

Celebrating The Birthday of The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Sunday, the fifth of April, Yud-Alef Nissan, is the Rebbe's birthday. A birthday is more than a day for songs and celebrations. In fact, a birthday is a day when 'mazalo gover', the spiritual source of a person's soul shines with power. "The spiritual source of a person's soul," means something higher than our conscious thought powers. We have our thoughts, feelings, and then a spiritual core from which those thoughts and feelings spring. This spiritual core is the mazal that shines powerfully on a person's birthday. Therefore one should utilise this power to focus on his individual task and align all the particular elements of his life with it. As the Previous Rebbe taught, on a birthday a person should spend time in solitude, thinking over the purpose of his life, correcting those matters that need to be amended, and making resolutions with regard to his conduct in the future.

If a birthday is such a special time, then surely the Rebbe's birthday will be even more so. For his birthday is not merely a personal event, affecting him alone. On the contrary, the very name Rebbe is an acronym for the Hebrew words, "head of the Jewish people". The head contains the nerve centre for the entire body, facilitating the simultaneous functioning of its diverse organs and limbs to create a state of harmony between them all. Similarly, a Rebbe is a comprehensive soul whose life is lived with awareness of others and whose efforts are devoted to tightening the connection between them. As such, the Rebbe's birthday is a day which impacts on us all.

What is the Rebbe's mazal and where is it directed? In one of his letters, he writes: "From the days I began going to cheder (school) and perhaps even before then, I had a vision of the ultimate Redemption." From his earliest childhood, and in every successive phase of life, the Rebbe devoted his efforts to creating a spiritual climate that will make Mashiach's coming a reality.

On a day when the spiritual source of the Rebbe's soul shines powerfully, each one of us should think how he can help advance this mission. The scientific and technological discoveries in our era have created the backdrop for the Redemption. Now it is our responsibility to create the conceptual foreground. This means that the values and principles which will characterize the Redemption need to be factors that influence our lives at present. Anticipating the Redemption in this manner will precipitate its unfolding as actual reality.

Leave Your Bubble

By Naftali Silberberg

I was walking home from work one day this past spring, engrossed in my thoughts. What did I accomplish today at work? Which projects have looming deadlines? Which tasks await me now at home? Is there enough money in the bank to cover this month's tuition checks? I felt the weight of my world on my shoulders.

That's pretty much routine for my daily walk home from work. But on that particular day something extraordinary happened. Mid-thought, I looked up. In front of me walked an old man, leaning on his cane. Behind me walked two teenage girls. On the other side of the street a mother strolled a carriage, a businessman was shouting into his cell phone and a beggar was crying for alms. The street was a beehive of activity as it always is at 5 p.m. in Brooklyn, NY.

Then it occurred to me that not one of them would care about all the urgent matters that are on my mind. And the same is true in reverse. Every one of them has their own list of worries and concerns, but one man's load is more than enough to occupy me.

It's as if each of us walks around in a figurative bubble. We say hello and exchange pleasantries, but remain firmly entrenched in our own little bubble. I share a street with hundreds of others, but in my consciousness, only I and my worries exist.



Millions of Grocery Stores Opened

This bubble is a tinted one. It colours everything I see or hear with a distinctive and totally unique hue. A new grocery recently opened a block away from my home. Is that a positive development or not?

The neighbourhood community board is trumpeting the new establishment as an indicator of real growth. The homeowners closest to the store have mixed feelings. Traffic has increased and finding a parking spot is now more difficult, but the convenience is undeniable. The people living just a bit further down the block are very happy. They can now send their kids to the store every time they run out of eggs. The owner of the grocery two blocks away is

very concerned about his new competitor. Needless to say, the owner of the new grocery and all his employees are delighted. The block's sanitation workers... The grocery suppliers...

So back to the question, is it a positive development or not? That depends whose bubble you're viewing it from. In the world of perception, this grocery opened not once, but as many times as people who became aware of this happening.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why our sages tell us (Talmud, Sanhedrin 37a) that sustaining one life is comparable to saving a world; because each person really is a world unto themselves. In potential, every event occurs some six billion times, experienced uniquely by every person who becomes aware of the happening. In a sense, we don't share a world; we each have our own, as King Solomon said (Ecclesiastes 3:11), "Also the world He put into their hearts..." King Solomon is referring to the heart, which is the seat of emotion, ego and passion.





