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from the book
SEEDS OF WISDOM, Volume 2
Based on personal encounters
with the Rebbe
by MENDEL KALMENSON



Lessons In Chess

Once, during a *chasidic* gathering of the Rebbe attended by the world-famous chess grandmaster, Sam Rashevsky, the Rebbe observed: "*Chasidic* philosophy encourages us to derive a lesson from everything we see and hear in the world around us. What spiritual lesson can be learned in the service of G-d from the game of chess?"

"...There are two types of players in the game. There are 'officers' - the queen, knight, bishop and rook – and there are 'soldiers,' or pawns. The difference between them is that officers can jump beyond their particular location and can move in all directions, covering ground quicker than the soldiers who can only move forward in one direction and one square at a time.

"Nevertheless, the foot soldier has a certain characteristic which makes him superior. When a pawn reaches the far side of the board, he can become elevated to the rank of a queen."

"The same is true in the game of life. There are two categories of "players": angels and human beings. The angels have greater powers, and can jump from one spiritual realm to the next. However, they can never transform themselves into something else. Human beings, while limited to taking one step at a time, can eventually transform themselves and reach beyond their natural limitations."

The winners in life are not born kings, but are those who grow wings.

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OBSSESSED!

Speaking to a capacity-crowd at the Shaar Hashomayim at a Federation CJA sponsored-event this winter, Rabbi Lord Jonathon Sacks made the following insightful remarks on the history of anti-Semitism:

For millennia, he explained, Jews were singled out for persecution on religious grounds. If we would only abandon our belief and practices and assume the faith of our oppressors, we would be spared and welcomed.

In the 20th century, the Nazis conceived a new type of anti-Semitism; a new mutation of an old virus of baffling resilience. The new anti-Semitism was predicated on scientific research. Rooted in Darwinism, inspired by Nietzsche and supported by scientific data, the Jew was declared an inferior race deserving of elimination.

Today, anti-semitism has morphed once again – this time into the insidious anti-Israel/anti-Zionism bias, fueled no less than in the world's revered halls of academia.

I would like to suggest that all three forms are expressions of one, essential phenomenon.

On one occasion during the March of the Living trip which I had the privilege to lead as rabbi, a speaker drew the following analogy to the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis. "Imagine", he said, "If the Canadian Government were to one day embark upon a course, legislating increasing discriminatory laws against people with green eyes. Hate for no reason other than the different colour of their eyes." The speaker went on to challenge the students whether they would stand idly by or protest and resist. Now whilst the challenge is laudable, the analogy is not.

The Nazis did not hate Jews in the same way that bigoted whites hate blacks. No, Jews are not merely inferior in the Nazi view. Gypsies are. Blacks are. But Jews are not simply a lesser order of being. Jews are a cancer; a state-less creature that attaches itself to its host society eroding and destroying it. One Jew, declared Hitler, can poison an entire volk. Hitler believed that he was chosen by history to engage in the ultimate battle for the survival and destiny of humankind. His was the noblest of all struggles – a war between the the Aryan ubermensch and the Jew. The final solution to the Jewish problem can be no other than the complete annihilation of the Jews down to the very last one. The Nazis didn't hate

the Jews anymore than a surgeon hates a cancerous tumour. The good doctor clinically and single-mindedly pursues every avenue to destroy it. The Jew is unredeemable; his very existence a pernicious threat to the advancement of mankind.

All three forms of anti-semitism are one. We are persecuted by virtue of our very existence.

Let us consider the unique nature of our religion and Jewish identity. To be a member of any other faith, one has to accept specific doctrines as sacred and observe certain practices. If one decides to no longer believe in the particular religion, then one is no longer a member of that faith. This is, of course, quite logical. Not so Judaism. A Jew is a Jew is a Jew. This obstinate religious identity, deeming irrelevant all which other faiths require as essential, lies at the core of the religion-based intolerance that we have been subject to over the millennia. How can a Jew who observes no religious law be viewed by his very faith as still a Jew, and moreover, the same Jew in essence as one who does?! In yesterday's world, one defined by religious dogma, this is both sinister and threatening. What kind of religion is Judaism and what kind of creature is the Jew?

Today's anti-Israel sentiment with its sanctions and vilifications is just another display of the same. The world will not hold the Jewish State to the same standards as it does every other. Israel will never be accepted as another member-state in the family of nations. She is on her own. Forever an outsider.

