

LampLighter

19 Cheshvan
Vayeira
903
6 November
5770/2009

PUBLISHED BY THE CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD

LIVING WITH THE TIMES

In this week's Torah portion, Vayeira, we read of Abraham's attempt to save the wicked city of Sodom. When G-d told Abraham He was going to destroy the city of Sodom, Abraham tried everything he could think of to dissuade Him, as the Torah tells us, "And Abraham drew near and said, 'Will You then destroy the righteous with the wicked?'"

Rashi, the foremost Torah commentator, explains the meaning of this verse: "Abraham attempted all these methods: speaking harshly, appeasement and prayer."

Abraham was willing to do anything in order to save the city of Sodom. His first approach was to "speak harshly" to G-d. When that wasn't effective, he tried to appease Him and when that didn't work he resorted to prayer and supplication. All possible means were attempted in Abraham's bid to persuade G-d to avert the decree.

Our Patriarch Abraham was referred to by G-d as "Abraham, the one who loves Me." How then could Abraham have had the audacity to address G-d harshly?

Also, why did Abraham begin his attempt to dissuade G-d from carrying out His plan with harsh words, rather than first trying to appease G-d in a more conciliatory manner or with prayer? Wasn't Abraham characterized by his great kindness?

The key to understanding this lies in the fact that Abraham was faced with a matter involving the saving of lives. G-d had already issued His decree; the angels had already been dispatched to destroy the city. Thus Abraham saw no other choice but to demand that G-d change His mind, even if harsh words were required.

At such a time, Abraham did not allow himself the luxury of taking personal considerations into account. No method of persuasion was off-limits or out of bounds. The only thing that mattered was that the city of Sodom not be destroyed, and Abraham tried with all his might to prevent it from happening. Speaking harshly to G-d was the antithesis of Abraham's nature; nonetheless, he did not refrain from doing so in the hope that it would bring about the desired effect of saving the city and its inhabitants.

We, the descendants of Abraham, must learn from his example and emulate his ways.

Whenever the saving of a Jewish life is involved, be it in the physical or spiritual sense, we cannot stop to weigh our choices or to calculate our options. The thing to do is act, and to act immediately. All of our efforts, all of our strengths and energy must be used to that end, even if it is contrary to our nature and even if harsh words are required. For all methods are permissible when it comes to saving the life of a fellow Jew.

(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Fast Food Judaism

Long before fast-food emporiums dotted the landscape like mushrooms after a rain, our Sages suggested we implement the fast-food mentality into our lives, though with a Jewish twist, of course. "Grab and eat, grab and drink," Rabbi Shmuel told his student Rabbi Yehuda Shenina (as recorded in the Talmud); "For life is like a party that will soon be over." In fact, in Chasidic philosophy Mitzvot (commandments) are indeed likened to food and the Torah to water.

Far from being a fatalistic outlook, or one that places the emphasis on physicality, Rabbi Shmuel's words teach us how to define our goals and motivate ourselves in a Jewish way.

Picture yourself in a fast-food line. Are you going to stand there leisurely contemplating the menu as you would in a fine restaurant, discussing it with the people joining you, maybe even asking what the head waiter suggests? Or would you order quickly from the list on the wall and hungrily gobble it down? Most likely you would do the latter, since expedience and swiftness are major reasons for your choice of restaurant styles.

"Do mitzvot, study Torah," Rabbi Shmuel taught, "For life - in this world - will soon be over and in the World to Come these same opportunities to do mitzvot and study Torah will no longer be available."

Similarly, Chasidic philosophy explains that since we are getting closer every day to the Redemption, the era of peace, prosperity, wisdom and health promised by G-d and foretold by the prophets, we shouldn't spend time contemplating a menu of mitzvot. We don't have time any longer to sit and relax at a fine restaurant, dillydallying until we make our choice.

Action is the main thing. Grab and eat, grab and drink. Whatever mitzva comes your way, do it. Whichever Jewish learning opportunity is available, benefit from it. We're living life in the fast-lane, travelling on the express train.

