

# LampLighter

28 Iyar  
Bamidbar  
**879**  
22 May  
5769/2009

PUBLISHED BY THE CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD

## LIVING WITH THE TIMES

Throughout the thousands of years of Jewish history, countless men, women and children have willingly given up their lives rather than deny their Jewishness. Not only scholars and learned Jews went to the auto-da-fe, with the "Shema" on their lips; simple and untutored Jews also chose to die sanctifying G-d's name without hesitation.

This irrational willingness to give up one's life for the sake of G-d seems odd in light of the dictum which states that "nothing can stand in the way of repentance." With the sword at their throats, who could have faulted our ancestors had they agreed to bow down to whatever idol worship was being forced upon them? Why didn't they save their lives by uttering some meaningless phrase or performing some other seemingly insignificant gesture demanded by their tormentors? Could they not have later fully repented and returned to G-d?

This question may be answered by understanding the special nature of the Jewish soul and the relationship it enjoys with G-d. That inner spark of Jewishness, described in Chasidut as "an actual part of G-d above," exists on a plane above time and space. It cannot bear to be severed from its Source for even a moment. The willingness to give up one's life rather than lose that connection is a consequence of the soul's very nature.

This concept is well illustrated in this week's Torah portion, Bamidbar, in which G-d commands that a census be taken of the Jews. Rashi, the great Torah commentator, notes that because of the great love G-d has for His people, "He counts them at every moment."

This comment must be interpreted beyond its literal meaning, for since the exodus from Egypt, there have only been nine censuses of our people. The tenth census will be taken after the Final Redemption. What then, does it mean that G-d counts the Jews "at every moment"?

The act of counting reduces the objects being counted to their common denominator; both great and small are counted as one. The common denominator among all Jews, without regard for educational status, societal standing or wealth, is the Jewish soul, which exists in every Jew to the same extent and renders all Jews equal.

G-d unceasingly "counts" His children and holds each of them dear, all the time. This love is so overwhelming that the Jew cannot endure being cut off from it for even a moment, even with the knowledge that his later repentance has the power to restore the relationship to what it had been. It is G-d's perpetual "counting" of His children which reveals the innate power of the Jewish soul.

*(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

## Numbers and Stars

*By Tali Loewenthal*

Numbers are fun. In fact, many people are really into numbers, all kinds of numbers. There are special mathematical numbers like pi, numbers in physics and chemistry, numbers in economics. There are also lots of numbers in the Torah, too. In fact, an entire Book of the Torah is called the Book of Numbers.

It is so named because it tells us about several occasions that the Jewish people were counted during their travels in the desert, on their way to the Holy Land. The Sages tell us these were no ordinary censuses. Each time the Jewish people were counted, it was an expression of G-d's love for His people and His concern for every individual.

Rashi's commentary compares G-d's counting of the Jewish people to the way He "counts" the heavenly stars. The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Creator knows each star, and "counts" them all as they rise and set. In a similar way, G-d counts the Jewish people repeatedly.

This connection of the Jewish people with the stars is found several times in Jewish teaching. For example, G-d promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. The comparison of people with stars gives us an insight into the special nature of each individual.

Throughout history, people have been gazing at the stars. Over the centuries, astronomers have drawn star maps showing enormous numbers of stars, some large and bright, others so small and faint they are only visible through powerful telescopes.

Astronomers tell us that each star is a gigantic source of heat and light. The stars which look so small are in fact very large and powerful. Furthermore, the Sages explain that the stars act as channels of spiritual influence. In this sense each star is different than all others; with its own unique qualities.

However, this great power that the stars possess is not at all obvious. To us on earth, looking with the unaided eye and perhaps not thinking too much about the matter, the stars seem tiny and insignificant. But this is, in fact an error, as each star is really a powerful and unique force.

So it is too with each individual. In the context of the whole world, he or she might feel insignificant. Yet in truth, within each one of us there is an inner source of tremendous spiritual power, tailored to the unique and essential task we must carry out in the course of our lives.

We tap that power by following the Divine commands taught in the Torah. These channel our physical and spiritual power in the most positive ways, transforming our "star" energies into a bright source of radiance and life for ourselves and for all around us which brings blessings and, ultimately, redemption to all humanity.



