

# LampLighter

15 Elul  
Ki Tavo  
**894**  
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## LIVING WITH THE TIMES

This week's Torah portion, Ki Tavo, contains the mitzva of bikurim, first fruits. The bikurim had to be of the finest fruits that were produced in the land of Israel, the first to mature in a particular season, and brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem before their owner was permitted to enjoy the rest of his bounty. By bringing the bikurim, a person expressed his thanks to G-d for His blessings. Unlike other offerings that were burned on the altar, the first fruits were given to the kohen (priest) for his own consumption.

We must always remember that all abundance comes from G-d. Our crops yield fruit not because of our merit or because of our labours, but solely due to G-d's blessing.

The farmer invests a great deal of effort before seeing results. He must plough the earth, sow his seeds, and carefully nurture his saplings. Yet, when all this labour is finished, he takes those fruit and elevates them to the realm of holiness. The farmer knows that it is G-d's blessing which causes the tree to bear fruit. Accordingly, the very best of his produce rightly belongs to Him.

The bikurim, having been elevated, are given to the kohen to be eaten as part of his Divine service.

From this we learn that a Jew must serve G-d not only when he prays or learns Torah. A Jew serves G-d throughout the day, even when engaged in as mundane an activity as eating! True, such service involves a great deal of preparation, but the reward is commensurate with the effort.

The principle behind the mitzva of bikurim may be applied even today, when the Jewish people are in exile. This is true even outside the land of Israel and even on a regular weekday!

We do so by acknowledging that all our wealth and possessions come directly from G-d and by utilizing all that G-d has blessed us with for holy purposes. In this manner the Jew can turn even the simplest object into a medium for holiness. When we thank G-d for everything He gives us, all of our actions are transformed into a Divine service.

In the times of the Holy Temple, a blessing was recited when the bikurim were brought asking G-d to allow us to joyfully perform the same mitzva the following year. Likewise, whenever we utilize G-d's gifts according to His dictates, it brings down Divine blessing so that in the future, too, we will merit to enjoy them with gladness and rejoicing.

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

## Good Thinking

By Yanki Tauber

It was the custom of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi to officiate as the "reader" (*baal korei*) of the weekly Torah reading in his synagogue. One year, the Rebbe was away from home on the Shabbat on which the section of *Ki Tavo* (Deuteronomy 26-29) is read. In the Rebbe's absence, someone else did the reading.

*Ki Tavo* contains the "Rebuke", a harsh description of the calamities or "curses" (*kellalot*) destined to befall the Jewish people should they forsake the commandments of the Torah. That year Rabbi Schneur Zalman's son, DovBer, who was about twelve years old at the time, was so affected by the "curses" of the Rebuke that he developed a heart ailment. Three weeks later, when Yom Kippur came round, he was still so weak that his father was hesitant to allow him to fast.

When the young DovBer was asked, "But don't you hear the Rebuke every year?" he replied, "When father reads, one does not hear curses."

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A recent *New York Times* article reported on a group of psychologists who are chafing under what they call the "tyranny of the positive attitude." For several years now, positive thinking has been in vogue. But these good doctors are "worried that we're not making space for people to feel bad" and feel that a reversal of this trend is in order. There's been a symposium ("The Overlooked Virtues of Negativity"), a book ("Stop Smiling, Start Kvetching"), and a push to get psychologists back to doing what they're supposed to be doing, which is to "focus on mental illness and human failing."

If the orbicular nature of the cultural trends in recent times is any indication, these guys are on to something big. Soon we'll be seeing "Start Kvetching" climbing the best-seller lists to the sound of smiley stickers being scraped off car windows across the country.

I take comfort in the fact that the Torah's attitude, which predates today's positivist trend by four thousand years and will survive it by much longer than that, is one of unabashed optimism. This is the doctrine of *bitachon*, or trust in G-d, which Chassidic master Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866) distilled as the Yiddish adage, *Tracht gutt, vet zein gutt*—"Think good, and it will be good."

What this means, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is that *bitachon*, the absolute assurance and conviction that G-d will make things good, actually becomes the conduit and vessel which draws down and receives G-d's blessings. Positive thinking is not just a way to weather negative occurrences, but actually makes positive results happen.

I can't tell you that I fully understand how this works. But the indomitable optimism of the Jew has been around for so long, and has been refuted so many times only to survive and blossom, that no personal testimony can possibly add to or detract from it.

Trust G-d, it works. If you do, it will.