The Bubble's Escape Hatch

Luckily, our bubble happens to have an escape hatch. Unlike the heart, the human mind has the ability to escape his or her personal enclosure and gaze into another's. The mind, when activated, has the ability to remain objective and feel another's pain. Then we can truly empathize, and joyfully celebrate another's triumphs. We are able to view a situation from another's perspective, enabling a merging of two worlds, or many.

This is our lifelong struggle between the heart and the mind; inhabiting our limited personal world or cognizing and appreciating other universes. This ability of our minds to bridge the gap is what separates humankind from the animal world.

The Collective Mind

In Kabbalistic teachings, the Jewish nation is compared to a single body. Every generation has a leader, who constitutes the "head" of the nation. In fact, the word "Rebbe," the traditional title bestowed upon Chassidic masters, is an acronym for the Hebrew words Rosh B'nei Yisroel "the head of the Children of Israel."

A Rebbe is an individual who has rid himself of his personal bubble. His view isn't coloured by personal considerations; he has no personal agenda or worries. Instead his time and energy are devoted to peering into others' bubbles and endeavouring to help, counsel and uplift them. He is the nation's objective mind. Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, the 4th Chabad-Lubavitch Rebbe, was once asked why receiving Chassidim for private audience was so physically exacting.

After a short while, he would be perspiring and fatigued. He responded that every time a Chassid entered, he had to emotionally "dress himself in that Chassid's clothing," in order to properly counsel him. When that Chassid left, he had to divest himself of that Chassid's clothing, and dress himself in the clothing of his next visitor. Dressing and undressing, dressing and undressing; it's a tiring routine!

Heads Up!

This concept was personified by our Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson. I've often heard and read the following observation from people who visited the Rebbe, "When in his presence, I sensed that I had his total attention. No one else existed in those few moments."

He had no personal aspirations. There was not a trace of luxury in his lifestyle or residence, and he felt no need to bask in the glow of his staggering successes. Incredibly, the Rebbe never allowed himself to be honoured at a dinner or function of any of the hundreds of the institutions he founded. In fact, he never even attended them. The Rebbe never visited any of the numerous cities whose religious scenes were revitalized by his devoted emissaries. There was too much work to do... too many people whose worlds needed immediate attention.

Now it is left to us to follow the Rebbe's example. Maybe we'll never completely escape our bubble, but let us at least try to dim its tint, maybe even designate times every day or week when we completely break out. Special times when we forget about ourselves, and completely devote our talents and resources for others' benefit.

The Cure for the Common Cynicism

Baruch Epstein

"Many became leaders because others believe so deeply in them; the Rebbe is a leader because he believes so deeply in us"-Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain.

I'd be a cynic, but I'm sure I'd fail!

The allure of scepticism is its exoneration from obligation; if nothing works properly why try? If everyone is insincere why be honest? How can we trust when deceit is rampant, when cultural heroes are routinely toppled?

Pessimistic and cold from relentless newspaper exposés, we dismiss the entire "system" as corrupt; fearing betrayal we jump ship. We corroborate every report, certain that everyone is lying, trying to cheat us for their own gain.

Society called them hippies, unkempt embarrassments; the Rebbe saw them as idealists. Credit checks, two forms of identification, "don't take rides from strangers..." Sadly, pessimism and suspicion infest our homes and souls. Motives are questioned, acts of kindness scrutinized for the "angle," the self interest.

The Rebbe is the antidote to cynicism; even the calloused cynic, the one who triple-checks affidavits, can't help but trust the Rebbe. The most seasoned pessimist with the dimmest view of humanity can't protest that no one is sincere when he learns of the Rebbe's relentless love and activist concern for complete strangers.

Some shunned 20th century Jewry for its apparent addiction to materialism, its race to "keep up with the Goldbergs". The Rebbe saw souls thirsting to find the G-dliness hidden in that Rolex. The



unkempt embarrassments that society called hippies were seen by the Rebbe as idealists needing to focus their romantic view of life.

