

LampLighter

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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

One of the main reasons that the Exodus from Egypt occupies such a central role in Judaism (we mention it daily in our prayers) is that this original exodus symbolizes the daily spiritual exodus which must take place in the life of a Jew. The Hebrew word for Egypt, "Mitzrayim," comes from the root word "Meitzar," meaning limitations and obstacles. It is up to every individual to liberate himself from his own internal limitations and boundaries, thus freeing his G-dly soul to express itself and seek spiritual fulfillment.

This week's Torah portion, Vaeira, tells of the very beginning of the events which led up to the Jews' triumphant liberation from bondage. By studying the circumstances of the Egyptian exodus, we see how we can apply these lessons to our own personal and spiritual journey as well.

The first plague to afflict the Egyptians was blood; every drop of water in the land was affected. Therefore, the first step toward spiritual liberation must also somehow be connected with transforming "water" into "blood."

Water symbolizes tranquillity, coldness, and lack of emotional excitement. Blood, on the other hand, is a symbol of warmth, enthusiasm and fervour. The Torah asks every Jew: Do you truly want to leave "Egypt," to overcome your self-imposed limitations? The first thing you must do is turn your "water" into "blood." Transform your apathy and inertia into enthusiasm and love of Torah and mitzvot. Infuse your life with a warmth and dedication directed toward G-d and holiness.

A person may claim, "Is it not enough that I simply perform the mitzvot, learn Torah, and avoid that which is forbidden? Am I not a good Jew even if I don't feel any enthusiasm for what I do?"

Chasidic philosophy explains that coldness and apathy are the source of all evil. When one is cool towards something, it means that he is totally uninterested in it. We see that when something truly close to the heart is mentioned, our pulse quickens and we "warm" to the subject. Coldness signals the mechanical performance of the commandments and leads to eventual spiritual deterioration.

The first action to be taken towards spiritual liberation is to replace our lukewarm dedication to Judaism with warmth and enthusiasm. We should be at least as equally enthused about Judaism as we are about other facets of our lives.

One of the practical ways this expresses itself is when we perform a mitzva in a particularly nice way. The desire to enhance our observance leads to our observing the precepts of Judaism out of love. This, then, is the first step towards going out of our own personal Egypt and ending our collective exile.

(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Pharaoh's Contrition

By Zalman Posner

Grandma took her precious grandchild to the beach to enjoy sun, sand and surf. A great wave came in, grabbed the child, and dragged him out to sea. The distraught woman went onto her knees and solemnly promised to love God and fulfil all the mitzvot to the letter if only He would return the lad. Sure enough, the next wave brought the child back and deposited him miraculously at the water's edge. She swooped him up in a loving bear hug, looked up to heaven and said, "He was wearing a hat."

The slavery in Egypt is approaching its final stages. The ten plagues are beginning to descend upon a hapless Egypt. Though Pharaoh's reactions are not spontaneous — his reversals and broken promises were foreordained — still, men of free and not pre-determined will, often emulate him.

It was after the second plague, Pharaoh had assured Moses that Israel would be freed, and the plague was in fact lifted. "But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart" and repudiated his pledge. His promises were forgotten when the pressure was removed.

Religion and G-d are frequently kept in reserve, like resources to be used only in the most desperate need, when all other means are exhausted. In case of sickness or some other calamity people will remember G-d, and contritely resolve never again to forget. There is no doubt that their faith and promises are honest and thoroughly sincere, but they are unproven as yet.

G-d is a refuge in distress, but not if He is otherwise ignored. Pharaoh set the example of promising to do good when he was suffering from a plague, but he promptly "hardened his heart when there was a respite." The time of respite, that is the test of faith. Suffering, desperation, and calamities may impel one toward religion and G-d, and they can well mean the start of a truly religious life. But the person whose religion is in direct proportion to his suffering is an apt pupil of Pharaoh, and hardly a worthy teacher.



