

B"H

MERKOS ON CAMPUS

Today Is The Day...

SERVING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON CAMPUS

Week Ending: Friday, February 5, 2010 - Shabbos Yisro, 21 Shevat, 5770
Melbourne Shabbos begins: 8.12 pm (D.S.T.) -Shabbos ends: 9.12 pm (D.S.T.)

GREETINGS AND BLESSINGS

It's About Time

Time is relative. When you're "on hold" for the operator or customer service rep, each minute is an endless source of annoyance. However, when you are frantically finishing an exam, 60 seconds is far too short. When you're late for an appointment and caught in traffic, each second is a year. But when you're doing the finishing touches before the "company" arrives, every second is a windfall.

Time can also stretch and shrink. For children, the months of the school year drag on interminably while the vacation days seem to instantly disappear. As we get older, though, we speak in terms of how "time flies." Days, weeks, months, years, blur together. And though we feel as if just yesterday we were in high school, we receive invitations to attend 10, 25, or 50 year reunions.

In every day there are seconds, minutes and hours. And every instant of all of our days should be filled with meaningful pursuits. "Wasting time" is not a phrase traditionally found in the Jewish lexicon. One might even go so far as to say that time is not ours to waste. For the Jewish concept of time is that it is a precious gift given to us by G-d. As the saying goes, "The past is history, the future is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it's called 'present.'"

Not using the gift of time in a manner deemed appropriate by the Gift-giver is, in essence, saying that the gift is not valued. Time not used, or not used properly, is lost; and lost time can never be regained.

Time, Chasidic thought teaches, must be guarded. Every bit of time, each day that passes, is not just a day but an entire lifetime. As Jewish teachings express, "The day is short, the work is much... and the Master is pressing." (Avot 2:15)

The "day" referred to in the above teaching is a person's lifetime. When a person realizes the nature of the work before him - to conduct his entire life in accordance with the Master's will - he understands that one day, one lifetime, is indeed short.

And because life is so short, we must make use of every moment: the moments of our days and of our nights; the moments of our youth and of our maturity; the moments when we have the vigor to "burn the candle at both ends" and the moments when the candle is flickering and fading.

A thoughtful incident about time and the last moments of a candle's light is told concerning Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. One evening, Rabbi

Salanter passed the house of a shoemaker, and saw him working by the light of a candle that was almost dying out.

"Why do you work so late?" Rabbi Salanter asked. "The candle will soon go out, and you won't be able to do anymore."

"It does not matter that the candle will soon go out," the shoe-maker replied. "While the candle burns, I can still make repairs."

Rabbi Salanter was deeply impacted and concluded, "A person works for material sustenance all the while that the candle is burning. So, too, should he work for the needs of his soul and repair as much as he possibly can as long as the lamp of G-d, which is the soul of person, is still burning."

The 22nd yartzeit of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka. The numerical equivalent of the Hebrew letters of her name is 470, the same as the numerical value of the Hebrew word "eit" - time.

Living with the Rebbe

This week's Torah reading, Yitro, narrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. About this central event in the history of the Jewish people the Torah states, "And G-d spoke all these words, saying." Our commentators ask a logical question: What is the meaning of the seemingly superfluous word "saying"?

Throughout the Torah, wherever the word "saying" appears, the intent is for those words to be transmitted and repeated to those Jews who were not present at the time when G-d uttered them.

However, at the giving of the Torah, every single Jew was present. Everyone was there at Mount Sinai, everyone heard the Ten Commandments - even the souls of Jews yet to be born in future generations were present. Why then, in this instance, does the Torah employ the word "saying"?

The Maggid of Mezeritch, Rabbi Dov Ber, successor of the Baal Shem Tov, answered this question as follows:

"Vayedabeir - And G-d spoke" alludes to the Ten Commandments.

"Leimor - saying" alludes to the Ten Utterances by which G-d created the world.

The intent of the verse "And G-d spoke all these words, saying" is that the Torah was given for the purpose of drawing down the Ten Commandments into the Ten Utterances of the physical world, i.e., that the light of Torah would illuminate the world to such an extent that it is perceived on the physical plane of existence.