Regardless of where, how long, the degree of our assimilation or how monumentally we may contribute to a given society – scientifically, culturally, politically and economically – we are forever alien. The Jews of Germany are the most painful example of this inescapable truth. The belief in a global Jewish conspiracy persists today no less today than it did in Czarist Russia or Nazi Germany.

'Behold a people that dwells alone' (Numbers 23:9).

The only answer to anti-Semitism is ... to embrace it.

Yes. We are different. The Chosen. And yes, the world is right, we have designs on the world and all its inhabitants. No, we don't want your money or your daughters. We have been

chosen by the Creator to take responsibility for His world. We are bound by an immutable covenant to ensure that every human being on the face of the earth is appreciated as infinitely precious and granted the freedom to live in peace and dignity. This will be finally realized in the Messianic Era when G-d will be revealed, and every man, women and child will be enveloped in His loving embrace. Heaven on earth.

To accomplish this great mission, the Al-mighty gave us His Torah – His guidance and instructions for living G-dly, meaningful lives. He has charged us to be a 'light unto the nations' by personal example, and by being the Divine guide to a world desperate for morally inspired leadership.

This is the only response that will resonate. It is the only one the world will react positively to. For it is the only answer that validates as it illuminates that which the world has sensed from time immemorial.

With the passage of time, the world's fixation on Israel (so small that on a map of the world, there isn't enough space for the word 'Israel' to be appear within her borders) and the Jew (merely 0.2% of the world's population) only intensifies. Where does this pre-occupation come from? Because, on a sub-conscious level the world knows that it's redemption is inexorably tied with the Jew. When we, both individually and collectively, will fulfill this great calling to be that light, only then will the world be at peace with us.

The closer we are to the actualization of the Messianic promise, the deeper is the obsession with an ancient sliver of land and an ancient people for whom she has always been home.

The time is now. The world is ready. It's up to us.



Nechama, Itchy and Zeldie join me in wishing you and yours a Shana Tovah on all levels.

We look forward to celebrating together MTC's 25th anniversary at our gala on December 1st.

With Hashem's help, the best is yet to come.

Rabbi New

MTC gratefully salutes our devoted 'Sponsors of the Day'

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October 15	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Lee Berdugo	Shevat 23	Joey Adler in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Lou Adler, obm
October 22	Cola Families in honour of the birthday of Michelle Lindsey	Shevat 27	Cola Families in honour of the birthday of Jennifer Devorah
October 24	Howard and Gloria Richman in honour of the birthday of Mr. Reuben Richman	January 2	Lewis & Teri Clarke in honour of the birthday of Hudson Clarke
Kislev 3	Barry Schwartz in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Claire Schwartz, obm	January 4	Cola Families in honour of the birthday of Adam Joshua
Kislev 13	Tuky Treitel and family in honour of the yartzeit of Reb Shaya Treitel, obm	Adar 3	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of Gabriella
Kislev 14	Cola Families in honour of the birthday of Jason Benjamin	Adar 7	Corey and Karen Eisenberg in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Stanley Ralph Eisenberg, obm
Kislev 17	Barry Schwartz in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Hyman Schwartz, obm	Adar 8	David & Lisa Medina in honour of the birthday of Menachem Mendel
Kislev 22	David and Laurie Puterman in honour of the birthday of Ovadia Shalom	Adar 10	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of David and Victoria
November 14	Evan and Osnat Feldman in honour of the birthday of Olivia Raquel	Adar 14	Catherine Claman in honour of the yartzeit of Abraham Claman
November 24	Cola Families in honour of the birthday of Kimberly Stacey	Adar 15	David and Laurie Puterman in honour of Laurie's birthday
Teves 2	Cola Families in honour of the birthday of Edward Israel	Adar 22	Hershey and Laurie Goldenblatt in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Sarah Goldenblatt, obm
		Adar 22	Michael and Elza Hirsch in honour of Elza's birthday