Fringes of Fright

As heard from Betzalel Schif

Freedom of religion was a concept that was foreign to us, citizens of the Soviet Union. As a child, it was ingrained in my bones that my every move was being monitored; with every step that I took in the street I needed to look around to see who was following me, who was keeping track of my activities. Invariably my shadows were KGB informers and specifically the Yevesecktzia, the notorious Jewish branch of the KGB, whose mission it was to eradicate religion in the Soviet Union, with special emphasis placed on stamping out Judaism.

Families like mine were right in the KGB's sights. They knew that we were members of the "Schneersons," as they dubbed us. We, Chabad Chassidim, worked tirelessly to keep alive the flames of Torah, mitzvot, and its infrastructure in Communist Russia; and built an underground network of Torah-schools, synagogues, and *mikvahs*.

This was my childhood. Despite the risk and the constant vigilance required, we lived a traditional Jewish life. We prayed, studied Torah, Judaism, and even had traditional Chassidic gatherings, complete with singing and dancing. Needless to say, all of this was done in utmost secrecy.

Public school attendance was mandated by the law, and school life was understandably difficult,

presenting many challenges for a boy who wished to follow Jewish laws and traditions. For example, I would always have to find a place to ritually wash my hands before eating my sandwich for lunch.

I had three classmates who were religious. Naturally, we bonded and became close friends. After school we would go to a secret location to learn Torah in a clandestine afternoon-school. Sometimes the location of this "school" changed four or five times a week, for fear that the previous location may have been compromised. We took all this in stride; it was "normal" life for us.

One particular event sticks out in my mind. The school principal came to our class one day together with the school nurse. It was actually quite unusual for them to visit a classroom together. The principal informed us that we will be receiving immunization shots.

Now, while this might seem to be a routine medical procedure, for me it was far from simple... I was wearing *tzitzit* beneath my shirt. *Tzitzit* is a four-cornered garment with eight knotted strings dangling from each corner. This garment reminds us of the 613 commandments contained in the Torah, our holy guidebook for life.

If I would now pick up my shirt to receive a shot in my back, the nurse would definitely notice my normally concealed *tzitzit*. That could mean doom for my family and me.

I'm not talking about a small fine or even some lashes. This could mean that my father, and maybe even me, would sit in a jail cell. My father had already sat in prison before and my friends' parents too. It was hell on earth. I immediately devised a plan, I would request permission to use the

bathroom and there I would remove my *tzitzit*.

I requested permission to the go to the bathroom. In a sly voice the principal responded, "Sure, you will receive the first shot and after that you could go right to the bathroom." I am not sure why he did not let me go to the bathroom first; perhaps he thought that I was trying to avoid getting the shot. I am certain that he was unaware of my *tzitzit*.

I tried to hide the fringes by hiking up my *tzitzit* as high as possible. All went seemingly well. The nurse administered the shot and didn't mention a word about the fringes. I wasn't sure whether she didn't notice them or perhaps she simply ignored them.

The next day during lunch break, the nurse called me in to her room. I was sure that my time had come. She must have noticed them, and now I was in grave trouble. She closed the door behind me and gently asked, "Are those *tzitzit* or *tefillin*?"

You can imagine my shock! She continued, telling me that she was Jewish and how she recalled her grandfather wearing the same sort of garment. She distinctly remembered two Jewish ritual objects mentioned in her home, and she wanted to know which of them I was wearing.

She told me that she was inspired and heart-warmed by my strength and courage; maintaining my Jewish traditions under such harsh conditions. We discussed what it meant to be a religious Jew in Soviet Russia as well as my personal hardships in school. She told me that from that day on I could come to her room to ritually wash my hands and eat my lunch. And indeed, that was what I did from that day on.