This job was given to the Jewish people when G-d gave them His Torah. Our task as Jews is to cause the light of Torah ("And G-d spoke") to illuminate the world ("saying"). We must never think that the Torah and the world are two separate entities. It isn't enough to conduct

ourselves according to Torah when studying and praying. Rather, the light of Torah must be brought down to even our most mundane affairs. Everything a Jew does, no matter how worldly, must be carried out in accordance with the Torah's dictates and performed in a spirit of holiness.

This, then, is the core of the giving of the Torah: bringing the light of Torah, the Ten Commandments - "And G-d spoke" - not only into the realm of Torah, but also into the realm of physical existence, into the world that was created by the Ten Utterances - "saying."

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Volume 1

ASK THE RABBI

Question of the Week:

A quick question. . . my friends often tell me to smile more. But how can one always just smile and be happy if (not so) deep down one has pressing troubles, worries and problems to deal with? Must I smile when I am not in the mood?

Answer:

What has smiling to do with your mood? What has the look on your face to do with the feelings in your heart?

Your face is not your business. It is public property. You only have to look at your own face once briefly in the morning. Everyone else has to look at your face all day. So just because you are in a bad mood or going through a rough patch, doesn't mean everyone else has to be brought down too. The people around you deserve to be greeted with a pleasant face.

Of course, smiling is not only for the benefit of others, but for your own benefit too. The number one cause of misery is not life's troubles but rather self-absorption. The more you think about yourself and your predicament, the more you marinate in self-pity, the more miserable you become.

On the other hand, when you look outside of yourself, look around you and see how you can be of service to others, when you smile not because you are in the mood but because others deserve to be smiled at, you start to feel upbeat and light again.

This is not to say that there are never any real reasons to be sad, or that smiling is a magical cure for depression. The point is that smiling is a duty you have to others. And when you focus on your duties rather than your difficulties, you are on the road to happiness.

Good Shabbos,
Rabbi Moss

A SMALL STILL VOICE

A Time to Reflect

The following two stories came into our mailbox just in time for this special issue marking the 22nd yartzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. It is surely Divine providence that we received these stories now, as both the Mitzva Tank and the L'Chaim publication are projects that were established in memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka.

by Larry L.

The first time I saw a Mitzva Tank was in 2007 on Park Avenue and 53rd Street in Manhattan. As I hurriedly walked along the sidewalk, a young Chasid asked me if I was Jewish. An extremely detached and secular inclination within me impelled me to respond with an emphatic "no," after which I kept walking on.

It was nearly a year later when I was again "accosted" by one of these upstart Chasidim. However, this time, as I walked along Park Avenue, I was in mid-freefall toward the depths of despair. This time there was no hesitation. "Yes. Yes, I am Jewish."

I was escorted across the street to a custom-made RV, also known as a "Mitzva Tank," where I was greeted warmly by two Lubavitcher Chasidim and a young boy. One of the Chasidim wrapped tefilin around my arm and my head and assisted me with the recitation of the Shema prayer.

It was not long afterward that I was introduced to the person who was to become my rabbi. He turned me on to Judaism and Chasidic teachings. I can honestly say that since the moment when I first stepped foot in the Mitzva Tank, my life has improved steadily, although in a measured pace, as I have learned more about Jewish teachings and observance.

The second blessing in the Amidah prayer which I now recite three times daily, praises G-d as the One "worthy to restore the dead." My interpretation of this reference is the "spiritually dead." I was one of these. I have since been restored to spiritual life, thank G-d! I have begun to observe Shabbat and mitzvot (commandments). My otherwise busy days are interspersed with prayer, Torah study, and the performance of mitzvot. Shabbat is my Island in Time and I consider it a treasure.

My life has purpose and meaning and everyday is spent involved in acts that remind me of G-d's warmth and graciousness.

