

Lamplighter

1 Elul
Shoftim
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

The end of this week's Torah portion, Shoftim, deals with the *egla arufa*, [a calf whose neck was broken]. If a dead body was found out in the open and it was not known who had killed the person, the Torah commands the elders of the nearest city to take a year-old calf down to the river and proclaim, "Our hands did not spill this blood, and our eyes did not see." The calf was then slaughtered both to atone for the death and to publicize the matter, so that the true murderer could be found.

It seems odd at first that any culpability is ascribed to the elders of the city which just happened to be closest to the discovery. They may not even have known of this person's existence during his lifetime. What possible role could the city's leaders have played in his death? Why does the Torah involve the city's rabbinical court, when obviously the real murderer is the one who needs to be punished?

The mitzva of the *egla arufa* serves to underscore the dictum, "All Jews are guarantors for each other." The responsibility for the death lies not only upon the shoulders of the cold-blooded murderer, but also upon the inhabitants of the nearest town and most specifically, on the community leaders, the elders who served on the *Beth Din* [the religious court].

The innocence of these leaders must be publicly proclaimed, for it was their responsibility to ensure the high moral calibre of their flock. Had they instilled Jewish values properly, such a situation would have never arisen. The fact that this murder happened in their domain shows that something is indeed wrong with their leadership.

The concept of bloodshed may also be applied to a Jew's spiritual life. When a person transgresses Torah law he is ostensibly "murdering" his G-dly Jewish soul with the degradation it must endure. With the repetition of such actions, a Jew in this spiritually reduced state can even appear to be a lifeless corpse, where he too is found in an "open field," the domain of the non-Jewish world.

Whose responsibility is this Jew's present condition? Is he not responsible for his own actions which led to his spiritual downfall? Could he not, of his own free will, have abandoned the "open field" and returned to the "city," the embracing fold of the Jewish way of life?

The Torah clearly states the duties of the Jewish leaders, "The members of the greater court were to gird themselves with ropes of iron...and make the rounds in all the inhabited places of Israel... and teach all of Israel." Their function was to ensure that this individual would not fall through the cracks and abandon the proper path of the Torah.

Being responsible for our fellow Jew is a lesson which should be noted by every Jew, especially during the month of Elul, when the thoughts of the entire Jewish People turn to repentance and return to G-d before the advent of the New Year. During this propitious month for repentance, when G-d goes out into the "field" to make our return to Him that much easier, let us truly exemplify the love of our fellow Jew so we can all enter the G-dly palace on the Day of Judgement.

(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

We Are One

By Tzvi Freeman

Some folks think of people much as we think of cars on a highway: Each with its own origin and destination, relating to one other only to negotiate lane changes and left-hand turns. For cars, closeness is danger, loneliness is freedom.

People are not cars. Cars are dead. People live. Living beings need one another, nurture one another, share destinies and reach them together. When you're alive, closeness is warmth, loneliness is suffocating.

People belong to families. Families make up communities. Communities make up the many colorful peoples of the world. And all those peoples make up a single, magnificent body with a single soul called humankind.

Some chop this body into six billion fragments and roll it back into a single mush. They want each person to do his or her own thing and relate equally to every other individual on the planet. They don't see the point of distinct peoples. They feel such distinctions just get in the way.

But we are like leaves extending from twigs branching out from larger twigs on branches of larger branches until we reach the trunk and roots of us all. Each of us has our place on this tree of life, each its source of nurture - and on this the tree relies for its very survival.

None of us walks alone. Each carries the experiences of ancestors wherever he or she roams, along with their troubles, their traumas, their victories, their hopes and their aspirations. Our thoughts grow out from their thoughts, our destiny shaped by their goals. At the highest peak we ever get to, there they are, holding our hand, pushing us upward, providing the shoulders on which to stand. And we share those shoulders, that consciousness, that heritage with all the brothers and sisters of our people.