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ISSUE 913

MOSHIACH MATTERS

We must increase in light, and not just any light, but specifically the light of simcha (joyousness). Since simcha "breaks all boundaries and limitations," it breaks through the person's limitations, the limitations of this world, and the limitations imposed by this dreadful darkness of exile...
(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 15 Shevat, 5739 - 1979)

INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



LIFE'S TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

The difficulties, trials, and tests of life are themselves the means by which we are to attain our ultimate objective—that the soul achieves the lofty spiritual level it once possessed before it descended into the body: "The soul that you have given me is pure." The purpose of life is for the soul to regain that level of original "purity" and even transcend it—for one hour of teshuva [repentance] and good deeds in this world is worth more than all the lifetime of the spiritual World to Come.

So life's trials, tragedies and difficulties actually bring us closer to our goal, our *raison d'être*; they are part of the divine system of toil and endeavour which enable us, finite mortals, to reach the highest levels of reward and goodness; which can only be earned by meaningful "labour" and effort. It follows that one must not allow the difficulties of life (or even failure) to overcome the joy of being both G-d's children and of having received His promise "Your people are all righteous."

Now along comes an individual—yourself—who is not just an ordinary person, but one who has heard of the light of Chasidic teachings, who has actually studied Chasidism, and who the Alm-ghty has refined and purified through affliction; yet you are in a mood of despair. You "find no place for yourself," etc. Your estimation of your own worth and spiritual level is so far below the truth that it contradicts not only faith but simple logic as well. The Alm-ghty has given us an irrevocably firm promise that ultimately no one will be rejected by Him. In addition, He does not require of the individual deeds that exceed his ability, for the Alm-ghty does not present His creations with unreasonable demands. G-d wants only that one's deeds measure up to his abilities.

All this is the declaration and promise of the Alm-ghty to us. Now you come along and say that your analysis of the situation is different; it is an analysis that leads to despair. You wring your hands and persuade yourself that from you are descending lower and lower. One can ask the classic rhetorical question, "When the teacher's opinions contradict the pupil's, to whose opinion do we listen? You should ask yourself this question. It seems to you that the situation is depressingly hopeless; the Alm-ghty says it is not so. Is there any doubt who is right?"

So much for arguments: Now to get down to practical matters: You must know and realize that you are one of our community of chasidim, which means in turn that you are connected, as a leaf or branch, to the "Tree of Life" of our saintly Chasidic leaders. This connection has the effect expressed by the verse, "You who cleave to G-d your G-d are alive, all of you, this day." Our sages comment: "Even on a day when the world is dying, you live; and just as you are all alive today so will you be alive in the spiritual World to Come." So you see that you have a personal promise from our Sages that you are alive today and that you will be alive in the World to Come. In light of all the above you must utilize your time to practice Torah and mitzvot in the spirit of Yirat Shamayim [awe of G-d]. You must also utilize the artistic talent, with which the Alm-ghty has blessed you, to further religious feeling. You cannot delay this task until tomorrow, for tomorrow has its own tasks; today, you must do today's tasks. To accomplish these goals you must be aware that all hindrances are plans of the yetzer [the evil inclination]; you must bring this into your mind and intellect, into your heart and emotions and into practical levels of thought, speech and deed.

When you apply yourself to this task, though it might well seem to you that you can only make an inroad as tiny as the point of a needle, the Alm-ghty will respond by granting you success; as promised, G-d will "make an opening as wide as the entrance of a hall." I hope you will not take the delay of my response into consideration, and that you will respond very soon with heartening tidings—mainly that you have begun to act in the spirit of the above.

A WORD from the Director

*The second day of the month of Shevat is the *yahrzeit* [the day of passing away] of Reb Zusya of Anipoli, a disciple of Reb Dov Ber of Mezritch (The Mezritcher Maggid), and colleague of Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Chabad Rebbe.*

The fact that illness and utter poverty were Reb Zusya's lot did not in the least affect his piety, humility, and love of G-d for which he was renowned.

A story is told of Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg, who approached Reb Dov Ber of Mezritch and asked him how it was possible to follow the injunction of our Sages to "make a blessing upon hearing bad news just as one would make a blessing upon hearing good news." Reb Dov Ber told Reb Shmelke to go to Reb Zusya, and he would answer his question.