## Finding our Heritage

by Kirk Douglas

*At Los Angeles' Synagogue for the Performing Arts, Kirk Douglas delivered the following talk:*

When I was a poor kid growing up in Amsterdam, New York, I was pretty good in cheder, so the Jews of our community thought they would do a wonderful thing and collect enough money to send me to a yeshiva to become a rabbi. It scared me, because I didn't want to become a rabbi. I wanted to be an actor. I had to work hard to get out of it.

But it took me a long time to learn that you didn't have to be a rabbi to be a Jew.

You see, when I was fourteen, I got frightened by the story of Abraham and Isaac: G-d orders Abraham to go up on the mountain and sacrifice his son, Isaac.

I remember the picture in my Hebrew school book: Abraham, with a long beard, holding a large knife in one outstretched hand, and in the other a frightened little boy. And that kid looked an awful lot like me. The hovering angel was having a hard time restraining Abraham.

How could the angel convince Abraham that G-d was only testing him? That picture stayed in my mind for a long time as I drifted away from Judaism.

I grew up, went to college, but my Judaism stayed stuck in a fourteen year-old boy's Hebrew school book.

It has been pointed out to me that no rational adult would make a business decision based on what they knew when they were fourteen. You wouldn't decide who to marry based on what you knew about love and relationships when you were fourteen. But many of us seem satisfied to dismiss religion based on what we learned at fourteen, and I was one of those people.

Of course, I was always proud to be a

Jew, even though it would have been easier for me not to be.

Although I felt drawn to the mystery of Judaism, other aspects pushed me away: What did I have in common with those black-hatted bearded men with their long peyot?

But as time went on and I got older, I began to change.

The catalyst was my son Michael. One day he asked me: "Dad, where did my grandfather come from?"

That question startled me. I wasn't sure. I knew he came from Russia, from some place called Mogilev.

And then Michael asked another question: "Where did your grandfather come from?"

I suddenly realized how little I knew about my background.

Anyone who could tell me was long dead. I had no ancestors. This thought depressed me. It haunted me. I had no ancestors! Can a man know who he truly is, if he doesn't know who his ancestors were?

I was lying in my room pondering this question for the umpteenth time, when I happened to look up over my bed. There on the wall hangs my collection of Chagall lithographs, his Bible series. And then it hit me.

Here were my ancestors!

And what a famous group - Moses, Abraham, Jacob, and so many others! I began to read about them, and the more I read, the happier I felt.

I was very grateful to Chagall for reminding me what an incredible lineage I had. Then I found out that Chagall, a Russian Jew, came from Vitebsk, a town not far from my parents' hometown of Mogilev, in White Russia.

The more I studied Jewish history, the more it fascinated me.

How did we survive?

We were lost in different parts of the world, among strange cultures - constantly persecuted. But our tormentors rose and fell, and we still hung on. The Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, all are long gone yet we remain, despite all the persecution.

And that is when I started to think that we should thank those pious, black-hatted, bearded Jews with their long peyot for keeping Judaism alive for so long.

They understood something very deep that we more secular types never learned or forgot if we did. G-d gave us the Torah and that made us the conscience of the world.

Throughout my life, when I was moving farther and farther from Judaism, I always clung to a single thread — Yom Kippur. On that one day I fasted. I might be shooting it out with Burt Lancaster or John Wayne, or battling Laurence Olivier and his 'Romans,' but I always fasted.

Two years ago, I went with my son Eric, who is a stand-up comedian, to the Yom Kippur service at the Comedy Club on Sunset Boulevard. This year, I spent Yom Kippur at a synagogue in Paris.

On one of my recent trips to Israel I took a walk through the Western Wall tunnel along the foundations of the Temple Mount, which takes you deep underneath the Moslem Quarter.

As I slowly walked along, following my guide, I let my fingers caress the huge stones that enclose the Mount where the Temple once stood. And then we stopped. My guide spoke softly: "This is rock of Mount Moriah."

I looked at this rough stone. "Mount Moriah?" I asked. "You mean..." She finished it for me. "Yes, this is where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed."

The picture from my Hebrew school book flashed into my mind.