Miracles do occur and they are the work of our Creator. Clearly, the Mitzva Tank is an important instrument for G-d's sublime intents. I thank you all and wish you continued fortification in your pursuits.

by Rabbi Zushe Silberstein

As an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Montreal, I regularly visit a number of jails in the Montreal area. Each Friday, before Shabbat, I visit the inmates in the Bordeaux Jail. This past Friday, one of the inmates was especially glad to see me. He asked me to make sure to have a few moments so that I could speak with him privately. Near the end of my visit, he pulled me aside and excitedly told me the following:

"Rabbi Silberstein, when you were here last Friday, I had wanted to spend a few minutes privately with you, because there were a number of things that I had wanted to discuss with you.

"You came and spoke with all of us Jewish inmates together, as a group. As usual, you gave each one of us a copy of the L'Chaim publication. Before we knew it, the time was up and we were all escorted back to our cells. I was really disappointed that I hadn't had a chance to speak with you privately.

"When I got back to my cell, I took out the L'Chaim and began to read it. Rabbi, all three of my questions that I had wanted to ask you were answered in that issue of L'Chaim! One question was to ask you what advice you could give me in my relationship with my girlfriend, and the front page article was all about the importance of honor, esteem and respect in relationships! The other two questions were similarly answered in that same issue!"

I must tell you that for some of the prisoners whom I visit, the L'Chaim has literally changed their lives. It is their one bit of Jewish teachings, their one link to Judaism, each week.

One fellow had, unfortunately, been in prison for quite a while. Each week, he would save the L'Chaim I gave him until he had quite an impressive collection! Recently he was released and is now living in our rehab center, Maison Bellfield. One of his most proud possessions that he took with him out of jail is his collection of L'Chaims.

THE REBBE WRITES

2 Tammuz, 5730 [1970]

After the long interval, I was pleased to receive your letter of last week, with the enclosures.

For various reasons, I am replying in English, one of them being that you may wish to show the letter to some of the friends of Chabad in your community, for whom Hebrew text may not be so easy.

Referring to the main topic of your letter, namely the dissemination of Yiddishkeit [Judaism] among the Jewish women, I can hardly overemphasize that this activity is one of the most basic and vital efforts for the general strengthening and spreading of Yiddishkeit. The role of Jewish women in Jewish life goes back to the time of Matan Torah [the giving of the Torah], as is well known from the commentary of our Sages on the verse, "Thus shalt thou say to the House of Jacob,

and tell the children of Israel - the 'House of Jacob' meaning the women." (Mechilta on Yisro 19:3 quoted Rashi on this verse.)

In other words, before giving the Torah to the whole people of Israel, G-d told Moshe Rabbeinu [Moses] to first approach the women, and then the men. This emphasizes the primary role of the Jewish wife and mother in preserving the Torah. Ever since, and throughout the ages, Jewish women have had a crucial role in the destiny of our people, as is well-known. Moreover, the Jewish housewife is called the Akeres Habayis - "the foundation of the house." In addition to the plain meaning of this term, namely, that she is the foundation of her own home, the term may be extended to include the whole "House of Israel," which is made up of many individual homes and families, for, indeed, this has been the historic role of Jewish womanhood.

Being acutely aware of this role of Jewish women in Jewish life, especially in the most recent generations, my father-in-law of saintly memory, frequently emphasized this, so much so that immediately after his liberation from Soviet Russia in 1927, when it became possible for him to publish his teachings, he published a number of discourses, talks and addresses in Yiddish, in order to make them more easily accessible to Jewish women and daughters. There is no need to elaborate further on the obvious. In the light of the above, and since this has been the consistent policy of all Chabad activities, it is hardly likely that any Chabad worker would not be interested in this area, and there can only be a misunderstanding if this is the impression in the particular case. I am confident that by discussing the matter together, it will soon be discovered that there has been a misunderstanding, and the reasons that have given rise to such a misunderstanding could be cleared up and easily removed.

Needless to say, you may show this letter to whom it may concern. I may add, however, that judging by your writing, that person seems to have a heavy burden of activity on his shoulders, and this may be the explanation why little has been done in the area of disseminating Yiddishkeit among the women as you write, simply for lack of manpower and time, etc. At any rate, I trust that you will get together and clear this matter up, in accordance with the verse - Az Nidbiru Yirei Hashem ["So shall those who fear G-d speak"], etc....