Reb Shmelke went to Reb Zusya, upon whom poverty and illness had left their physical marks. When Reb Shmelke posed his question to him, Reb Zusya was surprised. He replied, "This question should have been brought to someone who has actually experienced unfortunate events, G-d forbid. Thank G-d, I have only had good things happen to me for my whole life."

The answer to Reb Shmelke's question was that someone should rejoice in his lot to the point that he is not even aware of harsh events. This was the hallmark of Reb Zusya's life.

Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi held Reb Zusya in such high esteem that before printing his magnum opus, the Tanya, he sent a copy of it with a special messenger to Reb Zusya for his approbation.

J. I. Gutnick

Rosh Chodesh

Rosh Chodesh, the day (or days) that celebrate the arrival of the new Jewish month, has long been recognized as a woman's holiday. In the Talmud we read that Rosh Chodesh is a day when there is some form of work abstinence. The Talmudic commentators Rashi and Tosaphot explain that this refers to women, who traditionally celebrate Rosh Chodesh as their exclusive holiday.

Why do women merit a special holiday once a month? In the incident of the Golden Calf, because they had faith in G-d and His servant Moses, the women refused to relinquish their jewellery to the men who were building the calf. As a reward, G-d gave them an extra holiday each month.

According to kabbalistic teachings, as Rosh Chodesh is the celebration of the new moon, and women share a special relationship with the moon, therefore they also have a special reason to celebrate Rosh Chodesh.

Exactly what types of work women abstain from on Rosh Chodesh depends on community and/or family custom. Some women don't work at all, while others simply abstain from tedious household chores, such as laundry or sewing.

In some places women wear new clothing on Rosh Chodesh in celebration of the day's special character; and there are communities where women have special gatherings where they learn Torah. They might learn together about the month ahead and its qualities or upcoming holidays, or something related to the month and/or women. Some women also gather to pray together, either from the special prayers of the day, or from the book of *Tehillim*, Psalms.

CUSTOMS CORNER

It Happened Once...



For many years the two saintly brothers, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk and Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli, wandered the back roads of Galicia. Disguised as simple beggars, they journeyed from town to town and from village to village, refining their souls with the travails of exile and inspiring their brethren with words of wisdom and encouragement.

Late one evening, the brothers arrived in the town of Lodmir. Seeing a lighted window in a large, well-appointed home, they knocked on the door and asked for a place to stay the night. "I don't run a hotel," was the irate response of its large, well-dressed owner. "There's a poorhouse near the synagogue for wandering beggars. I'm sure you'll have no trouble finding accommodation there."

The heavy door all but slammed in their faces, and Rabbi Elimelech and Rabbi Zusha walked on. Soon they came upon another lighted home, whose resident, the town scribe, welcomed them in and put his humble hut and resources at their disposal.

Several years later, the two brothers again visited Lodmir. This time, they were official guests of the community, which had requested that the now-famous rabbis come for a Shabbat to grace the town with their presence and teachings. At the welcoming reception held in their honour and attended by the entire town, a wealthy gentleman approached them. "Rabbis!" he announced, "the town council has granted me the honour of hosting you during your stay. G-d has been generous to me, and you'll want for nothing in my home. I've already explained to your coachman how to find my residence, though he's sure not to miss it, everyone knows where 'Reb Feivel' lives..."

The gathering dispersed, and Rabbi Elimelech and Rabbi Zusha went to pay their respects to the town rabbi and meet with the scholars in the local study hall. The rich man went home to supervise the final arrangements for the rabbis' stay. Soon the coachman arrived with the brothers' coach and luggage. The horses were placed in the stables, the luggage in the rabbis' rooms, and the coachman settled in the servants' quarters.

Hours passed, but still no sign of the two visitors. Growing anxious, the host sought out their coachman. "What happened?" he asked. "When are they going to come here?"