A Jewish fast-food mentality means taking hold of every opportunity to do a mitzva, regardless of whether or not we think it should be the next one in our repertoire. There's no time for, "How can I light Shabbat candles if on Saturday I..." Or, "Why put on tefilin if I don't..." Or, "How can I attend a Jewish mysticism/Chasidic philosophy class if I don't even know the Hebrew alphabet?"

Grab and eat, grab and drink means that these last few moments before the Messianic Era need to be filled with action not contemplation, deeds not meditations. Soon the party will be over, or will it just be beginning?



SAYING MAZAL TOV

by Tzvi Jacobs

Esther and I were married for 2 1/2 years before we had our first baby. It often happens that couples have to wait a while and our story would be more dramatic if we were married for 10 years or more without being able to have children. Still, our story is unusual.

We had heard many stories and even had friends who had trouble either conceiving or carrying a baby to term, and after receiving a blessing and sometimes also advice from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, they had at least one baby. With those stories in mind, I went to Crown Heights in September, 1988. It was a pleasant Sunday afternoon and hundreds of people were in a long line waiting to see the Rebbe.

A black limousine pulled up in front of the house and I overheard that some politicians from New York were arriving. An official escorted them straight in to receive a blessing and seek the Rebbe's advice on an important political issue.

The line didn't move for about 30 minutes. I became unsure if I should ask the Rebbe for a blessing. Should I make the Rebbe, who had been fasting and standing all day and would continue to do so until he met and blessed the final person who got in line, stand and fast for even five seconds longer?

As I looked back at the rapidly growing line, I spotted one of my Yeshiva teachers. "Should I ask the Rebbe for a blessing for a baby?" I asked.

"Sure you should ask," he answered me, erasing all my doubts.

The line started moving. My heart started beating harder. The Rebbe is an awesome figure. He is a man, but people say the Rebbe has the superhuman ability to see into anyone's soul, even someone on the other side of the globe who has never seen or even heard about the Rebbe.

Finally, I made it into the Rebbe's home. The line was moving quickly. It was my turn. "Blessing for baby," I blurted out nervously.

"Amen. In a good and auspicious time," the Rebbe said. He spoke with a clear, strong voice while handing me a second dollar bill.

By December Esther was suspicious. She went to the doctor and the results were positive. She was pregnant. We were ecstatic. But about a week later, the nurse told us the fetal protein level was high and they wanted to do an amniocentesis to find out more and, if need be, G-d forbid, recommend an abortion. But Judaism does not allow for abortions for such reasons. The doctor's staff was pushing for the amniocentesis, but we called back and said, "No thanks."

Only then did I find out that high fetal protein was indicative of Down's syndrome. I didn't tell Esther immediately what I had found out.

The following evening we went to Crown Heights for a friend's wedding and I broke down and told Esther. We were both crying.

The "siren" sounded meaning that the Rebbe was going to say a short public discourse after which the Rebbe gave out dollars for people to give to charity. We got into the line. I couldn't say anything to the Rebbe. I tried to believe that all this was a test from G-d and that it was really a big blessing. I would have to write a letter to the Rebbe. Esther had gone through the women's line and was already waiting for me in the car.

"The Rebbe said, 'Mazal tov' to me," Esther said. "How did he know that I'm pregnant?"

"I thought the Rebbe says 'mazal tov' only after a baby is born," I said.

"I know. I was starting to doubt that I heard him right. And then when I got into the car I saw the back cover of this magazine."

It was a picture of a pregnant woman headlined, "Saying mazal tov is not enough." The advertisement then explained that a pregnant woman should have the "shir hama'alos" card in the delivery room, as a protection against any harm to the mother or newborn baby. It's a custom from Kaballa and strongly encouraged by the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

"Everything is going to be all right, Esti," I said. The Rebbe saying "mazal tov" calmed us down a lot. We just had normal worries and fears throughout the rest of the pregnancy. On Sunday night, May 9, Esther went into labour. At about 20 past midnight we drove to the Morristown hospital and went straight to maternity. At 12:55 a.m. the nurse called out, "Congratulations! It's a girl. A beautiful baby girl."