I was pleased to read in your letter about the advancement in your position, and may G-d grant that you continue to advance from good to better and best, since there is no limit to the good. In our days there is the additional important consideration, and that is when a Jew, a Shomer Torah and mitzvot [one who observes the Torah and its commandments], attains prominence in his field, regardless what his field may be, this gives him an additional opportunity and capacity to spread and strengthen Yiddishkeit, all the more so a person who is already active in the dissemination of traditional Yiddishkeit of the Torah and mitzvot.

May G-d grant that you should have good news to report in all above, and together with your wife, to bring up your children to a life of Torah, Chuppah [marriage] and Good Deeds, in good health and happy circumstances.

With blessing,

P.S. Acting on your request, this letter is being sent to you on a priority basis.

CUSTOMS

Do Positive Deeds

On the yartzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson in 1990, the Rebbe encouraged the following: "The yahrzeit should, as is Jewish custom, be connected with deeds undertaken in memory of the departed. The Hebrew expression for this intent, l'ilui nishmat, means 'for the ascent of the soul.' Our deeds help elevate the soul of the departed. Then, the higher levels that the soul reaches, are drawn down and influence this world...Also, it is proper that gifts be given to charity in multiples of 470, the numerical equivalent of the Rebbetzin's name.

In memory of Rabbi Gavriel and Rivka Holtzberg and the other kedoshim of Mumbai

RAMBAM THIS WEEK

Positive Mitzvah 247: Saving the Victim from his Attacker

Deuteronomy 25:12 "You shall cut off her hand; you shall not pity her"

We are commanded to save a victim from the hands of his attacker, even if we must harm the assailant in doing so.

Negative Mitzvah 293: It is forbidden to spare the life of a pursuer (potential murderer)

Deuteronomy 25:12 "Then you shall cut off her hand; do not show pity"

If we see a person who is determined to commit a murder, we must do all we can to prevent it.

If we cannot convince or stop him in any other way, we are permitted to apply force in our attempt to save a life (see Positive Mitzvah 247).

We may even cause him physical injury or kill him if that is the only way to stop him.

The Torah cautions us not to have pity on a person trying to take someone else's life.

Negative Mitzvah 297: It is forbidden to refrain from saving a Jew whose life is in danger

Leviticus 19:16 "Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor"

We are not allowed to stand by and refrain from saving someone's life if we can possibly do so.

We must do everything we can to help him.

This Negative Mitzvah also includes our obligation to give testimony.

We are cautioned not to avoid serving as a witness if we have seen or know of something that can effect the outcome of the trial. We must always help a fellow Jew protect his possessions and his life.

Positive Mitzvah 182: Setting Aside Cities of Refuge

Deuteronomy 19:3 "You shall prepare the way, and divide the border of the land into three parts...that every slayer may flee there"

Nothing happens totally by accident.

A person who unintentionally caused the death of another person must realize that he was also at fault.

He is directed to flee immediately to a "refuge city" set aside for this purpose.

There, he will be safe from the hands of the dead man's relatives who may seek to avenge his death. Also, he will have time to think about what he did and resolve to prevent such "accidents" in the future.

HaShem commands us to set aside such "refuge cities" and enable easy access to them.

We must pave the road leading to the city and remove any obstacle on the way.

This Positive Mitzvah applies in Eretz Yisrael when our entire nation dwells there.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

Because the L-rd descended on it in fire (Ex. 19:18)

The giving of the Torah at Sinai is closely associated with fire, to teach us that a Jew should always worship G-d with a fiery enthusiasm, eagerness and warmth - the ability for which was conferred at Mount Sinai.

(Sefer HaMaamarim, 5701)

And Mount Sinai was altogether smoke (ashan) (Ex. 19:18)

The three letters of the word ashan, ayin-shin-nun, stand for olam (world - the dimension of place); shana (year - the dimension of time); and nefesh (soul - the energy that animates the physical plane). The revelation at Sinai signified that from that point on we were given the ability to refine and elevate these two dimensions (through Torah and mitzvot - commandments), and infuse them with a G-dly light and vitality.

(Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism)

Honor your father and your mother (Ex. 20:12)

A basic principle in Judaism is that a person should always acknowledge and appreciate the good that is done for him. When a person considers that his father and mother are the reason he exists, having brought him into the world and taken care of him as a child, he will realize that it is only right that he repay their efforts to the best of his ability. This will, in turn, lead him to a greater appreciation of G-d, the Father of us all going back to Adam.

(Sefer HaChinuch)

It states in Psalms (128:6), "And may you see children born to your children; peace upon Israel." The way of the world is that children always complain that their parents aren't providing them with enough. It isn't until they grow up, have children of their own, and hear the very same complaints that they begin to understand their parents, and there is "peace on Israel."

(AleI Zayit)

ESSAY

Doing Nothing

In the third month of the Children of Israel's exodus from the land of Egypt, on that day, they arrived in the Sinai desert... And Israel camped there, before the mountain

Exodus 19:1-2

"That day" was the first of Sivan in the year 2448 from creation (1313 bce), six weeks after the Exodus. Six days later, the entire nation of Israel stood at the foot of Mount Sinai as G-d revealed Himself to them and gave them the Torah. Ever since, we celebrate the festival of Shavuot as "The Time of the Giving of Our Torah."

The 19th chapter of Exodus describes this final week of preparation for Sinai. By analyzing the Torah's account, the Talmud[1] pieces together the following chronicle of events for these six days, the 1st through the 6th of Sivan:

Sivan 1, the day we arrived at Sinai: "Moses did not say anything at all to the Jewish people, since they were weary from the journey." [2]

Sivan 2: At dawn, Moses ascends Mount Sinai. He brings back the following message from G-d: "You have seen what I have done to Egypt, and how I bore you upon the wings of eagles and brought you to Myself. Now, if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My chosen treasure from among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine. You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." [3] With these words, G-d expressed His desire that we become His "chosen people." The day is accordingly marked in our calendar as Yom HaMeyuchas, "The Day of Designation."

Sivan 3: G-d commands Moses to fence in the mountain, marking the boundaries where everyone is to stand when G-d reveals Himself upon the mountain and gives them the Torah: Moses may approach closer than Aaron, who may approach closer than the kohanim (priests), who may approach closer than the rest of the people. [4]

Sivan 4: The Jewish people are told to purify and sanctify themselves in preparation for the giving of the Torah by suspending marital relations and immersing in a mikveh. [5]

Sivan 5: Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain and seals the covenant between G-d and Israel. The entire people proclaim, "All that G-d commands, we shall do and we shall hear (comprehend)." [6]

Sivan 6: The Giving of the Torah. "When morning came, there was thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud upon the mountain... The voice of the shofar sounded, growing stronger and stronger... G-d descended upon Mount Sinai ... and spoke the following words, saying: 'I Am G-d your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt..'" [7]

A Mysterious Blank

The revelation at Sinai marked the culmination and fulfillment of the Exodus. Many months earlier, also at Sinai, when G-d first appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commanded him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, He had said: "This is your sign that I have sent you: when you take this nation out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain." [8]

From the moment that Moses brought them word of the promised redemption, the Jewish people awaited the revelation at Sinai. For Moses had promised them more than an escape from Egypt and their "hard

labor in mortar and bricks.”[9] He had promised them the ultimate freedom: freedom from their own mortality, freedom from the finiteness and mundanity of a material-bound existence. He had promised them a vision of the divine reality and a mandate to incorporate its boundlessness and eternity into their lives. He had promised them G-d’s Torah.[10]

From the day they left Egypt, the Jews literally counted the days to the morning on which they would behold the reality of G-d and be granted the liberating truth of truths. (To this very day, we experience their 49-day count, from the day they left Egypt to the day they received the Torah, with our own “counting of the omer.” Every Passover, we re-experience our forefathers’ initial taste of freedom when they physically exited Egypt; for the next seven weeks, we undergo the yearning and preparation for the Torah which they pioneered in their forty-nine days of counting and self-refinement; finally, on the festival of Shavuot, we receive the ultimate gift of freedom, as we are granted our annual “revelation at Sinai” and “giving of the Torah.”[11])

In light of this, the events—or rather, the non-event—of the 1st of Sivan is most difficult to understand. This was the day on which “Moses did not say anything at all to the Jewish people, since they were weary from the journey.” But human nature is such that the closer one comes to an anticipated point in time, the stronger one’s yearning and desire becomes. Why, after six weeks of anticipation and preparation for the great day, would everything come to a halt merely because the Jewish people were “weary from the journey”? Why would they not do “anything at all” in preparation for their receiving of the Torah, on the very day on which they arrived at Mount Sinai?