That's why your own people are so important: If you want to find peace with any other person in the world, you've got to start with your own brothers and sisters. Until then, you haven't yet found peace within your own self. And only when you've found peace within yourself can you help us find peace for the entire world.

Every Jew is a brother or sister of a great family of many thousands of years. Where a Jew walks, there walk sages and martyrs, heroes and heroines, legends and miracles, all the way back to Abraham and Sarah, the first two Jews who challenged the whole world with their ideals. There walk the tears, the blood and the *chutzpah* of millennia, the legacy of those who lived, yearned and died for a World To Come, a world the way it was meant to be.

Their destiny is our destiny. In us they are fulfilled. In all of us and every one of us, and all of us together. For we are all one.

When one Jew does an act of kindness, all our hands extend with his or hers. If one Jew should fall, all of us stumble. If one suffers, we all feel pain. When one rejoices, we are all uplifted. In our oneness we will find our destiny and our destiny is to be one. For we are a single body, breathing with a single set of lungs, pulsating with a single heart, drawing from a single well of consciousness.

We are one. Let it be with love.



When There is Nowhere to Turn

By Mirish Kiszner*

It was the perfect apartment and the purchase was almost completed when, fuelled by the deteriorating security situation, followed by the IDF incursion into Beit Jala, the shekel dropped steeply against the dollar. Aleksander Guravich – who had spent the better part of his week signing reams of paper at the bank, the mortgage broker, and a number of free loan societies – was suddenly obliged to come up with an additional forty thousand NIS. He didn't know where to turn.

Weaving his way through the narrow streets of Geulah on his way to the synagogue, he hardly glanced at the plastered notices glaring from the stone walls, proclaiming the names of the latest terrorism victims. His mind was elsewhere as he tossed a few coins into an outstretched palm. Numbers and figures spiralled and twisted around in his mind.

As he passed Stefansky's supermarket, a wave of wistfulness overcame him. The image of Simon rose in his mind, as he started reminiscing about his first years in the Holy Land, and how far he had come to date.

Upon his arrival in Israel from the Soviet Union, the employment agency had assigned him to care for Simon Stefansky. Aleksander had been surprised to learn that the elderly man – bent, frail and trembling; his stern old face like a withered pear – owned a veritable financial empire. That this wiry man with steel grey hair and suffering from dementia had once been a successful business tycoon was hard to imagine.

Simon's children, immersed in the business, were relieved when the care of their father went over to Aleksander. Simon, however, wasn't shy to express his own estimation of the caretaker. "You want to kill me," he remarked rather frequently. "You're here to finish me off."

There were days, rare occasions, when Simon enjoyed some lucid moments, times when the two of them would sit together on a park bench and make small talk with little difficulty. Mostly though, Simon sat quietly, as though deep in thought, sometimes muttering softly, his eyes roving along the walls and ceilings. Aleksander cooked for him, managed his household affairs and took care of all his need with warmth and devotion.

As Aleksander turned left into a narrow side street, the synagogue with the domed rooftop and arched entranceway came into view. Its white stones were bathed in the golden light of the afternoon sun. Once, at precisely such a time of day, when the same golden shafts of sunlight poured into the open windows of Simon's kitchen, Aleksander found the old man standing beside the cutlery drawer, pointing a kitchen knife at him.

"You want to kill me, that's why you're here," said the erstwhile business man.

"I'm here to care for you," Aleksander said, keeping his voice low. "Do you want me to leave?"

The old man said nothing.

"All right, then. I'll leave."

Simon dropped the knife. It fell with a clang; then he wept.

"Who are you?" he asked after he'd calmed down.

"I'm Aleksander, your caretaker. Try to keep that in your memory."

"Don't make me believe that lie," he said.

Aleksander gently led Simon to the couch, fed him his dinner and tenderly put him to sleep.