But it no longer frightened me.

I had learned that Abraham lived at a time when sacrificing your son to idols was common practice.

The lesson of Mount Moriah was that G-d does not want human sacrifice.

It was very quiet in the tunnel, dimly lit, cool. My guide's voice was barely above a whisper. "This is where it all started."

I couldn't speak. She was right. This place represented the beginning of my doubts, and at long last, the end of them. Here, in the dark tunnel, touching the rock of Mount Moriah, I grew up.

I felt that I had come home. And yet I knew that my journey is not over. I still have a long way to go. Judaism is a lifetime of learning and I've just started. I hope it's not too late. If G-d is patient, maybe He'll give me enough time to learn the things I need to know to understand what it is that makes us Jews the conscience of the world.

Published by The Chabad House of Caulfield in conjunction with the Rabbinical College of Australia and N.Z.

P.O. Box 67, Balaclava Vic. 3183 AUSTRALIA  
Phone (03) 9525 8190  
Email: lamplighter\_weekly@hotmail.com  
Internet: www.lamplighterweekly.com

Editors: Shneur Wilhelm, Boruch Sholom Ajzenszmid  
*The Lamplighter contains words from sacred writings. Please do not deface or discard.*

ISSUE 879

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# INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



## Mount Sinai was a fact

25th of Iyar, 5712 [1952]

Rabbi S. Carlebach,

Recently you brought to my attention a letter addressed to you by ———, a student at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York. In this letter the writer professes to be a true scientific thinker, an unbeliever in the supernatural; he also asserts that all facts seem to be in contradiction to the existence of G-d, and professes to be a "liberal Jew," etc., etc.

Not knowing the background of this student, or the field of science in which he specializes, I cannot deal with the subject in detail, especially in the course of a letter.

There are, however, several general observations that I can make, which the said student has apparently overlooked, and which he would do well to consider carefully:

1. Science does not come with foregone conclusions and beliefs with the idea of reconciling and adjusting facts to these beliefs. Rather the opposite, it deals with facts, and then formulates opinions and conclusions. To approach a subject with one's mind made up beforehand is not true scientific thinking but a contradiction to it.
2. Science requires that no conclusion can be valid before a thorough study and research was made on the subject. The question therefore presents itself: How much time and effort had the above-mentioned writer devoted to the study of religion to justify his conclusions on the subject?
3. A fact is considered any event or phenomenon testified to by witnesses, especially where the evidence is identical and comes from witnesses of varied interests, education, social background, age, etc. Where there is such evidence, it is accepted as a fact which is undeniable even if it does not agree with a scientific theory. This is the accepted practice in science even where there are several reliable witnesses and certainly scores of them, hundreds and thousands.

The Divine Revelation at Mount Sinai was a fact witnessed by millions of people, all of whom reported it to its minutest detail, accurately; for the whole people of Israel stood at Mount Sinai and witnessed it.

We know that this is a fact because millions of Jews in our day accept it as such, because they received it as such from their own parents, and these millions in turn received the evidence from the previous generation, and so on, in an uninterrupted chain of transmitted evidence from millions to millions of witnesses, generation after generation, back to the original millions of witnesses who saw the event with their own eyes.

Among these original witnesses there were many who were initiated in the sciences of those days (viz. Egypt), many achievements of which are still baffling nowadays; among them were philosophers and thinkers, as well as ignorant and uneducated persons, women and children of all ages. Yet all of them reported the event and phenomena connected with it without contradiction to one another.

Such a fact is certainly indisputable. I do not believe that there is another fact which can match it for evidence and accuracy.

To deny such a fact is anything but scientific; it is the very opposite of science.

Parenthetically, it is unfortunate that this basic difference between the Jewish religion and those of others is so little known, for the Jewish religion is the only one that is not based on a single founder or a few, but is based on the Divine Revelation witnessed by all the people, numbering several millions.

This answers also ———'s statement that "the acceptance of the Torah as being the only truth is dangerous" since "its authors were only men... and as men they could not have been infallible."

Jews accept the Torah precisely because it was given by G-d, not by man, and it was given in the presence of millions of people who had seen it and heard it with their own eyes and ears. That is why the Torah is the absolute truth, for G-d is absolute.