The Silencing of the Jewish Mind

Let us take a closer look at what the Torah tells us about the doings of the Jewish people on the day in question, the first of Sivan: “In the third month of the Children of Israel’s exodus from the land of Egypt, on that day, they arrived in the Sinai desert. They journeyed from Rephidim and came to the Sinai desert, and camped in the desert; and Israel camped there, before the mountain.”[12]

In his commentary on these verses, Rashi addresses the grammatically unconventional use of the singular vayichan (“and he camped,” rather than vayachanu, “and they camped”) in speaking of the entire Jewish people. Rashi explains that the Torah wishes to inform us that “They camped as a single man, with a single heart, unlike all other encampments, which were accompanied by dissent and dispute.”

Indeed, we find many instances of quarreling and even rebellion in the course of the Jewish People’s journeys in the desert. Still, was it really as bad as that? Were “all other encampments” (there were forty-two of them altogether, as enumerated in the 33rd chapter of Numbers) ridden with strife, and Sinai the only peaceful exception?

But the “dissent and dispute” which characterized the Jewish camp need not be understood only in the negative sense. Our sages tell us that G-d created man in such a way that “Just as no two are alike in their features, no two are alike in mind and character.”[13] Each

individual's distinct mindset and temperament leads him to apply the same truths in his own unique way. So differences of opinion do not necessarily stem from selfishness and animosity; they can also arise out of a sincere search for the truth and the desire to fully realize one's potential as an individual. In fact, when untainted by self-interest, dissent and differences of opinion can prove positive and constructive.

Nevertheless, what was acceptable, even desirable, in the other forty-one encampments, was intolerable at the encampment at Sinai. For an important part of our preparations to receive the Torah was (and remains) the eradication of all differences in outlook and understanding.

The reason for this is best understood by examining the difference between pre and post-Sinaitic study of Torah. Also before Sinai, the Torah was studied and observed: Shem, the son of Noah, headed an academy for Torah study together with his great-grandson, Eber[14]; the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—established "yeshivot" for Torah study[15]; and throughout the Egyptian exile, the tribe of Levi (who were not enslaved) occupied themselves with the study of Torah.[16] So the "Giving of the Torah" at Sinai was not the unveiling of a hitherto undisclosed document. What, then, did happen at Sinai?

Prior to Sinai, the intellect was the tool with which to mine the depths of Torah. G-d had invested His wisdom in words and ideas comprehensible to the human mind, and the human mind labored to grasp and digest them—to the extent that it was capable. Since every mind is unique in both its strengths and its weaknesses, the scope and depth of each student's understanding differed. Obviously, no mind was capable of apprehending the entirety of Torah, as the infinite wisdom of G-d could never be contained by the finite human mind.

But at Sinai, G-d gave us His Torah. All of it. He chose to impart the whole of His wisdom to us, regardless of the limits of our intellect. At this moment, Moses and the most simple of Jews were equal: equal in their inability to grasp the essence of G-d's wisdom with their own brainpower, and equal in that G-d had granted them this understanding as a gift—that He "inserted" the infinity of His wisdom into the simplest of Torah's verses in the mouth of the simplest of Jews.

To prepare for the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people had to abnegate their individual talents and faculties. They had to make the transition from active apprehension of Torah to passive submission to a gift from above.

So the first of Sivan, the day on which the Jews arrived at the station at which they would receive the Torah, was far from an uneventful day. On the contrary, it was a day of intense preparation, involving an unprecedented activity: to establish a camp that was "as a single man with a single heart." Not only to reach a consensus on a unified course of action ("as a single man"), but also to each surrender his or her individual approach, outlook and intuition to a singular egoless receptiveness ("a single heart") that is the most important prerequisite to the divine granting of the Torah.