Aleksander sighed. Alzheimers, terrorists, financial crisis, it all merged together in his mind somehow. "You ought to be thankful for all the good in your life," he chastised himself as he skipped up the stairs, taking them two at a time. "You have a family, you have health, and you have an income; be grateful."

In those days, on a caretaker's salary, his income wouldn't have sufficed for the purchase of a home. His current profession as a chiropractor – though by no means a wealth amassing machine – improved his lifestyle, he had to admit. But his real wealth had come not from aligning vertebrae.

Good fortune had shined on him. The return to his heritage had connected him to G-d, to His Torah. In its holy tomes, Aleksander had unearthed luminous jewels the likes of which he hadn't encountered while traipsing through the quarries of Tibetan-Indian and Chinese philosophy. For this newfound oasis, where truth and joy actually existed, he was profoundly thankful.

Aleksander fingered his prayer book. Only a short while ago – two or three years back – this prayer book had felt heavy in his hands. In fact the first time he'd entered that synagogue was an experience that had engraved itself into his mind.

As he stood behind Simon's wheelchair with his long dark hair caressing his shoulders, and the vibrant colors of his t-shirt screaming out from among the black-hatted, white-shirted congregants, he felt awkward and obtrusive. He wanted only to merge into the walls of the synagogue, to remain unnoticed.

Then a young man with laughing eyes with *tefillin* wrapped around his arm approached him.

"Why don't you come pray?"

The question was thrown at him with the nonchalance of a friend who wonders at his friend's hesitation before crossing the threshold of his home. The invitation pleased him; it was a gesture that made him feel welcome. Yet there was no denying the barricade that stood between him and the prayers.

"I don't know how..." he answered simply.

The lines on the man's forehead etched a little deeper. "So?" he said. His dancing, laughing eyes stood still for a moment, in thought. Then the corners of his mouth smiled again and he patted Aleksander on the back. "We'll teach you," he said.

And here he was, a few short years later. The synagogue was quickly filling up as more congregants unhooked themselves from their day's activities. The voice of the one leading the services rang out, "*Ashrei*..." Aleksander closed his eyes savouring the distinct tenor. He had been taught well; first the *Shema*, later the *Amidah*. These kind people had appreciated him, looked beneath his exterior. In this synagogue he wasn't defined as *the Russian caretaker*, just like *the chiropractor* wasn't his identity now. Here he always was Mr. Aleksander Guravich—a respected person all his own, a valuable member of society.

The prayers now concluded, the congregants dispersed, the dim hues of twilight filtered in through the large oval windows. Only Aleksander, immersed in conversation with his Creator, lingered still. "G-d," he murmured. "If you want me to buy the apartment so that my wife and I could have a place to live, so that we are able to raise our children...if this is Your will, help me, please. I have no one to turn to but You."

A feeling of peace settled over him like a winged dove. He'd handed his worries over to the Master Planner. It was time to go home, time to spend time with his family, time to wrap up the day in tranquillity and harmony.

When he entered his two-room apartment, the folding cots and cribs had already made their appearance across the dining room floor as it did every evening. The children freshly bathed and pajama-clad clambered over him and giggled loudly as he tossed them playfully in the air. Elena, his wife, turned from the tiny kitchen sink and greeted her husband with a strange look.

"You didn't tell me you spoke to them..." she said.

"Spoke to whom?"

Elena wiped her hands in her apron and hastened to undo the strings. Aleksander, realizing that something was afoot, said not a word as he followed her movements with his eyes. Then, from the single kitchen cabinet, Elena removed a small envelope.

"A loan, likely?" she asked with an expression of mingled rapture and curiosity.

Aleksander cast a quick glance at the sender's address. "Family Stefansky," it read.

"This just came by a private messenger service; maybe half an hour ago. You did talk to them, didn't you?" queried his wife.

"Not in a year, I haven't," replied Aleksander. "Not since Simon passed away."

He turned the envelope over in his hands. A check slipped out. Under "Pay To" the name Aleksander Guravich was written in a neat scrawl. Amount: 40,000 shekels.

