprise. "Isn't falling the last thing you want to happen when climbing?"

The instructor chuckles. He has to shout to be heard over the wind. "Yeah. It is. But it happens. The wind knocks you off course, your foot slips, the rope comes loose. You fall. Most people are so terrified of falling, so focused on making sure they never do, they don't know what to do when it happens."

I look up at the mountain looming above us. It just seems to ascend higher, eventually becoming lost in clouds. I swallow.

"Most times, you manage to catch yourself when you slip. But sometimes you can't. And then you fall."

I stare, captivated by his words.

"There's a moment, when you fall, that everything seems to stand still. You see the earth coming towards

you, but you haven't hit it yet. It feels like you can fall forever. And then you hit.

"What makes the fall so bad isn't the fall itself. Sure, you may hurt yourself. Maybe even break something. But that's not the really bad part. It's getting up again. Getting up, bruised, battered, maybe worse, and looking up at how far you've fallen. And starting to climb again."

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

I jerk awake, body clammy with sweat. I stare blindly around the room for a moment, panting, tangled in my blankets. Slowly, I calm down, recognize my bedroom. I turn to the clock - 4:45 am. I sigh and rub a hand across my eyes.

Just a dream.

I lie back down again. Listen to the sound of my heartbeat, the ticking of the clock. I practice breathing slowly to calm my still thudding breath. What a weird dream. I've never climbed a thing in my life. I mentally shrug, turn over, and try to go back to sleep.

Yet sleep proves elusive for the remainder of the night.

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

I can't focus that day at work. I keep thinking I can feel that snowy wind every time someone opens a win-

dow, hear the instructor's words whenever the office falls quiet. I try to put it out of my mind, but I catch myself thinking about it when I'm not paying attention.

By the time the day finally crawls to an end, I can barely keep my eyes open. I all but float home, my mind swimming in a groggy haze of exhaustion. I absent-mindedly put something in the oven to eat, plop down on the couch. Somehow, I manage to stay awake for the next three hours, keeping myself occupied with activities I can barely remember the moment I complete them.

I jerk awake, body clammy with sweat. I stare blindly around the room for a moment, panting, tangled in my blankets. Slowly, I calm down, recognize my bedroom. I turn to the clock - 4:45 am. I sigh and rub a hand across my eyes. Just a dream.

Finally, I crawl into bed. I'm asleep almost as soon as I hit the pillow.

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

"The hardest part of climbing is the fall."

I wake up soaked in cold sweat. The dream again, the same dream. I get up, wash my face, pace my room, go back to bed. It doesn't help. I can't fall back asleep.

I sigh. This is going to be rough day.

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

The week passes by in a

blur. Has it been a week? Oh man, what day is it?"

"The wind knocks you off course, your foot slips, the rope comes loose."

Days blend, work becomes forgotten. The dream comes back, every night. Every day, it torments me.

"You fall."

I'm so tired. When was the last time I slept?

"...everything stands still."

"Sir?"

"And then you hit."

I don't even know what day it is anymore. My life revolves around the dream now.

Icy winds, frozen snow. A huge mountain.

"Sir?"

"...bruised, battered, maybe even worse..."

Oh G-d, I just need to sleep.

"The hardest part of climbing is the fall."

"Sir, are you OK?"

I look around blindly, lost in my thoughts. I'm standing on a sidewalk. I don't recognize this part of town, don't remember walking here. A man in a coat is staring at me in concern.

"Huh?"

The man comes closer. "Are you OK? You've been standing there for a few minutes now, just muttering something about falling. Do you need help?"

It takes me a moment to focus long enough to understand him. "No? No, no it's OK. I'm fine. Just been a long week. Thank you."

I walk past him, turn the corner. I'm still walking when I realize I have nowhere to go. I don't even know how to get home. I look around, searching for signs, and notice a synagogue across the road.

I swallow.

It's been a long time.

After a moment, I cross the road.

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

The synagogue is dark, filled with long pews facing the front. I sit in one, head bent, thinking. After some time, the door opens behind me. I stay in my place, eyes downcast as the synagogue echoes with approaching footsteps and quiet voices. A hollow click sounds as one of the men turn on the lights, causing me to squint.

After a few minutes, I hear footsteps echo on the floor as someone approaches. I look up. It's the rabbi. The pew creaks as he sits down beside me.

He studies me for a moment. "You look familiar. You used to pray here, didn't you?"

"A long time ago."

"What happened?"

I turn away. "I fell."

He nods, as if he knows exactly what I mean. "And now?"

"I... I don't know. I've been told that the hardest part of climbing is the fall. Getting back up again. Trying again. Can I ever get back to where I was? Should I? What if..." I fall silent.

"What if you fall again?" He finishes the sentence for me, the words soft, filled with understanding, as if he's had this conversation many times before. "What if this time, you can't get back up?"