By the way, you can be sure that when we went into that delivery room, we had our "shir hama'alos—saying 'mazal tov' is not enough" cards—one for the mother, one for the baby, and a spare for the expectant father.

Esther was so happy and thankful to be a mother—and to have such a healthy, adorable baby—that she wrote a thank-you note to the Rebbe about four months after Chaya Mushka Bracha was born. While writing the letter, Esther saw a friend walk past. She was still childless. So Esther added a note at the end of her letter: "May the Rebbe please give Leah bas Sara a blessing to have a baby."

Our Sages teach that when you pray for someone else, G-d blesses the one who prayed for his fellow first. Three months later both Esther and her friend were expecting. Our Nechama Dina was born within two weeks of Leah's baby.

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

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ISSUE 903

MOSHIACH MATTERS

G-d rained upon Sodom and Gomora brimstone and fire... (Gen. 19:24)

At the present time Sodom is in its ruined state. However, when Moshiach comes and evil will be completely removed from the earth, Sodom will return to its original state of blessing and beauty, as it says, (Ezek. 16) "And I will return the captivity of Sodom." (*Sefer HaParshiot*)

INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



Committing to Yiddishkeit

6th of Shevat 5731

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter with some delay. In it you write about the uncertainty you feel regarding commitment to Yiddishkeit [Judaism], inasmuch as you think that life in accordance with the Torah and Mitzvos [commandments] is restrictive, and limits individual creativity, particularly in the area of thinking and choosing for himself, etc., so that it is hard to reconcile such commitment with the idea of personal freedom.

Frankly, this attitude is somewhat surprising, coming from a thinking person. I suppose the difficulty here is due to the superficial understanding of the meaning of the "acceptance of the yoke of the Torah and Mitzvos," because the word "yoke" suggest restrictiveness.

In truth, however, there are many things in the daily life which a person accepts and follows without question, even if it be a highly gifted intellectual, with a searching bent of mind. Since you attend college, and have no doubt studied science, etc., you surely know that one does not go about starting everything in physics and technology from the beginning, by verifying everything through personal research and experimentation. For example, a person will board a plane without first having researched into aerodynamics, etc., to verify that it is safe to fly in it, and that it will bring one to one's destination at approximately the scheduled time.

Or take an example from the area of physical health. There are well-established things which are useful or harmful to one's health. A person will not go about trying to verify the utility or harmfulness of a particular drug through personal experimentation. Even if a person has a very strong inclination to do some research and experimentation, he will surely choose such areas which have not previously been researched.

This generally accepted attitude is quite understandable and logical. For inasmuch as experts have amply researched into these areas and have determined what is good and what is harmful for physical health, or have established the methods as to further technological advancement - it would be at best a waste of time to try to go over all those experiments from the beginning. On the other hand, there is no assurance that he may not make some error, and arrive at wrong conclusions, with disastrous effects, as experience has shown in some cases.

What has been said above in regard to physical health is also true in regard to spiritual health, and how the Neshomo [soul] can attain perfection and fulfillment. All the more so since spiritual health is generally related to physical health, particularly insofar as a Jew is concerned.

Now the Creator of man, Who is also the Creator and Master of the whole world, surely has the best qualifications that might be expected of any authority, to know what is good for man and for the world in which he lives. In His goodness, G-d has already provided us with complete and final results, having put us on notice that if a person will conduct his daily life in a certain way, then he will have a healthy Neshomo in a healthy body, and it will be good for him in this world as well as in the world to come. He has also left some areas where a person can carry on his own experimentation in other matters which do not interfere with the rules laid down by Him.

In other words, it is quite certain that if a human being would live long enough, and would have the necessary capacities to make all sorts of experiments, without distraction and interference, and without error, he would undoubtedly arrive at the very same conclusions which we already find in the Torah which G-d has given us, namely the need to observe Shabbos, eat Kosher, etc., etc. But, as mentioned above, G-d in His infinite goodness - and it is in the nature of the Good to do good - wished to spare us all the trouble, as well as the possibility of error, and has already given us the results beforehand, for the benefit of both the person who has the inclination and capacity to search, as well as for those who do not.