Adar 23	Emmanuel & Heather Amar in honour of Elijah's birthday	April 15	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Lou Adler, of blessed memory
Adar 26	Martin Halickman in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Isadore Halickman, obm	April 25	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Jarrid Adler
February 9	Evan and Osnat Feldman in honour of the birthday of Benjamin	Sivan 1	Tuky Treitel and family in honour of the yartzeit of Menashe ben Yitzchok Mayer, obm
February 21	Evan and Osnat Feldman in honour of the birthday of Jack Isaac	Sivan 15	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of Olivia
Nisan 10	Peter and Marla Veres in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Andre Veres, obm	Sivan 21	David and Laurie Puterman in honour of the birthday of Yisroel
Nisan 17	Philip and Edie Friedman in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Lucy Friedman, obm	Sivan 21	Tuky Treitel and family in honour of the yartzeit of Eliezer Dovid ben Shlomo, obm
Nisan 24	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of Shimmy	Sivan 22	Ronald Pearl in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Goldie Pearl, obm
Nisan 24	Michael and Elza Hirsch in honour of Rochel's birthday	May 6	Mark Lazar in honour of the birthday of Shira Lazar
Nisan 27	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of Joelle	May 11	Cola families in honour of the birthday of Jeremy Samuel
March 1	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Samuel Joshua Gilbert	May 15	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Sary Berdugo
		May 29	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Lauren Adler
Iyar 2	Michael and Barbara Chernack in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Yetta Chernack, obm	Tamuz 5	Robert & Joelle Burke in honour of the yartzeit of Mintzie Siminovith-Burke
Iyar 5	Sara Eldor in honour of her birthday	Tamuz 10	Joey Adler in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Fred Berdugo, obm
Iyar 7	Stanley and Carole Satov in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Miriam Satov, obm	Tamuz 11	David and Laurie Puterman in honour of the birthday of Anaëlle Bracha
Iyar 13	Stanley and Carole Satov in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Dorothy Pockrass, obm	Tamuz 11	David and Laurie Puterman in honour of their wedding anniversary
Iyar 13	Cons families in honour of the birthday of Isaac Akiva	Tamuz 22	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of Samuel
Iyar 13	Julius and Terry Suss in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Marcus Suss, obm	June 18	Cola Families in honour of the birthday of Mandy Sara
Iyar 14	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of Hannah	Av 12	David, Lisa and Danielle Medina in honour of the birthday of Amalya Chavah
Iyar 16	Martin and Joelle Sacksner in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Yaakov Dovid ben Moshe Chaim, obm	Av 19	Jeremy & Mandy Levi in honour of the birthday of Jacob David
Iyar 19	Catherine Claman in honour of the yartzeit of Mary Claman	Elul 3	Cons Families in honour of the birthday of Joshua
Iyar 19	Julius and Terry Suss in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Bella Suss, obm	Elul 10	Tuky Treitel and family in honour of the yartzeit of Tzivia bas Yekusiel Yehuda, obm
Iyar 20	Hershey and Laurie Goldenblatt in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Lester Edward Goldenblatt, obm	Elul 12	Stanley and Carole Satov in honour of the yartzeit of Mr. Richard Satov, obm
Iyar 23	David and Laurie Puterman in honour of the birthday of Yehuda	Elul 15	David and Laurie Puterman in honour of David's birthday
Iyar 23	Arthur and Marion Levitt in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Lillian Levitt Shuchat, obm	Elul 19	Tuky Treitel and family in honour of the yartzeit of Golda Gestetner, obm
Iyar 24	George Galambos in honour of the yartzeit of Mrs. Aniko Galambos, obm	Elul 28	Frances and Gerald Kessner in honour of the yartzeits of Tova Kessner, obm and Avrohom Yakov Kessner, obm Elul 28
Iyar 27	Michael and Elza Hirsch in honour of Yitzhak Laivi's birthday	August 5	Lewis & Teri Clarke in honour of the birthday of Myles Clarke
April 6	Jerry and Roslyn Convoy in honour of the reunion of brothers Jerry and Yehoshua after 63 years	August 9	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Noah Jacob Berdugo
April 8	Joey Adler in honour of her birthday	August 15	Joey Adler in honour of the birthday of Mitchell Adler

I Shall Teach You to Sing!

The night Elie Wiesel met the Rebbe

by MICHAEL CHIGHEL

My first visit to his court lasted almost an entire night," writes Elie Wiesel in his *Memoirs* regarding how he came to Brooklyn, sometime in the early '60s,¹ in order to make the acquaintance of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.



The Rebbe had read some of my works in French, and asked me to explain why I was angry with G-d. 'Because I loved Him too much,' I replied. 'And now?' he asked. 'Now too. And because I love Him, I am angry with Him!' The Rebbe disagreed: 'To love G-d is to accept that you do not understand Him!' I asked whether one could love G-d without having faith. He told me faith had to precede all the rest. 'Rebbe,' I asked, 'how can you believe in G-d after Auschwitz?' He looked at me in silence for a long moment, his hands resting on the table. Then he replied, in a soft, barely audible voice, 'How can you not believe in G-d after Auschwitz?'