I nod.

"Do you know what makes falling so hard? It's not getting back to where you were. It's thinking that you have to get it all done today. I don't know what the future will bring - how high you'll climb, whether you'll fall again, whether you'll get back up. But what I do know is that the possibilities of the future don't change what's in front of you today. Today you don't need to climb a mountain. Today, you need to get on your feet. You need to take a step. That's all you can do."

I look up at him. He smiles back at me.

"We're trying to make a *minyan* for the evening prayers. We could really use a tenth man."

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Dear Chabad

I would like to thank you for your generosity in donating the Haggadot and Shmurah Matzah to our soldiers who have been activated throughout New York State due to COVID-19. The materials you provided comforted many Service Members who were apart from their families this Passover and it allowed them to keep a sense of normalcy during these tumultuous times. The cooperative efforts of all faiths to provide religious refuge to our soldiers under these times of great distress allows the Service Members and myself to know that we can get through this together, and for that, I thank you greatly! Stay safe and healthy, my friend. Sincerely,
Tyler Swartz,
Family Assistance SPC,
Contractor NYNG

Wishing you and yours a very "Happy Passover". Be safe and strong!!!
Gabriella Hakiel & Family

Thanks for all you do!
Rachel & Stuart Axelrod

Betsy and I want to thank you for the Matzah that we will use for our family Seder. Let's hope and pray for a better year. We hope you and your family have a zissen Pesach. As ever,
Zelig & Bayla Bobry

I want to thank you personally and Chabad as an organization for the Shmurah Matzoh that you delivered to my house for Pesach for Harry Pearle and for me. It is emblematic of the Chabad movement that when others are hesitant due to situations that are extraordinary, those in Chabad extend themselves as you did for the love of the Jewish people and the honoring of HaShem. Having the Shmura Matzot in my house early relieved a tension that would otherwise have added to the pressure of preparing and serving Passover meals, while reviewing commentary that helped make the Haggadah meaningful to both Harry and me. I hope that this virus will soon pass, and that I will be able to see you dancing and hear you singing in the spirit of HaShem as you have always done. I am enclosing a check to show my gratitude for your caring actions. Cordially,
Dr. Mort Isaacs

Just want to thank you for the Hand Baked Shmurah Matzah! Sincerely,
Millie Natal

Thank you so much for calling. I'm sorry I was unable to answer the phone. That you include me in the numerous details that fill each of your days is such an honor. I am grateful for the Shmurah

Matzah you left at my doorstep. May we all weather the storm that is swirling around us. Good wishes to you and your wife and family to have a Happy and Kosher Pesach. In friendship,
Marcia Nabut

Please accept this contribution (I've still got the amount in our Tzedakah boxes to count but I'll get to that when things quiet down - I'm still adding to them) in support of all you do for us and our community. You, Chabad, and Chabad.org are a source of comfort in these troubled times. Best wishes,
Alexander, Michelle
& Ed Sassaman

May you and yours and all Bnei Yisrael continue to enjoy and thrive with the chizuk that Chabad gives and emanates to Klal Yisrael. Kol tuv,
Sharon Strosberg

A Yasher Koach to all of you and a sweet, healthy year to everyone.
Rose Merzel Lichtman

I hope you had a meaningful and 'silly' Purim. Please use this for your outstanding work in the Rochester area. Kol tov,
Laurie Krieger

Thank you for all you do for us in Rochester! It is a pleasure to see Rabbi at RGH every Friday delivering the Shabbos flower.
Sharon Cerasoli

Thank you so much for your kind and wise words when I needed some guidance. Thanks to you, I am in a much better place, able to contribute positivity to my environment, rather than cynicism. My mitzvah quotient will also rise, in appreciation for all of the miracles and gifts that I have been given. I'm wishing you and your family a safe passage through this difficult moment.
K.M.

Thank you very much for the Shmura Matza which you brought to my home. Wishing you all a Happy Kosher Pesach.
Susanne Esan

Thank you very much for the Passover Shmurah Matzah delivery. It really lifted my spirits. That was the first time I had Shmurah Matzah at my home seder. Going forward, I want to order it every year. Enclosed is a Chabad donation. Everyone stay safe. Best,
Judy Wolf

We would like to contribute to the Chabad Friday Flower Program at the Hospitals. Enclosed is a gift for that purpose.
Beryl & Joan Nusbaum

It has been way too long since we last spoke. How are you? How is the family? We are sadly at home all telemarketing and my youngest is going to school on line. This Passover we will be having

the smallest seder in years... My youngest, Leah, is planning to attend Oxford University in the Fall. Your newsletter/newspaper every holiday is very welcome. Thank you for selling our Chametz. Wish you and your family a healthy and safe holiday season. All the best, b'shalom,
Michael (Moshe)
Stein (Finkelstein)
UR Class of 84
P.S. Please use the donation to help with U of R Chabad. Fondly, Mike

Happy "Purim" to you and all your family, and I do hope this short message finds everyone well and looking forward to springtime! I'm sorry that we have not been able to meet for our time of sharing in friendship, conversation & faith!!! ... I will find a way forward with "G-D's" help! "HE" has always guided my path and shown me the way to live, but right now, it's a bit scary. I've been blessed with many friends, but don't want to burden them; so it's up to me to figure this all out! Please, say a "prayer" (or two) for me; if you could?! Thank YOU!!!