## Dancing With G-d

By Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal

They were mere boys—all under the age of eighteen—but in this particular case, their youth proved to be a liability, not the asset it had been under other circumstances. It was puzzling, really: Most camp commandants consigned teenagers sixteen and older to life, since they were deemed hardy enough for the slave labour force into which they were conscripted. But this camp commandant had drawn the line at eighteen instead, decreeing that all those who were younger be sent to certain death. His orders for additional selections grew more shrill and fevered with each passing day, multiplying the numbers that were fed into the furnaces. Perhaps it was the advent of the Jewish High Holidays that had unleashed his fury, or, in perverse irony, his own heinous way of celebrating.

It was the fall of 1944 at Auschwitz, and Hungarian Jews - the last nationality to be transported to the camp - had arrived in massive numbers. The furnaces worked overtime as the inmates were sped to their inexorable fate. Everything about the camp seemed so surreal - the perpetual fog cover of smoke and ash, the barren landscape of barbed wire and slime - that it served to mirror the prisoners' own profound sense of displacement and disorientation. Everything had happened so fast: being crammed into the cattle cars that had disgorged them at Auschwitz; the quick, merciless dismemberment of families as spouses, children, parents and siblings were torn apart from one another during the selections; being dispassionately stripped of the clothing and personal belongings that made them human, and the freezing-cold showers and assembly-line delousing that had followed. In the course of only minutes, the new inmates had lost everything they

owned, everything they loved.

Already, some were engulfed by the horror, so studded by their sudden plunge into hell, so mummified into Muselmann (the walking dead), that they could barely remember their own names, let alone the religious holidays. But there were those remnants, those few who still cared about observing the Jewish holidays; among them were fifty religious boys who had just been selected for the gas chamber and were now being herded into a bathhouse, ostensibly to take "showers." It was late enough in concentration camp history that the boys knew the truth. Gas would pour through the pipes, not water. It was a ruse that the Nazis used to disarm the inmates, to ensure their cooperation. But these spiritual heroes made a conscious decision not to give in to them, choosing defiance instead.

Amid the tumult in the bathhouse, one boy sprang up and shouted: "Brothers! Today is the holiday of Simchat Torah, when the Jewish world rejoices, having concluded the reading of the Torah over the past year, followed directly with the commencement of the new cycle of the Torah reading. During our short lives, we have tried to uphold the Torah to the best of our ability, and now we have one last chance to do so. Before we die, let us celebrate Simchat Torah one last time.

"We do not possess anything anymore," the boy continued. "We have nothing. We do not have clothes to cover us, nor a sefer Torah (Torah scroll) with which to dance. So let us dance with G-d Himself—who is surely here among us—before we return our souls to Him."

Since it had first been erected and used, the gas chambers had absorbed a cacophony of human sounds—screams, cries, moans, benedictions—that would forever reside within its cold earthen stone walls. But never before had its rafters trembled with the pure, sweet strains of fifty young voices raised in fervent song, never before had its concrete floor shaken under the pounding of fifty pairs of feet stamping in unbridled joy. The boys pierced the heavens with their song: "Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu u'mah nayim goraleinu umah yafah yerushateinu..." (How fortunate are we and how wonderful is our portion and how beautiful is our heritage.)

"What is going on in there?" One scowling Nazi guard asked his comrade as they waited outside. "Why hasn't the gas been turned on yet?"

"It sounds like they're singing...and dancing. Are they crazy?" another guard said in disbelief.

"Go find out what's causing the delay," an officer commanded. "And get the commandant."

Summoned to the doors of the gas chamber, the commandant listened with growing fury to the incongruous revelry inside. He had watched Jews marching to their deaths hundreds of times before - some weeping softly, others reciting prayers - and he had relished these scenes. But this - this singing and dancing - this was unacceptable. He flung open the gas chamber doors and pulled one boy toward him.

"You!" he shouted. "Tell me why you are singing and dancing now."

"Because leaving a world where Nazi beasts reign is cause for celebration," the boy sneered. "And because we are overjoyed at the prospect of reuniting with our beloved parents, whom you murdered so viciously."

The commandant became enraged at the boy's contemptuous words. Obsequiousness... fear... last-ditch attempts to ingratiate one's self into his favour - those were acceptable modes of behaviour. Insolence was not.