The Rebbe's constant, repetitive harping on the cosmic value of each Jew, each person, and each act stands in stark contrast to the folded-armed snarl of the seasoned sceptic.

Cynicism has a cousin - sarcasm. You've met him; he's the know-it-all for whom nothing is worth knowing. He ridicules sincerity; guarantees that you'll regret every decision. You can find him at the bar getting a refill because his cup is always half full. Every statement bites; but he's always "just kidding." Sarcasm is a second-rate attempt at humour, devoid of wit; indicative of untreated ugliness.

Where cynicism projects failure, sees greed in every gesture of kindness, cousin sarcasm anticipates criticism and rejection and lashes out in self defence. Cynicism is the strategy; sarcasm the tactic.

As the ultimate optimist, the Rebbe is the salve for this ailment too, and its abhorrent manifestations.

The Rebbe's deep-seated belief in each individual's inherent value led to action: the Rebbe reawakened souls numbed by Auschwitz and squelched by shopping malls. The Rebbe highlighted the G-dliness in the trivial, the indispensability of the ignored.

It's a favourite hobby of the media to seek the darkest side of athletes and celebrities; absence of any such material is proof positive that he or she is a phony; something unimaginably sinister must hide in the closet. The Rebbe, conversely, directed that exploratory energy to seek the G-dly within even the brutally indifferent.

So out to the streets the Rebbe's legions go, armed with industrial-strength doses of "yes". Yes you can, yes you must! The Rebbe doesn't insulate us from life's challenges; the Rebbe offers context, confidence and a plan to address them. With the Rebbe's help you always know that however low you've fallen, you'll never forget how to smile.



The Lamplighter

Told by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch

In 1907, Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch was staying in Würzburg, Germany, and a group of Chassidim came to spend a Shabbat with the Rebbe. Among them were Reb Yosef Yuzik Horowitz, his son-in-law Reb Feivel Zalmanov, and Reb Elimelech Stoptzer.

The Rebbe prayed for many hours that Shabbat morning, as was his manner. In the meanwhile, the Chassidim made kiddush and consumed a quantity of lechayim's. Later, when the Rebbe had finished and they sat with him at the Shabbat meal, Reb Yosef Yuzik asked:

"Rebbe, what is a Chassid?"

Replied the Rebbe: "A Chassid is a lamplighter. The lamplighter walks the streets carrying a flame at the end of a pole. He knows that the flame is not his. And he goes from lamp to lamp to set them alight."

Asked Reb Yosef Yuzik: "What if the lamp is in a desert?"

"Then one must go and light it," said the Rebbe, "and when one lights a lamp in a desert, the desolation of the desert becomes visible. The barren wilderness will then be ashamed before the burning lamp."

Continued the Chassid: "What if the lamp is at sea?"

"Then one must undress, dive into the sea, and go light the lamp."

"And this is a Chassid?" Reb Yosef Yuzik asked.

For a long while the Rebbe thought. Then he said: "Yes, this is a Chassid."

"But Rebbe, I do not see the lamps!"

Answered the Rebbe: "That is because you are not a lamplighter."

"How does one become a lamplighter?"

"First, you must reject the evil within yourself. Start with yourself: cleanse yourself, refine yourself, and you will see the lamp within your fellow. When a person is himself coarse, G-d forbid, he sees coarseness; when a person is himself refined, he sees the refinement in others."

Reb Yosef Yuzik then asked: "Is one to grab the other by the throat?"

Replied the Rebbe: "By the throat, no; by the lapels, yes."

The Power of the Deed

By Tzvi Freeman

Perhaps the wildest, craziest and most outrageous thing the Rebbe did was to launch a mitzvah campaign. In retrospect, it may seem strange: The Rebbe was a scholar and a sage. You don't usually expect such personalities to be maverick social activists driving worldwide campaigns. But the Rebbe was not only the mastermind behind the campaign—he was the one stepping on the pedal and driving it full force.

I don't know if anyone ever made a mitzvah campaign before—at least, not since Moses. One thing for sure, it's certainly not conventional warfare. Not the goals, not the strategies and certainly not the rules of the playing field.