This was a most "wearying journey." It was not the physical journey from Rephidim which so drained them, but the psychological transition from a six-week active preparation to utter passivity. On this day, "Moses did not say anything at all" to them, and his non-verbalization of the order of the day was its strongest articulation: to transcend one's individual comprehension of Torah and make oneself an "empty vessel" to receive what G-d would bestow.

Return to Self

Following the great "non-event" of Sivan 1 came five days of active preparation for Sinai.

Initially, the definitiveness and individuality of the mind is an impediment to receiving the infinite, intangible essence of the divine wisdom. But after we open ourselves to receive G-d's Torah, we must "reactivate" our individual faculties in order to absorb and assimilate what we have received.

Once again, differences will emerge. Moses, Aaron, the priests and the common folk—each will have his boundaries clearly marked. Each will take the very essence of Torah, which they all received equally, and apply it to his own life with the tools of his own cognition and experience.

Based on an address by the Rebbe, Sivan 2, 5743 (May 14, 1983) [17]

- [1]. Talmud, Shabbat 86b; see also Rashi's commentary on Exodus 19.
- [2]. Talmud, *ibid*.
- [3]. Exodus 19:4-6.
- [4]. *Ibid.*, v. 12 (see Rashi on v. 24).
- [5]. *Ibid.*, v. 14.
- [6]. *Ibid.*, 24:4-8.
- [7]. *Ibid.*, 19:16-20:2.
- [8]. *Ibid.*, 3:12.
- [9]. *Ibid.*, 1:14.
- [10]. See Freedom, WIR, vol. IX, no. 17.
- [11]. See Seeking the Week, WIR, vol. VIII, no. 36.
- [12]. Exodus 19:1-2.
- [13]. Talmud, Berachot 58a.
- [14]. Rashi on Genesis 26:5.
- [15]. Talmud, Yoma 28b.
- [16]. Rashi on Genesis 46:28; Chizkuni on Exodus 5:4.
- [17]. Likkutei Sichot, vol. XXVIII, pp. 7-14.

By Simon Jacobson

IT ONCE HAPPENED

Years ago in the city of Minsk there lived a man named Shmuel Nachum. Although his main occupation was studying Torah, his mind was so acute in business matters that he became an arbiter and legal advisor in all sorts of business disputes. In fact, this is how he made a comfortable living.

Shmuel Nachum and his wife had one surviving daughter, named Devorah, on whom they doted. Devorah was an unusually bright child and her father assumed total responsibility for her education. By the age of eight she was studying the Chumash (the Five Books of Moses) and the Prophets. Her progress continued and by age ten she knew the whole Bible and began learning Mishna and the Code of Jewish Law. In addition she learned mathematics, Polish, and was able to read and write. By the age of fifteen she was studying Talmud with the commentaries of Rashi.

At 18, Devorah married a fine young man and was a happy new bride. Her husband succeeded in business and she shortly gave birth to two girls and one boy. Suddenly, tragedy struck her in a series of terrible blows. Her two little girls died in an epidemic and within the same year her husband also died. Broken-hearted, the young widow returned to her parents' home with her little son. But three years later, her son also, was taken from her.

What did Devorah have left to live for? All day she tried to hide her grief from her parents, but from time to time she would closet herself in her room and weep for hours. After some time she realized that she must take charge of her shattered life, and she threw herself into her studies more than ever. She also began to involve herself in the social welfare of the local women.

Together with two of her childhood friends, Devorah established study-circles among the young women of Minsk who had not been as fortunate as she in learning Torah. Indeed, her learning groups became popular and spread throughout the city, making her a sought-after lecturer. Devorah found great solace in her work for, in helping others, she at the same time stilled the dull pain in her aching heart.