"I'll teach you a lesson," he screamed as the boys continued to dance and sing, heedless of his presence. "You thought that the gas chamber would be your last stop. You'll find out otherwise. The gas chamber would have been easy and painless compared to what awaits you now. I will torture each one of you with unbearable suffering. I will slice your flesh till you expire." The commandant ordered the guards to remove the boys from the gas chamber and place them in a holding block overnight. He planned to begin the torture sessions the following day.

But the next morning, his plans again went awry. A high-ranking Nazi officer had travelled to Auschwitz to round up slave labour for a work camp that lacked sufficient help. He needed to find several hundred young, able-bodied men capable of performing gruelling work under barbarous conditions. As he strode through the camp looking for prospects, the Nazi officer just happened to pass by the barracks in which the fifty religious boys had been temporarily housed. Their vitality undiminished by their overnight stay, the boys still radiated strength and good health. "Excellent," the Nazi officer smiled in satisfaction. "Exactly the type of boys I need."

The Nazi officer pulled rank on the camp commandant, who revealed nothing about his original plans for the boys' fate. He stood silently as the Nazi officer ordered the boys - and several hundred other inmates - to board the trucks that rolled out of Auschwitz into safer climes. Some say that the boys left the grounds singing.

*Postscript: Survivors of Auschwitz report that all fifty boys survived the war.*

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

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

# INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



## Elevating the Environment

Chai (18) Elul, 5737 [1977]

To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel, Everywhere -

These are the concluding days of Elul, the month of soul-searching and honest self-appraisal with respect to the outgoing year. These days are also devoted to preparation for the New Year - may it bring all good to all our people Israel.

It is obvious that this effort should, first of all, be applied to ensure that the outgoing year should be a complete one - namely, that it be both complete (not lacking) and perfect.

The ability to achieve this perfection is given by means of Teshuva Shleima (complete return to G-d), particularly in the last twelve days of the year, each day corresponding to a month of the outgoing year - to make good any past deficiency as well as insufficiency.

It is also self-evident that the resolutions which one makes for the coming year should likewise be perfect, which is to say that one should not be content to strive only for the most necessary and minimal, but for the highest and fullest measure, in all areas of human activity - in thought, speech and deed.

Understandably also, the degree and quality of perfection which is required of a person grows together with the person. For, as a person rises in stature, a correspondingly superior perfection is expected of him, since the perfection which accorded with his previous state is no longer good enough for his higher state. Thus, from time to time, as a person grows older and wiser, the quality of perfection in all his activities must rise in a corresponding measure.

It has often been pointed out that man's mission in life includes also "elevating" the environment in which he lives, in accordance with the Divine intent in the entire Creation and in all its particulars, by infusing holiness and G-dliness into all the aspects of the physical world within his reach - in the so-called "Four Kingdoms" - domem, tzome'ach, chai, and medabber (inorganic matter, vegetable, animal, and man).

Significantly, this finds expression in the special Mitzvos (commandments) which are connected with the beginning of the year, in the festivals of the month of Tishrei:

The Mitzvah of the Succah, the Jew's house of dwelling during the seven days of Succos, where the walls of the Succah represent the "inorganic kingdom";

The Mitzvah of the "Four Kinds" - Esrog, Lulav, myrtle and willow - which come from the vegetable kingdom;

The Mitzvah of Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the Shofar being a horn of an animal;

And all of these things (by virtue of being Divine commandments) are elevated through the medabber, the "speaking" (human) being - the person carrying out the said (and all other) Mitzvos, where-by he elevates also himself and mankind - both in the realm of doing as well as of not doing - the latter as represented in the Mitzvah of the fast on Yom Kippur.

Thus, through infusing holiness into all four kingdoms of the physical world and making them into "vessels" (and instruments) of G-dliness in carrying out G-d's command - a Jew elevates them to their true perfection.

It also follows that just as in regard to his personal perfection, which is expected to rise in harmony with his rising state, so also in regard to the four kingdoms he is expected (and given the ability) to raise, from time to time, the state of perfection to which he elevates them (as explained above) - both quantitatively and qualitatively - in the manner of doing the Mitzvos (where there can be grades of performance, such as acceptable post facto; good to begin with; according to unanimous opinion; with hiddur [excellence], etc.) and their inner content.

Taking into account the assurance that G-d does not require of a human being anything beyond his capacity, it is certain that everyone, man or woman can achieve utmost perfection in all aforesaid endeavours, "in one instant," since the person so resolved receives aid from G-d, for Whom there are no limitations.