"A loan?" asked Simon's son when Aleksander phoned him. "No, why should we send you a loan? A mistake? No, nothing of the sort... 4,000 instead of 40,000? Not at all."

"The litigation attorney recently finished reviewing our father's will. Our father, of late memory, wanted 40,000 shekels to go to you."

*Some names and details have been changed to protect privacy

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INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



Feelings of Indifference

I have received your letter of June 13th, in which, after a brief biographical outline of yourself, you present your problem, namely, that you have recently become aware of a feeling of apathy and indifference to the religious rites and practices, due to a perplexing doubt to the authenticity of the Jewish tradition, by which you undoubtedly mean the Torah and mitzvot, and you wonder how this may be logically proved.

I hope that this is indeed your only difficulty which has weakened your observance of the mitzvot maasiyot [mitzvot involving actual deeds] in daily life; in most cases the true reason is the desire to make it easy for oneself and avoiding a "burden" and then seeking to "justify" this attitude on philosophical grounds. In the latter case the problem is more complicated.

In the hope that you belong to the minority, I will briefly state here the logical basis for the truth that the Torah and mitzvot have been given to us Jews by Divine Revelation.

This is not very difficult to prove, since the proof is the same as all other evidence that we have of historic events, in past generations, only much more forcefully and convincingly.

By way of illustration; if you are asked, how do you know there existed such a person as Rambam [Rabbi Moses Maimonides] (whom you mentioned in your letter) author of Hayad Hachazaka, Sefer Hamitzvot, etc., or the like, you would surely reply that you are certain about his existence from the books he had written, and although the Rambam lived some 800 years ago, his works now in print have been reprinted from earlier editions, and those from earlier ones still, uninterruptedly, going back to the very manuscript which the Rambam wrote in his own hand. This is considered sufficient proof, but efforts are made to reconcile them in the certainty that both have been written by the same author.

The same kind of proof substantiates any historic past, which we ourselves have not witnessed, and all normal people accept them without question, except those who for some reason are interested in falsification.

In many cases the authenticity of a historic event is based on the evidence of a limited group of people, even where there is room to suspect that the witnesses were not, perhaps, quite disinterested; but because there is nothing to compel one to be suspicious, and especially if we can check the evidence and counter-check it, it is accepted as a fact.

From the above point of view, any doubts you may have about the authenticity of the Jewish tradition should be quickly dispelled.

...At any rate, millions of Jews knew and still do know that G-d is the Author of the Torah Shebiktav [Written Torah] and the Torah Shebaal Peh [Oral Torah], which He gave to His people Israel not only to study but to observe in practice in daily life, and make it a condition of the existence and welfare of our people as a whole, and of the true happiness of every individual Jewish man and Jewish Woman.

How do these millions of Jews know, and how did they know in the past that the Torah is true? Simply because they have it on the evidence of their parents, millions of Jews that preceded them, and these in turn from their parents, and so on, uninterruptedly back to the millions of Jews (if we include women and children and those above and below the age range of the 600,000 male adults) who witnessed the Divine Revelation at Sinai.

Throughout all those generations the very same content has been traditionally handed down, not by a single group, but by a people of many millions, of different mentalities, walks of life, interests, under the most varying circumstances, places and times, etc., etc. Such evidence cannot be disputed.

It is difficult, even in the course of a letter, to elaborate, but I am sure even the above should dispel any of your doubts, if indeed, you had any serious doubts, as to the authenticity of our tradition, and that you will from now on not permit anything to weaken your observance of the mitzvot, the observance of which itself illumines the mind and soul more than any philosophical book can ever do. I shall be glad to hear good news from you. I wish you success.