The article in the Purim issue of "The Chabad Times" - "Do Jews believe in heaven (or) reincarnation (or both)?? - this article fits my belief system to a (T)!! Thank you for including it. Stay well & I pray we can get together soon!! Please pray! Blessings,
J.D.C.

Thanks for supporting our Soldiers Passover Project.
Keith D. Freedman



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Welcome to FridayLight, a campaign encouraging Jewish women and girls to illuminate the world with the light of Shabbat. By observing this special tradition each and every Friday night, you will not only bask in a personal moment of inner peace, but also connect to a global community of Jewish women who together hold the power to bring light to the world.

Join us, won't you?



Visit FridayLight.org to get candle lighting times for your location, share your feelings, invite a friend to join, and more.



How To Tap Into The Sounds Of Silence

by Miriam Karp

Determined to get a bit of exercise after too many weeks of sitting, I took an early-morning stroll around the pond behind the hospital. Though small and artificially made, a surprising wealth of nature was packed in that haven. A family of fluffy goslings followed their mother, a heron took off, rabbits scampered, a beaver scuttled into the wetlands. The azure water, the chirping birds, the rich green plants were soothing. I could feel my racing mind slow, my breathing deepen. The hours under fluorescent lights negotiating a world of labs, computers, X-ray machines, diagnoses and opinions as I sat by my brother's bedside and tried to advocate for him all faded. A sense of wonder and connection filled my being.

Nature has always been both a balm and a gate for me... a gate to G-d, to infinity, to something deeper and more whole. It was through extended time away from the concrete roads and strip malls, meandering down dirt paths, and through the slice of a canoe oar into a pristine lake that I came to sense a pulse of the universe as a searching teen.

As I walked back to the parking lot, through the revolving door and into the bustling hospital lobby, I felt renewed. I kept hearing echoes of the chirping and singing of the multitude of birds that had flocked to that small space. The calls, the sing-song were melodious signs, reminding me of something higher.

Back a few thousand years in the same time period I was in, during those weeks after Passover, the newly freed

slaves were drawn towards a Divine song that would transform them and our world. Leaving bitter brokenness, walking and integrating, day by day, step by step towards healing and wholeness, towards their destiny, they learned, they repaired, and they got ready.

I can imagine a chorus of birds, of angels, of music of the soul healing them, starting faintly and growing in volume and dimension as they approached that mountain - that place where they would stand in unison and meet their Creator.

Music, spawned by nature and by humans, has a rich place in Jewish spirituality. Nigunim, wordless Chassidic melodies, have been dubbed the pen of the soul. They help the soul connect and ascend to realities beyond our limited words and intellect. A crucial part of the service in the Holy Temple was the music of Levites. More than accompanying melodies, their songs were guided by Divine inspiration to elevate each person in the exact way their soul needed. True music for the soul.

The Zohar speaks at length about the meaning of birds and their various songs, their unadulterated praise of Hashem. The Baal Shem Tov and other mystics spent much time praying in the woods, their songs soaring aloft with these pure trills.

So surely, that timeless moment - when the freed slaves were approaching, when the Torah would be given, when the highest spirituality united with the most base physicality - would surely be accompanied by a symphony beyond symphonies, a



crescendo of majesty, somehow combining the richness of nature's lovely singers, and human's finest and deepest offerings.

But at the moment of the revelation, as Moshe reached the peak of the mountain, there was... silence.

But at the moment of the revelation, as Moshe reached the peak of the mountain, there was... silence. The deepest, most complete silence. Not one bird chirped, not one dog barked, not one leaf rustled in the wind. Just silence. Why?

The deepest, most complete silence. Not one bird chirped, not one dog barked, not one leaf rustled in the wind.

Try sitting in complete stillness - as I instruct my preschoolers to - when we learn about this time. There are myriads of background noises, doors, voices, furnaces blowing. But at the giving of the Torah, there was none of this.

Just silence. Why?

Noise is a result of sound waves bouncing off an object. So, too, in a deeper sense, static and conflict in our lives is spiritual noise, Divine energy bouncing off of us. G-d is continually radiating the most perfect and sublime energy of light and oneness. What keeps it from being absorbed? Ego, doubt, fear, unhealthy desires and distractions - all the myriad ways we get pulled off-course. All the myriad challenges that make us human and give us free choice - obstacles to ultimately make us stronger.