I am enclosing an extra copy, should you wish to forward it to your correspondent

## A MITZVA A DAY

**Positive Commandment 190:** *Offering Peace Before Waging War*  
Peace is the greatest blessing G-d can grant us. Even when the Jewish people feel it necessary to wage war against a nation, the first thing they are commanded to do is offer a peaceful settlement. If their enemies are willing to accept their rule and follow the seven Noahide Laws (Torah commandments for gentiles), no war is necessary. This is learned out from the words (in the Torah) "They shall be your subjects and shall serve you" (Deuteronomy 20:11).

## A WORD from the Director

*This Shabbat we bless the new month of Sivan. The theme of the month of Sivan is intertwined with the main festival of the month, Shavuot.*

*On the first day of Sivan the Children of Israel encamped in the wilderness of Sinai ready to receive the Torah. Concerning this the Torah states, "And Israel encamped there..." using the singular form of the verb "encamped" regarding which our Sages teach us that this means that the people were like one person with one heart.*

*Though many other times when the Jews made camp there was strife and contention, when they encamped to receive the Torah they were totally united.*

*Thus, it is clear that one of the pre-requisites for receiving the Torah - and every year at this time we prepare to receive the Torah once again - is to enhance and foster unity amongst the Jewish people.*

*The "easy way" to become more united with other Jews is to follow two essential teachings of our Sages: "Love your fellow as yourself" and "Judge every person favourably."*

*Where is the place to start? The place to start is with ourselves and our own families. This, of course, doesn't mean that we have to perfect these relationships before we can extend the teachings to others, but it is certainly the correct place to start as "charity begins at home."*

*If we keep these fundamental teachings in mind we will certainly foster Jewish unity in our own little world which will ultimately impact on the entire world.*

J.I. Gutnick

## MOSHIACH MATTERS

Since "He (G-d) fulfils the desire of those who fear Him," and "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living being," G-d will surely fulfil the desire of every Jew. That desire is expressed at the conclusion of the Book of Psalms "Let every being that has a soul praise G-d." Each Jew has a soul which is "a part of G-d from above" and thus, wherever a Jew is, he can "praise G-d." This activity of praising G-d, especially when it comes on the initiative of the person himself (and not as "bread of shame") will hasten Moshiach's coming. (*The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 11 Nissan, 5751-1991*)

# It Happened Once...



Rabbi Meir of Premishlan was a great tzadik (righteous person) whose holiness was acknowledged by the many Jews who came to him from far and wide for blessings and advice.

One day a woman was admitted into his study. As soon as she set eyes on the tzadik she burst into tears. "What is troubling you?" Reb Meir asked. The sobbing woman could barely speak, but she managed to get out the words, "Rebbe, I have no children; please give me your blessing."

The Rebbe was full of compassion for the woman's pain and he replied to her, "May it be G-d's will that your request be fulfilled."

Armed with the holy man's blessing, the woman confidently went home and waited for his words to be realized. Not a year had passed by when Rabbi Meir received a letter from a distant city from a person he did not know.

When he read the letter and removed the papers contained in the envelope, he was shocked to find a bank note for the tremendous sum of three hundred rubles.

The letter read: "My wife has just given birth to a child thanks to the Rebbe's blessing. I beg the Rebbe to accept this gift in gratitude."

Far from being pleased, Rabbi Meir's distress was apparent, as he extended his hand to put the bank note on the far side of the table as if he wanted to remain as distant from it as possible. Then he called his sons to come to him at once to discuss an important matter.

When they arrived, he brought them into his room and pointed to the letter: "Today I received a letter which is brimming full of errors and falsehoods. For one thing, it refers to me as a holy man, a tzadik, and that is patently false. Secondly, the entire premise of the letter is false, for this man credits me with the birth of his son. How ridiculous! What do I have to do with such lofty matters as birth and death? Am I a tzadik that I have control over these things? I have therefore decided to return the money to him at once."

His sons were shocked. The eldest spoke first. "Father, we are very poor. Perhaps G-d has taken pity on us and decided to end our poverty through this man. Maybe it would be wrong and ungrateful of us not to make good use of it." Everyone agreed.