That initial, protracted *yechidus* with the Rebbe, climaxing with the Rebbe's rhetorical question, made a permanent impression on Wiesel and an indelible effect on his writing. Wiesel would later go so far as to speak of it as a crisis, a pivotal moment in his literary career: "That was a turning point in my writing, that simple dialogue."³

In 1964, Wiesel published his second novel, *The Gates of the Forest*, a story divided into four seasons, the last of which, "Winter," is a vivid, detailed account of that meeting in the Rebbe's quarters.⁴ The account is grueling, heartbreaking, painfully vulnerable, and at some points just shocking. Auschwitz, of course, is the pivotal question of the conversation. "How can you believe in G-d after Auschwitz?" But as the conversation shifts from emotion to emotion, from argument to counter-argument, the Rebbe keeps pushing his visitor to reveal why he is *really* there, his deepest motivation for the visit. "What do you expect of me?" asks the Rebbe. To which the knee-jerk response is: "Nothing, absolutely nothing." But the Rebbe is patient. By the end of the visit, the visitor will know why he came.

In the meantime, the room is mostly filled with the sound of fury. Wiesel is not afraid of G-d. And therefore he is not afraid of the Rebbe. He speaks to the Rebbe as a plaintiff with a case against G-d, addressing G-d's defense attorney. He expects the Rebbe to work at defending G-d for the crime of Auschwitz, and it would seem that the satisfaction he seeks is to see the Rebbe fail in that task.

But the Rebbe leaves him unsatisfied. Wiesel is utterly unprepared for the Rebbe's counter-proposal. Instead of playing the part of G-d's defense attorney, the Rebbe proposes to act as prosecutor, on Wiesel's behalf. In Wiesel's own account, this startling shift is marked by a controlled explosion of indignation on the Rebbe's part: "... Do you think that I don't know it? That I have no eyes to see, no ears to hear? That my heart doesn't revolt?"

It is in this moment of Wiesel's narrative that we sense a certain degree of oversimplification carried out for the sake of fiction. A novel is no place for detailed philosophical arguments. Fortunately, we have a long letter that the Rebbe wrote to Wiesel less than a year after *The Gates of the Forest* appeared in print, in which the Rebbe articulates his proposed prosecution of G-d in great detail and with sharp force.⁵

I agree with you, of course, that the complaint "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?" [Gen. 18:25] can be authentic and can have its proper force only when it breaks forth from the pain-filled heart of a deep believer. Moreover we find that indeed the first one who ever expressed this complaint was Abraham our father, the greatest believer and the father of "believers, sons of believers" [Shabbat 97a]. We are also told by the sages that the first to have posed the question of "the righteous one who suffers, the wicked one who prospers" was none other than our teacher Moses [Berachot 7a], the same one who explicated to the Jews, and to the entire world, the idea of "I am the Lord your G-d" and "you shall have no other gods" [Exod. 20:2], where the category of "other gods" includes the human intellect and understanding, when one makes these into idols and supreme authorities.

For this reason, I was surprised that you did not see the course of thought through to the end and bring out its conclusion. After all – as you know – the answer to the complaint of Moses our teacher – according to the account of our sages, of blessed memory, when shown how Rabbi Akiva's flesh was ripped off with iron combs, etc., Moses our teacher burst out: "This is Torah, and this is its reward?!" – the answer to this was: "Silence! Thus it arises in the supernal Mind!"

[...] Nevertheless, this did not weaken the faith of Moses our teacher, nor that of other authentic questioners and men. On the contrary, this only served to strengthen their faith,

*The account is grueling,
heartbreaking, painfully
vulnerable, and at some
points just shocking.*



something to be found explicitly in the case of Job; likewise in the case of Abraham our father, who not only stood fast by his faith but was also able to withstand every test; and likewise the other "rebels" who maintained a deep faith until the last day of their lives.

I think you will agree with me that it is no mere coincidence that all authentic questioners retained their trust in G-d. Rather, it could in no way be otherwise. So long as the question is asked with integrity, it is logical that such a deep feeling can come only from the conviction that true justice is the justice that stems from a super-human source, that is, from something higher than both human intellect and human feeling. It is for this reason precisely that the question unsettles not only a person's emotion and intellect, but also his interiority and the essence of his being.

But after the initial tempestuous assault, he has to realize that the entire approach on which the question is based, and of wishing to understand with the intellect that which is higher than the intellect, is something that cannot take place. Moreover, he must – after a rattling outrage and a thorough grieving – ultimately come to the conclusion: Nevertheless I believe [*ani maamin*]! On the contrary – even more strongly.