"They're not coming," said the coachman. "Rabbi Elimelech and Rabbi Zusha are staying at the scribe's home."

"At the scribe's; what are you talking about?! You're here, aren't you?"

"Those were the rabbis' instructions. 'Take the horses and our luggage to Reb Feivel's,' they said to me. 'We'll be staying with the scribe.'"

Reb Feivel rushed to the scribe's hut and fairly knocked down the door. "Honoured Rabbis," he cried, finding Rabbi Elimelech and Rabbi Zusha before the fire, having a cup of tea with their host. "Why have you done this to me? It was agreed that I would host you. You must tell me what I have done to deserve such humiliation!"

"But you are hosting us," said Rabbi Elimelech, "at least, that part of us that you desire to host. Last time we were here, but without a coach, horses, coachman and bundles of pressed clothes, you turned us away from your door. So it is not us you want in your home, but our coachman, horses and luggage—which are currently enjoying your hospitality..."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

And I appeared (va'eira) (Ex. 6:3)

The word "va'eira" is in both the past and present tense, indicating that the revelation of G-dliness that existed in the times of our forefathers continues to exist today as well. Every Jew possesses the quality of Abraham (love of G-d), the quality of Isaac (awe of G-d), and the quality of Jacob (mercy); the revelation of these inner traits is akin to G-d's revelation to the Patriarchs. (*Ohr HaTorah*)

These are Aaron and Moses... These are Moses and Aaron (Ex. 6:26, 27)

Aaron, the first priest, embodied the proper worship of G-d, and by extension, symbolizes prayer in general. The job of the priests was to offer the sacrifices in the Holy Temple; in our days, prayer takes the place of these sacrifices. Moses symbolized Torah study. The repetition of the two names in the reverse order teaches us that there are times in our daily lives when one aspect takes precedence over the other. Sometimes we stress prayer as a preparation for performing mitzvot and Torah study, and sometimes we study first in order to pray more effectively. (*The Lubavitcher Rebbe*)

And the magicians did likewise with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt (Ex. 3)

Unlike the frogs brought forth by Moses and Aaron that jumped into the Egyptians' homes, beds, kneading troughs and even ovens, the frogs produced by the magicians merely dispersed throughout the country. For without a specific G-dly command, there was no need for them to sacrifice their lives. (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*)

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob... I have also heard the groaning of the Children of Israel (Ex. 6:3-5)

Moses was concerned that after 210 years of slavery in Egypt the Jewish people would have grown too accustomed to the exile to fully absorb the message that their redemption was imminent. G-d's answer about our Patriarchs thus reassured him that his worries were unwarranted; the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can never accustom themselves to exile, for to them it is an unnatural state. Every day that passes is as bitter as the very first. The same is true for us today. Despite the fact that this present exile has lasted more than 1900 years, the Jewish people is more than ready to accept the message that the Final Redemption is indeed imminent. (*The Lubavitcher Rebbe*)

But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs (Ex. 7:12)

From Aaron's staff we learn about the resurrection of the dead that will take place in Messianic times. If a lifeless staff, a dry piece of wood, can be transformed into a living entity, how much more so can a human being, consisting of a physical body and soul, be restored to life! (*Zohar*)

CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

PARSHAS VA'EIRA 1 SHVAT • 16 JANUARY

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	8:26 PM
	MINCHA:	8:35 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS :	9:10 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	MINCHA:	8:35 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	9:30 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS: SUN- FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	8:35 PM
	MAARIV:	9:20 PM

CANDLE LIGHTING: 15 JANUARY 2010



Begins	Ends
8:26 MELBOURNE	9:30
8:14 ADELAIDE	9:15
6:30 BRISBANE	7:26
7:01 DARWIN	7:54
6:29 GOLD COAST	7:25
7:08 PERTH	8:07
7:51 SYDNEY	8:52
8:03 CANBERRA	9:04
8:28 LAUNCESTON	9:35
8:25 AUCKLAND	9:27
8:37 WELLINGTON	9:44

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.