A MITZVA A DAY

Positive Commandment 150: *Checking for Signs in Birds*

The Torah lists all the non-kosher birds that are not to be eaten. Research of that list has shown some common characteristics amongst birds that are forbidden as food. For example, almost all the prohibited birds are hunters. In addition to the prohibition of eating non-kosher birds, we are also commanded to check that list and eat only those which are kosher. This is learned out from the words (in the Torah), "You may eat all clean (kosher) birds" (Deuteronomy 14:11).

A WORD from the Director

Sometimes - simply because Elul and the High Holidays occur with yearly dependability - we don't pay enough attention to a very radical concept in Judaism.

During the month of Elul a Jew is supposed to stop what he's doing, honestly and objectively assess his spiritual condition, and take whatever steps are necessary to improve it. But how much can an older, set-in-his-ways person really change?

Realistically speaking, each of us has his own strengths and weaknesses, things we are willing to do and things that are just not for us. Aside from minor adjustments, aren't we destined to remain basically the same till 120?

To this, Judaism responds with a resounding "No!" You too can change and do teshuva, the Torah tells us, regardless of your experience or maturity. Whatever happened before is past history. No door is closed, no bad habits so ingrained that they cannot be overcome. A Jew always has the potential to draw nearer to G-d, and during the month of Elul, is granted special powers from Above to assist him.

This principle, that a Jew is a perpetual "work in progress" and that it's never too late to improve, is the result of the unique nature of the Jewish soul. The Jewish soul is eternal, unlimited by any boundaries. Nothing can stand in the way of a Jew's sincere desire to be close to G-d - not logic, emotion, environment or inclination. The moment he resolves to change course ever so slightly (in the right direction), he becomes unstoppable.

Each day of his life, a Jew has the capacity to revolutionize his existence and imbue it with ever-increasing holiness. This is even easier during Elul, when our hearts are naturally aroused to do teshuva and spurred on by G-d's greater proximity to us.

J.I. Gutnick

MOSHIACH MATTERS

In his Iggeret Teiman (letter to the Jews of Yemen), Rabbi Moses Maimonides writes that, "as a preparatory step for Moshiach's coming... prophecy will return to Israel." To prepare us to be able to receive the revelations of the Era of the Redemption, we must experience through prophecy, a foretaste of the "advice" that will be communicated in that era. It is therefore important for later generations to know that it is, "one of the fundamentals of our faith to know that G-d sends His prophecies through people." In all generations, the revelation of prophecy is always possible. (From a talk of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

It Happened Once...



A wealthy Jewish butcher once lived in a town on the seaside. In his youth he had been quite poor, and had worked very hard to amass his wealth. Unfortunately, he had never had the opportunity to learn Torah, but he took great pleasure in praying and saying Psalms. He never forgot what it meant to be needy, and he constantly went out of his way to help his fellow Jews.

Every Friday afternoon before Shabbat he would distribute meat and money to all the poor families in the town. His good nature made him a favourite among not only the Jews, but also the gentiles of the town. His reputation even spread to the governor who favoured him with an important appointment as the chief customs officer of the port. As such, he would collect taxes on imports and also collect a fee for his services. As one of the benefits of his job, he was also permitted to take any one item from amongst the goods. It was in the capacity of customs collector that he amassed an even greater fortune.

One day a ship arrived in port, and he went to inspect the goods on board. After he performed his duties, the captain approached him saying, "I have some especially good merchandise on board today. Something totally unique, but I am not at liberty to divulge to you the nature of this merchandise unless you want to buy it."

The butcher was very curious and asked what it was, but he always received the same reply, "I will tell you only if you agree to buy it."

"How much do you want for it?" he inquired. "Ten thousand gold coins!" was the astonishing answer. "You expect me to make the purchase without knowing what I'm buying?" "That's the stipulation. I assure you, you won't be disappointed."

The butcher was all but hooked, but the captain was enjoying his power over the butcher. He was no longer satisfied with ten thousand; he raised the price to twenty thousand coins, and then forty thousand gold coins!

Finally the butcher agreed. "I will pay your price. Just show me the merchandise!"