A WORD from the Director

This Thursday, the 20th of Cheshvan, is the birthday of Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber (1860-1920), the fifth Chabad Lubavitch Rebbe.

A beautiful story is told about a lesson that Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber (known as the "Rebbe Rashab") taught his son, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, who was later to become his successor.

Once, when Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak set out on a journey, the Rebbe Rashab asked him to try to do a certain favour for one of the chasidim, a businessman, who was in need of help.

When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak returned he told his father, "I did everything you told me to do, and the favour to that man I did meticulously."

"You err," said the Rebbe Rashab. "You did a favour to yourself, not to him. G-d did a favour to him, by arranging for an emissary, such as yourself, through whom the will of Divine Providence could be realized."

The Rebbe Rashab was teaching us a lesson that permeates the whole of Judaism. When we do a mitzva, especially one which ostensibly allows us to help another person, we are G-d's emissaries. And, more than helping the other person we are, in essence, helping ourselves.

Tzedaka, charity, is a prime example. When we give tzedaka it should be with the knowledge and understanding that G-d has bestowed upon us a privilege; the privilege of administering His money in a righteous manner. Certainly, this is the reason why our Sages teach, "More than charity does for the poor person, it does for the rich person."

This attitude can and should permeate all "favours" we do for others. In addition to being the correct attitude, it stops us from feeling self-righteous!

J. I. Gutnick

Reasons for covering the challah on Shabbat:

a. When the Jews were in the desert they subsisted on the manna that fell from heaven every day, except for Shabbat; the challah on Shabbat commemorates that manna. (On Friday a double portion came down. The two challahs on our Shabbat table celebrate this miracle.) The manna was encased between layers of dew that preserved its freshness, so we envelop the challahs between the table cloth (or cutting board) and the challah cover.

b. In Talmudic times, meals were served to each person individually on a three-legged tray, which was brought out by waiters. On Shabbat, these table-trays were brought out after the *Kiddush*, as the meal was served in honour of Shabbat, which the *Kiddush* had just sanctified. Today, we set the table with the challah on it, but cover it until the time when it would have been brought in. This delivers the message that the meal only begins after and because of, the *Kiddush*.

c. Another reason why we cover the bread while we recite the *Kiddush* is related to the order in which we say blessings on food.

In the Torah the land of Israel is praised with seven foods, listed in the following order: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. We prioritise blessing them and eating them, in the order in which they are mentioned. Grain is before grapes, so bread should be eaten before wine.

We therefore cover the bread so that it not be "shamed" by the fact that we drink the *Kiddush* wine before we partake of the challah.

It Happened Once...



The great Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev would routinely pay a pastoral visit to every sick person in the city of Berditchev. He would pray with them, offer his help to the family and reassure them of G-d's essential goodness. With the love and concern he would display for the needs of every patient, his very presence would often prove the panacea that could drag someone from their very deathbed back to the land of the living.

At one house, however, all his well-practiced efforts would prove to be of no avail. Drastically ill and in extreme pain, the patient refused all attempts to lighten his spirits. Clearly suffering from some spiritual crisis or existential angst he refused to be comforted by any well-meaning bromide.

No good deeds, no merits. "Rabbi, I'm terrified," he finally admitted. "I have been a sinner my whole life and I feel that I have nothing to show for all the years I wasted on earth. No good deeds, no merits. What will happen to me after I die?"

Without hesitation Rabbi Levi Yitzchak reached forward and took the man's hand. "I hereby give you as an absolute gift, for now until eternity, my complete portion in the world to come. If I have any reward waiting for me in paradise, it's yours."

Shocked beyond belief, it took a while for the message of the *tzaddik's* gift to sink in. But finally the man sank back onto his pillows in relief and the worry over his future faded from his eyes. A few minutes later he died.

"Rabbi," one of his aides cried in frustration, "we are so used to you donating your time, sacrificing your health and being there for others, but this time even you have gone too far. Did you have to forego your future bliss for such a person? He definitely did not deserve it and didn't even live long enough to appreciate it."