Only the Rebbe staunchly maintained that the money must be returned to the misguided sender.

They turned the matter over this way and that, but it became clear that no consensus could be reached. The family decided to bring their dilemma to a rabbinical court. The judges listened to both sides of the case and then reached their decision: The Rebbe should keep the money. It was true that Reb Meir was such a modest man that he denied being a tzadik whose blessings could have helped the childless woman, but the woman and her husband obviously thought differently. In their estimation it was the Rebbe's prayers that brought about the birth of their child, and they gave the money purely as a gift from their hearts. Therefore, it was perfectly fine to keep the gift.

The Rebbe and his sons left the rooms of the rabbinical court in very different moods. The sons were satisfied that their opinion had been upheld by the judges. The terrible poverty in which they lived would be alleviated at least for a time. Their father, however, had no peace from the decision. For although the rabbinical court had ruled that he was completely justified in keeping the money, his own heart was uneasy. He decided to take the problem to his wife, the rebbetzin.

As his life's companion and a woman whose vision was always clear, she would be the final arbiter of this case, for he trusted her judgment completely.

The Rebbe and his sons entered the house and asked the rebbetzin to come and sit with them as they had something of great importance to discuss with her. When the family was seated around the table, the Rebbe filled her in on all the details of the problem, leaving out nothing, but stressing his own unease with the reason for receiving the gift.

Her sons, on the other hand, stressed how much easier their lives would be now, since G-d had clearly wanted to help them out of their troubles by sending them this money.

She listened wordlessly to both sides and then turned to her husband. "My dear husband, all your life you have guarded yourself from even tasting food that had a question about its kosher status. Even when you discovered that it was a hundred percent kosher you refrained from eating it, because its permissibility had been in question. Now we are faced with the same situation, the only difference being that the question is on the kosher status of money and not on food; why should you act any differently now?"

Rabbi Meir smiled at her. He stood up, walked into his room, took the bank note and put it into an envelope which he addressed to the sender. That very day it was deposited in the post and the hearts of the tzadik and tzadeket were content.

## THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

### In the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting (Num. 1:1)

All of the Divine utterances that were said during the Jews' first year in the desert, before the Sanctuary was erected, are described as having been said "at Mount Sinai." However, once the Sanctuary was built, the Torah uses the words "in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting," since the sanctuary was now the place where the Divine Presence rested. (*Rashbam*)

### The Levites shall keep charge of the Sanctuary of Testimony (Num. 1:53)

The Levites, whose job it was to "guard" the Sanctuary and the Holy Temple, were counted in the census from the age of one month. But how can a one-month-old infant possibly "keep the charge of the Sanctuary of Testimony"? "Guarding" the holiness of the Sanctuary refers to spiritual guardianship, not physical protection. The Levites served not by virtue of their physical prowess or outstanding bravery, but because of their high spiritual stature, something that even a small baby had already inherited.

### CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

#### PARSHAS BAMIDBAR 29 IYAR • 23 MAY

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	4:57 PM
	MINCHA:	5:05 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	5:30 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	TEHILLIM:	8:30 AM
	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	LAST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	9:48 AM
	BLESSING THE NEW MONTH OF SIVAN –	
	NEW MOON: Sunday, May 24, 2009 –	
	Sivan 1, 5769:	7:51:10 (3 <i>chalakim</i> ) AM
	MINCHA:	4:50 PM
SHABBOS ENDS:	5:56 PM	
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS SUN – FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	2:00 PM 5:00 PM
	MAARIV:	5:55 PM 7:00 PM

### CANDLE LIGHTING: 22 MAY 2009



BEGINS		ENDS
4:57	MELBOURNE	5:56
4:59	ADELAIDE	5:57
4:46	BRISBANE	5:41
6:10	DARWIN	7:02
4:43	GOLD COAST	5:42
5:06	PERTH	6:03
4:41	SYDNEY	5:38
4:39	LAUNCESTON	5:42
5:00	AUCKLAND	5:59
4:49	WELLINGTON	5:51

Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry

### The Lubavitcher Rebbe

צוקללה"ה נבג"מ ז"ע

May he succeed in imploring the Almighty  
to redeem His people speedily in our days.