"Only after you have brought all the money," the captain answered with a grin, and off went the butcher to fetch the treasure of coins.

Even as he went to collect the coins, the butcher doubted his sanity. He returned and laid the money on the table. The captain turned on his heel and in a few minutes he returned with the "merchandise" — Jewish men, women and children in tow — bound hand and foot.

The evil captain couldn't restrain himself, and broke out in laughter, "Aren't you happy now? What a bargain you got yourself! If you hadn't bought them, they would have been food for sharks — I certainly have no use for them!"

The butcher took the hapless people with him and left the ship as fast as his feet could carry him, lest the wicked captain have a change of heart. He kept thinking over and over again how G-d had inspired him to spend a fortune on unknown goods in order to save these Jews.

The butcher fed and clothed the former prisoners and treated them with the utmost kindness. One day he noticed a young girl from among them and thought, "This girl would be perfect for my son." The two young people agreed and preparations were made for the wedding.

On the eve of the great affair, the butcher circulated among the guests, offering a drink here, a dainty there, when he saw a young man sitting in a corner weeping.

"What is wrong? Everyone is rejoicing, why are you so sad?" The poor boy replied, "The girl who is about to marry your son was betrothed to me before we were abducted by the pirates."

"Why did no one tell me?" the butcher asked. "We are all so grateful to you, that no one dared disturb your happiness," the boy responded.

The butcher thought for a while, and then called his son to him. After recounting the entire story to the groom, he asked, "What do you want to do about it?"

"There is no question. Let the couple be married today as they had planned so many months ago. I will not stand in their way."

And so it was that the entire village celebrated the marriage that very day. The butcher not only made them the wedding, but furnished them with a house and furnishing and enough money to begin a new life.

The Sages said of this man that with his forty thousand gold coins he purchased a place in the World to Come equalled only by that of the greatest tzadikim.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

Neither shall you set up for yourself any pillar (matzeiva), which the L-rd your G-d hates (Deut. 16:22)

The word "matzeiva" comes from the Hebrew root meaning constant, steady and permanent. Do not look at this world as an end unto itself, the Torah counsels. Regard it merely as a passageway to be navigated and a preparation for the World to Come. (*Kedushat Levi*)

The first fruits of your grain...shall you give him (Deut. 18:4)

As Rashi explains, "This refers to the teruma contribution set aside for the priests. [The Torah] does not specify any amount, but our Rabbis said that a person of good will gives one in forty." Symbolically, "one in forty" is an allusion to Yom Kippur. Moses ascended Mount Sinai on the 1st of Elul, where he remained for 40 days, until Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is thus the most auspicious time of this 40-day period. (*Ohr HaTorah*)

But if any man hates his fellow, and lies in wait for him (Deut. 19:11)

Although literally referring to a killer who has fled to one of the "cities of refuge," the verse allegorically alludes to the Evil Inclination, which disguises itself as a person's "fellow" while really "hating" him. One must therefore be aware that the Evil Inclination is constantly "lying in wait," watching his every step and hoping to trip him up.

CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

PARSHAS SHOFTIM 2 ELUL • 22 AUGUST

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	5:31 PM
	MINCHA:	5:40 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	6:10 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	MINCHA:	5:30 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	6:29 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS SUN – FRI:	10:00 AM
	MINCHA:	5:40 PM
	MAARIV:	6:35 PM

CANDLE LIGHTING: 21 AUGUST 2009



BEGINS		ENDS
5:31	MELBOURNE	6:29
5:30	ADELAIDE	6:27
5:11	BRISBANE	6:05
6:24	DARWIN	7:15
5:09	GOLD COAST	6:07
5:35	PERTH	6:30
5:11	SYDNEY	6:07
5:18	LAUNCESTON	6:20
5:33	AUCKLAND	6:31
5:26	WELLINGTON	6:27
5:17	CANBERRA	6:14

Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

זצוקללה"ה נבג"מ ז"ע

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