The great man was unfazed. "It was worth it," he declared with finality. "It wasn't even a sacrifice. I'd gladly give away everything I have, in this world and the world to come, just to buy a few seconds of comfort for a fellow Jew."

One of the great rabbis of the time once happened to engage Rabbi Nechemiah Ginzburg, a chassid of the Tzemach Tzedek (R' Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, 1789-1866), in a halachic discussion. The rabbi was amazed by Rabbi Nechemiah's knowledge and genius, and even more amazed to learn that his conversant was an anonymous merchant from the town of Dubrovna. "I have met the greatest scholars of our time," he exclaimed, "and I can personally attest that few of them are as knowledgeable and brilliant as yourself. How is it that your name is not known among the Torah scholars of our generation?"

"In our town," replied Rabbi Nechemiah, "there is a man who deals in rare and precious books. Once he visited the home of a sage and was amazed by the wealth of books on the sage's bookshelves. 'How is it,' he wondered, 'that no one has ever heard of your library? People come from far and wide to examine my wares, but my entire collection is not a tenth of the size and value of yours!'"

"'You collect books to sell them to the world,' replied the sage, 'so all the world knows about them. My books are for myself.'"

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

G-d appeared to him [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre (Gen. 18:1)

When Rabbi Sholom Ber, the fifth Chabad Rebbe, was a young boy of four or five he went to his grandfather, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the Rebbe at that time. He began to cry as he asked, "Why did G-d show Himself to our father Abraham, but He does not show Himself to us?" Reb Menachem Mendel answered him: "When a tzadik (righteous person) decides at the age of ninety-nine years that he should be circumcised, he deserves that G-d appear to him.

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him (Gen. 18:19)

Rashi comments that the phrase "for I know him" implies love and affection for Abraham. G-d loved Abraham because He knew that Abraham would teach his children to follow in his footsteps. As great and impressive as Abraham's worship of G-d was, more worthy of merit was the fact that he could be counted on to instruct others. (*Hayom Yom*)

To do righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19)

When G-d bestows wealth and abundance on a Jew, he must honestly judge himself and ask: "Am I really worthy of all this goodness? What have I done to deserve these blessings?" When a person is thus honest with himself, it will cause him to realize that the sharing of his wealth with those less fortunate is truly tzedaka—righteousness. (*Sefer HaMaamarim*)

In all that Sara may say to you - hearken unto her voice (Gen. 21:12)

The Talmud states: Three tzadikim were given a taste of the World to Come in this world - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the World to Come, the prophecy "the female will surround and encompass the male," and "a woman of valour is the crown of her husband" (Proverbs) will be fulfilled. Abraham was given a glimpse of this when G-d told him to heed the words of Sara, who was an even greater prophet than he. (*Likutei Torah*)

And the two angels came to Sodom (Gen. 19:1)

When Abraham was paid a visit by angels, they appeared as human beings. Why, when they presented themselves to Lot, did they appear in their form as angels? Abraham, known as he was for his hospitality, treated everyone he came into contact with in the same equal manner; simple people were honoured as much as those more "important." Had Lot, however, seen mere humans at his door, he would have never allowed them to cross the threshold of his home. (*Rabbi Leib Sarah's*)

CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

PARSHAS VAYEIRA 20 CHESHVAN • 7 NOVEMBER

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	7:41 PM
	MINCHA:	7:50 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS :	8:20 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	MINCHA:	7:40 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	8:43 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS: SUN- FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	7:50 PM
	MAARIV:	8:40 PM

CANDLE LIGHTING: 6 NOVEMBER 2009



Begins	Ends
7:41 MELBOURNE	8:43
7:31 ADELAIDE	8:31
5:51 BRISBANE	6:47
6:30 DARWIN	7:22
5:50 GOLD COAST	6:45
6:27 PERTH	7:25
7:09 SYDNEY	8:08
7:20 CANBERRA	8:20
7:41 LAUNCESTON	8:47
7:40 AUCKLAND	8:41
7:49 WELLINGTON	8:53

Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

יצוקללה"ה נבג"מ ז"ע

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