At the giving of the Torah there was an incredible infusion, a moment of totality and harmony. When G-d's infinite energy came all the way down, down, down into the lowest crags of our material world and was totally absorbed, resistance gone. Static gone. Silence. Not of an empty void, but of a unified harmony that transcends individual sounds.

That moment faded. Life and its challenges resumed. The Jews started kvetching and rebelling.

Today, we know that all too well. Moments of utter blackest, thickest resistance flare up. Too much of our world seems dense and impervious to any glimmer or shard of light.

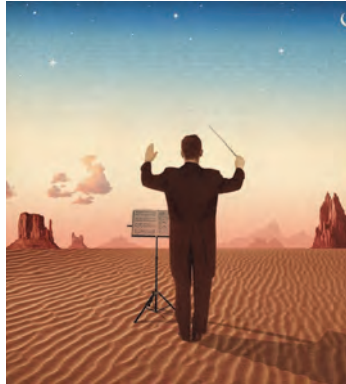
But that nucleus remains. In each of our souls. In each

kernel of creation.

Moments of utter power and beauty arise.

Our task? To remember who we are. The outpouring of love after attacks, the soulful, brave response of members of the community, the loveliest sunset, a newborn babe. Moments when we get a brief connection to that deep, encompassing primal oneness at our core.

Remember that sound of deepest silence, as we stand at the foot of Mount Sinai on this Shavuot. To let G-d's power enter and rejuvenate us, much as I pray for the forces of healing to rejuvenate my brother. And to keep peeling back the resistance, by using those powerful and true tools given to us each on that day. Working those mitzvot, working our souls, working our world to reveal the oneness at its core until that song of complete harmony pervades our daily, ordinary lives.



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WHO ARE YOU?
Continued from page 6

Simple as could be. Here was a man who had won national championships in karate, a scholar with published books on Jewish law, a PhD equivalent granted by the Rabbinate of Israel - and his main goal in life was to teach me that I was a Jew.

Here was someone who embodied the exact opposite of everything I knew. I knew people who were nothing, but pretended to be something. Here was someone who was a success in so many ways, yet to him it meant nothing. All that mattered was helping others.

And working with prisoners is no easy task. Let's be honest here. We are the garbage of the world. We are the people you hate, and rightly so. There is a reason we are behind bars. We did something that landed us here. With few exceptions, we deserve to be where we are.

So what kind of person, with ability, intelligence, and options, chooses to work with us?

This was the first question I asked Fishel when he entered my cell. And his answer blew me away. He told me that the same question was once asked to his Rebbe, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, in regards to how he didn't tire standing for hours, handing out dollars to hundreds upon hundreds of people. The Rebbe answered that when you count diamonds you don't get tired. So Fishel said that even when those diamonds end up in a pile of mud, when you know there are diamonds, you'll stick your hand right in and pull them out. The mud may cover the diamond, but it can't penetrate it or diminish its beauty and value. and the mud will wash off. I was a dia-

mond. Most certainly covered in mud, if not worse, but a diamond nonetheless.

Who would have thought that being imprisoned would be the greatest thing that could have happened to me? It wasn't until I came to prison that I learned who I was. Until then I thought I knew, but I had no idea. Now, even though I am physically

behind bars, I am finally free within. And though this is not a place where I want to stay, I am using every minute of my time here as an opportunity. An opportunity for growth, repentance and change. I have begun to view my sentence as yeshiva for ex-criminals. I have a lot of time here to study Torah, and I attend a Tanya class and Halachah

class with Fishel every day. I keep Shabbat, eat kosher food, and do mitzvot whenever I can. Funny enough, because I was so well known on the streets, other inmates are willing to attend the classes and learn because of me. Go figure.

I wait for the day of my release. I await the day when I can give back to society and

try and make up for the damage I did. I yearn for the day when I can marry a wonderful woman and bring beautiful children into this world. And when I do leave these prison walls, I will know what to answer when asked who I am.

I am Moshe. I am a diamond. I am a Jew.

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May G-d bless you with all good things and may others follow your shining example!

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MINI GAN IZZY:

Age: 2^{1/2}*-4^{1/2}
9:00 am - 1:00 pm
\$150 per week

MGI EXTENDED:

Age: 2^{1/2}*-4^{1/2}
9:00 am - 3:30 pm
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PRIMARY:

Boys & girls going into K
Girls going into 1-6
9:00 am - 3:30 pm
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9:00 am - 3:30 pm
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JULY 1 - AUGUST 5
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CAMP LOCATION: 12 CORNERS MIDDLE SCHOOL IN BRIGHTON
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