May G-d grant that the efforts to achieve utmost perfection in the outgoing year, and the good resolutions to achieve perfection in all the above mentioned matters each day of the coming year, should bring down upon everyone G-d's blessings in all needs, material and spiritual, also in complete measure,

These efforts should, in addition to this, bring, very soon indeed, the complete blessing, the true and complete Redemption through our Righteous Moshiach.

## A MITZVA A DAY

**Positive Commandment 95: The Nullification of Vows**  
Sometimes, a person just cannot keep his promise or finds himself unable to fulfil his obligation. The Torah commands us to examine the situation. By dealing properly with the incident and judging the circumstances, it may be possible to absolve the vow.

## A WORD from the Director

*This Shabbat afternoon, we study two chapters of Ethics of the Fathers, chapters three and four. In chapter four our Sages counsel us to be "humble of spirit before every man."*

*As we are now in the midst of Elul, when our thoughts are focused on amending our ways before the New Year, this advice is especially timely. But how are we to implement our Sages' words? What can a person do to achieve humility?*

*In truth, there are two ways. The first involves reflecting on how we are not complete as lone individuals. Perfection is only possible as part of the sum total of the Jewish people, who are described as a "single upright body." In the human body, each and every limb performs a unique function without which the body cannot survive. For example, by providing it with mobility, the foot complements and completes the head. So too is it with the "body" of the Jewish people. No matter how high a level we may attain, we are always incomplete without our fellow Jews. Reminding ourselves of this truth will cause us to feel humble and indebted to others.*

*The second way involves turning inward, concentrating on our various flaws and inadequacies. This approach will also lead to humility, but by emphasizing the negative, it will also make us feel sad. According to Chasidic philosophy, sadness is counterproductive. A Jew must always strive to serve G-d with happiness and joy. Thus this second method must be reserved for very rare occasions, such as when a person feels completely incapable of conquering his Evil Inclination and must resort to other means.*

*In general, however, the first approach is the easiest way to be "humble of spirit before every man." When we realize that we are deficient on our own, we will automatically feel humble with regard to others.*

## MOSHIACH MATTERS

Your righteous Moshiach declared in Your presence, "Who can perceive [his own] errors? Cleanse me from secret flaws." O G-d, our G-d - cleanse us from all our transgressions and purify us from all our impurities. Sprinkle pure water over us and purify us, as it is written by Your prophet [Ezekiel]: "Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be cleansed from all your impurities - from all your idolatries I will purify you."

(Selichot)

J.I. Gutnick

# It Happened Once...



In a certain Jewish village in Poland, the entire community had gathered to pray for their beloved rabbi who was hovering between life and death. As the rabbi's last moments approached, he called over his beloved pupil, Reb Avraham, and in the presence of the elders of the community put his frail hands on his head and appointed him as his successor. Moments later, the rabbi closed his eyes, and returned his soul to its Creator.

Reb Avraham was a Torah genius, an inspiring speaker and wise leader. His fear of G-d and his knowledge were remarkable. He had been at the rabbi's side since his arrival some ten years earlier. No one had actually seen Reb Avraham arrive. One morning the rabbi arrived at the synagogue with a man whom he said had arrived several months earlier and since then they had never been apart. But no one doubted Reb Avraham's credentials.

After the days of mourning Reb Avraham began to fill the old rabbi's place and everything returned to normal. He was busy day and night with the questions and problems of the community.

But one day, an unusual problem arose: a madman entered their village. The madman was filthy, was constantly grunting like an animal or talking incoherently. Occasionally he quoted sayings from the Talmud or Psalms.

The elders of the village went to Reb Avraham to ask him to pray for the unfortunate fellow. Reb Avraham answered, "What? Are my prayers any more potent than yours that I can exempt you from praying? Tonight we will all gather in the synagogue and pray together for him."

A half hour later they were all saying Psalms and, strangely enough, the madman was there too, walking in a small circle in the corner looking at the ground before him and mumbling to himself non-stop.

But as soon as they finished the book for the first time and saw it had no effect, Reb Avraham began to speak words of inspiration. The madman stood still, pointed a finger at Reb Avraham and yelled out to the startled crowd:

"What! He is going to inspire you? He is your rabbi? Heh!! Why he and I sinned together! We left the Torah together!! Heh! We ate with the gentiles, drank with them, and acted like them! This is the person you call your rabbi?"

The entire congregation was stunned. Before they had taken pity on the madman, but now he was getting offensive. They all turned to the rabbi to see what he would say, ready to throw the fellow out at a moment's notice.