This is the subtext, the full content, of the Rebbe's rhetorical response, "How can you not believe in G-d after Auschwitz?"

One must read it over a few times, especially the last line, to appreciate the radical and revolutionary character of the Rebbe's response to the question of Auschwitz. Whereas various writers on Holocaust theology have suggested in various ways that a Jew must continue to believe in G-d despite Auschwitz, not a single voice has had the temerity, or the radical logic, to suggest that a Jew must continue to believe in G-d *because* of Auschwitz. For the Rebbe, Auschwitz is not something that should weaken one's belief and trust in G-d. "On the contrary," says the Rebbe, Auschwitz should bring one to place one's faith in G-d "*even more strongly!*"

The radical logic, the logic of holy *chutzpah*,⁶ seems to run as follows. Yes, we must prosecute G-d for Auschwitz. Yes, we must demand from G-d that He give us an explanation. (After all, we cannot explain it with our human intellect.) But in order to prosecute G-d, we must *believe* that G-d is there, and that G-d is inherently benevolent. Without those two

fundamental assumptions, the question cannot be asked at all. In the very demand for an explanation, we affirm our trust in G-d and in His goodness. What the Rebbe wished to impress upon Wiesel was the already operative reality of the emunah, the faith and trust, upon which Wiesel's own fury was premised in all his arguments against G-d.

In light of this extraordinary epistle, those who are familiar with Wiesel's writings can see how that long night in the Rebbe's quarters in Brooklyn was indeed, as Wiesel says, "a turning point in my writing." Wiesel not only went on to write many books on biblical, midrashic, talmudic and chassidic themes. In retrospect, he came to appreciate his entire corpus as an expression, howbeit gnarled and broken, of emunah. As he states in his *Memoirs*:



Elie Wiesel (standing, wearing a beret) at a farbrengen

I have never renounced my faith in G-d. I have risen against His justice, protested His silence and sometimes His absence, but my anger rises up within faith and not outside it. I admit that this is hardly an original position. It is part of Jewish tradition. [. . .] Abraham and Moses, Jeremiah and Rebbe Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev teach us that it is permissible for man to accuse G-d, provided it be done in the name of faith in G-d. If that hurts, so be it. Sometimes we must accept the pain of faith so as not to lose it.⁷

By the end of the long soul-searching session with the Rebbe, Wiesel came to confess, or rather to discover, why he really came to see the Rebbe. ". . . You asked me what I expect of you, and I said I expect nothing. I was mistaken. Make me able to cry."

In the original Yiddish version of the book that came to be called *Night*, Wiesel recalls how the death of his father in Buchenwald had traumatized his capacity for tears. The light of his world was extinguished, he writes. "But I did not cry, and this is what causes me the most grief: this inability to cry. The heart had petrified, the fountainhead of tears had dried up."⁸ When Wiesel pleads with the Rebbe, "Make me able to cry!" we understand that this is not some incidental request blurted out during that

In the very demand for an explanation, we affirm our trust in G-d and in His goodness.

I Shall Teach You to Sing!

(cont'd)

*And if he came in
order to challenge the
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fail to defend G-d, he
was disappointed.*

yechidus, or some flourish added to a fictional novel for dramatic effect. The request is nothing less than Wiesel's secret reason for coming to the Rebbe. He did not come expecting the Rebbe to change the past. And if he came in order to challenge the Rebbe and to hear him fail to defend G-d, he was disappointed in this, as we have seen. Wiesel came to the Rebbe for the same reason that anyone ever went to Rebbe: he went to discover his *true request*. And so the face-to-face with the Rebbe, the being-seen by the Rebbe, allowed him to see his true self, and to articulate his deep-felt need to become transparent to himself. "Make me able to cry!"

And the Rebbe's response? Did the Rebbe put his arms around the broken man and allow him to experience his long-awaited catharsis? Did he come forth with his famous paternal love, and allow Wiesel to weep on his shoulder and mourn for the father lost in Buchenwald?

Again the Rebbe responded in an unexpected manner. Yes, he did encourage Wiesel to find the needed catharsis for his grief. But not in weeping. Because weeping is not an adequate form of catharsis for the colossal suffering of Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

The Rebbe shook his head.

"That's not enough. I shall teach you to sing."