Take tefillin, the first campaign launched in 1967. The practice had fallen

into disuse. Many Jews didn't even know what tefillin were. Conventional procedure would be to convene Jewish leadership, establish a committee, negotiate cooperative efforts, establish an editorial board to publish materials, establish another committee to oversee distribution of those materials to schools and synagogues, hold symposiums and subsidize speaking tours, establish yet another committee to review the efforts of all these committees and...you get the idea. Eventually, with a more informed public, tefillin may even gain some popularity in specific circles. Of course, a study would be conducted to determine this as well.

The Rebbe's strategy? There's a Jew who is not putting on tefillin! Grab him on the street (that's right, literally on the street), roll up his sleeve and put tefillin on him!

More remarkable: it worked. The tefillin campaign precipitated the victory of the Six Day War and in the wake of that miracle thundered a sudden wave of Jewish pride. The Rebbe's campaign rode that wave high; directing what could have been a temporal fizz into a renaissance of Jewish practice such as hasn't been seen in centuries.

So much for committees.

More campaigns were to follow. In 1974, partly as a response to terrorism in Israel, partly as a wake-up call to Diaspora Jews, the Rebbe added on five more: Mezuzah, Torah Study, Tzedakah, A House Full of Torah Books (which brought with it a call to establish yeshivas everywhere) and Shabbat Candles. Over the next two years the Rebbe added Kosher Food, the Mikvah, Torah Education and-the mitzvah the Rebbe called "the general principle behind all the campaigns"-Love Your Fellow Jew. That made ten.

Then there were the "seasonal campaigns" like; light up the streets, homes and campuses with Chanukah Menorahs; blitz the Jews with Purim Kits; see how many million tons of matzah we can serve in two nights of Passover around the globe; get every Jewish man, woman and child into a synagogue to hear



the Ten Commandments on Shavuot; and many more. But they were never counted by the Rebbe in his oft-recited list of ten. Neither was the campaign that every Jewish child (and subsequently, every Jewish adult) should own a letter in a Torah scroll; most likely because that's a one-shot deal.

Eventually, bringing Moshiach became a campaign; the campaign of campaigns.

A lot of nice Jewish people did not react favourably to these campaigns, to put it politely. Some felt that it was ill advised for observant Jews to waste precious time and risk being sullied in their observance by those Jews that had opted out of Judaism. Others argued that getting people to do mitzvahs they did not understand was worthless.

The Rebbe was unmoved by their complaints. His most repeated words were, "The main thing is, do something." Taste and see/just do it-you'll like it. Inspiration, understanding, commitment... that was all to follow, once you've already taken the plunge. This was radical; for many, too radical. Okay, it was well-grounded in Jewish tradition; so Jewish tradition is radical. People didn't like it. But it worked. Take a look around you at the Jewish world today and you'll see that it worked.

They say that when G-d wanted to communicate with us at Mount Sinai, He condensed all His infinite wisdom into ten practical, simple utterances. The Rebbe did the same with his ingenuity in these ten campaigns. Each campaign has a strategy that is another lesson in how to conquer the world with light. Here are just a few powerful messages:

Tefillin, like we said, is all about going out there without fear and "just doing it."

The Shabbat candle campaign is about how one little girl can light up an entire world. The message was, "Every little Jewish girl should light her own candle". People asked, "And what's with all the adult women that don't light"? To which the Rebbe responded, "That's the point. Who is better at getting a Jewish mother to light a candle than her bubbling little daughter?" And the Rebbe delighted in telling those stories of the little girl who turned her family around just with her once a week ritual of lighting a candle. Sort of a variation on the David and Goliath theme.

The Mezuzah campaign is about the power of details-in this case, the details written in a small parchment.

The Tzedakah campaign was centred around getting people to have a charity box in their homes and places of work--like a Trojan horse that looks so innocent and then pulls so many mitzvahs along inside it.

The Torah study campaigns were about the power of Torah to change the world.

And all of campaigns are about the innate power of any mitzvah, whether we understand it or not.

I'm sure you can think of much more--there's a deep well of wisdom to draw from here. But the main thing is to keep driving those campaigns without letting up, until they cover the entire earth with wisdom and light. As I can hear the Rebbe saying right now, "The main thing is-just do it!"