The room was filled with silence, it was obvious that Reb Avraham was going through some sort of inner turmoil and they were waiting to see the outcome. "He's right!" Reb Avraham whispered. "Everything he said is true!" The crowd let out a gasp!

Several minutes passed until finally Reb Avraham stood up and said in a loud voice, "I thank G-d for this moment! We were both from the finest, most G-d fearing families and we excelled in our studies. Everyone predicted great things from us. But somehow we fell. It began slowly: we began reading foolish books, then hanging around with the gentiles until we decided to leave Judaism altogether and 'enjoy life'; just as he said.

"After a few years of this we finally parted ways. I went into business while he went to university to learn philosophy. Eventually, we lost contact completely. I succeeded fantastically, married a gentile woman and built a castle on a huge estate; no one had any inkling that I was a Jew.

"One day when I was taking a stroll on my estate, my dog began barking, broke away from me and ran to a spot not far from us. There lay the body of a dead Jew. Probably some anti-Semite murdered him, I thought to myself.

"Suddenly my entire being became filled with mercy. I called for my servants and ordered them to bury the man and put a marker on his grave. From that moment something happened to me. I felt as though G-d sent this to awaken me to my true self. It was a sort of miracle.

"Eventually, I went to the city, met with the local rabbi and told him that I wanted to repent. At first he thought that I was a gentile and was either insane or trying to get him into trouble, but finally he believed me; another miracle.

"He advised me to take a bag of money, write a note to my wife giving her all my riches and to flee to a rabbi friend of his in a distant place to learn Torah. And that is what I did. I arrived here over ten years ago. I took to the Torah like a fish to water. I remembered everything I had learned as a youth and I quickly became quite a scholar. But although I became the rabbi of your community, I somehow felt that it had all happened too quickly and easily.

"Just now my first reaction was to have this fellow thrown out of the synagogue. Then my second reaction was to deny it and tonight, run away myself. I was ashamed to the bone. But I realized that this was also a miracle; perhaps even more than the first miracles. Now let's all pray for my friend."

As soon as they all finished the next Psalm the madman suddenly became calm, a normal expression returned to his face, and he fell heavily into his seat... a cured man.

## THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

**You will become mad from the sight of your eyes** (Deut. 28:34)

"The sight of your eyes" means "your leaders" - those who serve as "the eyes of the congregation." This is therefore one of the harshest curses; that the Jews will recoil in shock and horror when they behold who their leaders are... (Rabbi Shimon Sofer)

**And G-d shall make you plentiful for good, in the fruit of your body** (Deut. 28:11)

The Torah promises length of days and good years - even beyond what is truly deserved - in the merit of children who are raised and educated according to Torah. (Torat Moshe)

**And all these blessings shall come upon you, and overtake you - vehisigucha** (Deut. 28:2)

At first glance the word "vehisigucha" is redundant. If "all these blessings" are fulfilled, isn't it obvious that their recipient would be "overtaken" by them? Rather, the Hebrew word is related to hasaga, attainment or comprehension. It sometimes happens that a person is blessed with wealth, yet he lacks an understanding of how to use it properly. "Vehisigucha" is thus a separate blessing, that the person have the wisdom to utilize G-d's abundance correctly. (Rabbi Sh. Y. Taub of Modzhitz)

### CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

#### PARSHAS KITAVO 16 ELUL • 5 SEPTEMBER

<b>FRIDAY NIGHT:</b>	CANDLE LIGHTING:	5:42 PM
	MINCHA:	5:50 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	6:20 PM
<b>SHABBOS MORNING:</b>	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	MINCHA:	5:40 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	6:40 PM
<b>WEEKDAYS:</b>	SHACHARIS SUN - FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	5:55 PM
	MAARIV:	6:45 PM

### CANDLE LIGHTING: 4 SEPTEMBER 2009



BEGINS	ENDS
5:42 ..... MELBOURNE .....	6:40
5:40 ..... ADELAIDE .....	6:36
5:17 ..... BRISBANE .....	6:11
6:25 ..... DARWIN .....	7:14
5:15 ..... GOLD COAST .....	6:13
5:43 ..... PERTH .....	6:38
5:20 ..... SYDNEY .....	6:16
5:32 ..... LAUNCESTON .....	6:33
5:44 ..... AUCKLAND .....	6:41
5:40 ..... WELLINGTON .....	6:40
5:28 ..... CANBERRA .....	6:24

Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry

### The Lubavitcher Rebbe

צוקללה"ה נב"מ ז"ע

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