One day her father was approached by a certain man named Tzadok Moshe with a suggestion for a match between Devorah and his rebbe, a notable Torah scholar from Vitebsk named Nachum. Devorah expressed an interest in meeting the man, and it was arranged that he should travel to Minsk to meet this extraordinary woman. Within a short time they became engaged and thus began a new episode in the life of this unusual woman.

Having been used to the high level of Torah scholarship amongst the women of Minsk, Devorah was appalled at the ignorance of the women in Vitebsk, and she set about remedying it. Again she arranged study-circles as she had in Minsk. In addition, she established institutions for the sick and needy. She was very happy in her new life, filling her time with study, social service and managing her husband's business.

Nachum was not merely astonished to find that his wife was such a capable manager of his business affairs, but her extensive Torah knowledge astounded him! He began to realize more and more what a treasure he had in such a wife, and his respect and admiration for her increased enormously. He began to realize what a change her coming had made, not only in his own home which had become a veritable "Open House and Council of Wise Men," but in Vitebsk at large, where her influence was felt and appreciated in every sphere of social and educational activity! What he did not know was that Devorah found time every day to study Talmud and that she was studying it in its entirety for the second time!

Devorah was not satisfied to concentrate on the women alone; her ambition was to see Vitebsk as a whole become a center of Jewish learning. To that end she devised a plan in which a number of promising students from the small Vitebsk yeshiva would be supported to learn in one of the great yeshivas in another town where they would prepare themselves to serve their home town upon their return. In the interim, she convinced her husband to import and maintain at his own expense, a group of teachers and their families to come and educate the people of Vitebsk. This plan took time to implement, but within a year ten teachers were installed in Vitebsk and the sweet sound of Torah could be heard throughout the whole town.

Devorah had made her home in Vitebsk for ten years and her dream of making it a Torah center was slowly becoming a reality due to her efforts, foresight, and rare abilities.

Adapted from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Memoirs.

REDEMPTION

Redemption is intrinsically related to women. Kabala explains that the Sefira (Attribute) of Malchut ("sovereignty") reflects the feminine dimension. During exile, Malchut is in a state of descent and does not receive direct influence from the other Attributes. Conversely, in the Era of the Redemption, "a woman of valour [will be] the crown of her husband" (Proverbs 12:4). The higher source of Malchut will be revealed, the direct bond between Malchut and the other Attributes will be re-established, and Malchut will become a source of vital influence, renewing the totality of existence.

(Shulamit Tilles, The Jewish Feminine Dimension).

CONCLUDING WORD

This Shabbat is the anniversary of the passing of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and daughter of the Previous Rebbe. Extremely modest, queenly in bearing, sensitive, compassionate and intelligent, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka was the embodiment of Jewish womanhood.

After the Rebbetzin's passing in 1988, the Rebbe began to speak about "a new era" having commenced. Although the Rebbe had always stressed our generation's unique role in preparing the world for Moshiach, at that point the Rebbe declared that the only thing left in our Divine service is to actually greet Moshiach himself.

As the Rebbe further explained, this "new period" we are now in is especially significant for Jewish women and girls, whose task is not only to establish a "dwelling place for G-d in the lower realms" (as is every Jewish person's), but to ensure that it is a "beautiful" dwelling. When a "beautiful dwelling" is established, G-d "puts

Himself" into the dwelling in an entirely different manner, not just "dwelling there" but uniting with it, as it were. G-d's dwelling place in the lower worlds becomes not only nullified to the "Owner," but one with Him.

This is reflected in the special mitzvot of Jewish women and girls, with their emphasis on light (Shabbat and Yom Tov candles), purity and holiness (kashrut and the laws of family purity), and warmth (providing children with a Torah-true Jewish education, the main objective of which is to instill enthusiasm for Judaism). In other words, Jewish women and girls are the ultimate "interior decorators" in establishing a "beautiful dwelling."

In these last few moments of exile, it is therefore crucial that all Jewish women and girls be aware of their tremendous role in hastening the Final Redemption, which will come "as reward for the righteous women of the generation."

Best Wishes Gut Shabbos

Yankel Rapp

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Please Note: One cannot read this Newsletter in the bathroom as it contains words of Torah. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 85:2. Please do not deface or discard hard copies of this Newsletter.