"Grown people don't cry; beggars don't cry." The Rebbe added, "Crying is for children. Are you still a child, and is your life a child's dream? No, crying is no use. You must sing."⁹

In 1973, Wiesel composed a cantata titled, *Ani Maamin: A Song Lost and Found Again*. The song concludes with the following verses:

I believe in you,
Even against your will.
Even if you punish me
For believing in you.
Blessed are the fools
Who shout their faith.
Blessed are the fools
Who go on laughing.
Who mock the man who mocks the Jew,
Who help their brothers
Singing, over and over and over:
I believe.
I believe in the coming of the Messiah,
And though he tarries,
I wait daily for his coming.
I believe. ■



Michael Chighel (Kigel) received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Toronto for his dissertation on the Book of Job, after a specialization in 20th-century French and German thought. In Canada he taught in the departments of philosophy and of Jewish studies at the universities of York, Queen's and Waterloo. He produced *Passages and Messages* for eleven seasons on Canadian television (CTS). Until this year he held the Rohr Chair of Jewish Studies at the Lauder Business School in Vienna, where he taught Torah, European ethics and political economy. He has translated a number of books and published various articles in Jewish thought. Michael and his family have recently made aliyah, and now live in Jerusalem.

FOOTNOTES

1. Since *The Gates of the Forest* (Les portes de la forêt), Wiesel's initial quasi-fictional account of this meeting, appeared in print in August of 1964, the visit must have taken place before that, and probably after September 1962, the publication date of *The Town Beyond the Wall* (La Ville de la chance), this being the clearest sample of a work in French in which the author is "angry with G-d."
2. Elie Wiesel, *Memoirs: All the Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York, 1995) pp. 402-3.
3. *Against Silence*, ed. Irving Abrahamson, vol. 3 (New York, 1985), p. 63. Cf. Wiesel, *Memoirs*, pp. 402f.
4. Wiesel, *Gates of the Forest* (New York, 1966), pp. 189-204.
5. This is a more or less free translation of the Rebbe's Yiddish letter dated 24 Nissan 5725 (26 April 1965). It is printed in R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 33 (New York: Kehot, 2001), pp. 255-60.
6. Chutzpah dikdusha is a concept in chassidic teachings that parallels shtus dikdusha, "holy folly."
7. Wiesel, *Memoirs*, p. 84.
8. Eliezer Wiesel, . . . Un di velt hot geshvigen (Buenos Aires: Union Central Israelita Polaca en la Argentina, 1956), p. 238. This text was heavily reworked and truncated, with Jérôme Lindon, to produce *La nuit* (Paris: Minuit, 1958).
9. *Ibid.*, p. 200. Wiesel laments, in another context, how Buchenwald has erected a wall between his childhood masters in Sighet, who taught him Torah and song, and the present. "I have betrayed them: I no longer know how to sing." Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time* (New York, 1982), pp. 13f.

Seeing G-d

In tribute to my brother

by RABBI NEW

One of the unique properties of the Hebrew language is that words often have more than one –related – meaning. The Hebrew words that refer to one who lives his life in awe of G-d are 'Yorei Elokim'. Now the word 'yorei' also means to see. To behold. So 'Yorei Elokim' also translates as 'one who sees G-d'. The connection between the two translations is that the one who can see G-d is the one who can truly be in awe of Him.

My brother Chaim, of blessed memory, was a deeply devout man, yet defied the conventional limits of religiosity. Chaim'l – as his family lovingly called him – saw G-d in places where others were afraid to go for fear that they would not see Him there. "There is no place devoid of Him" declares the ancient mystical texts of the Jewish faith, the Kabbalah. My brother lived that. He saw G-d in every part of G-d's world that his inquisitive mind and searching soul led him. In music of all genres. In art in its endless expression. In nature in its grandeur and in its tender and exquisite detail. In man's creativity and talent. With his soulful and discerning eye, Chaim'l captured the beauty with his photographic lens so that we too can, perhaps, in some way, glimpse the Divine as he did. ■



This tribute, which addresses only one facet of my brother's life, was written for one of his daughters who requested I write something about him for a university project. She was creating an archive of her father's portfolio photography. The photograph below is from that collection.

Many of you have read the emails that I and my surviving brothers wrote in the weeks following his sudden passing. If you, dear reader, did not, I strongly recommend that you do. The emotional response and inspiration people experienced upon reading about his extraordinary life has been nothing short of phenomenal. It would be my pleasure to forward or give them to you.



MTC Celebrates Draw 2016

Over \$500,000 was raised through the sale of 4,870 tickets and corporate and event sponsorships.

A heartfelt 'Yasher Koach' to our co-chairs Lou Flam and Eric Howard, our captains, Michael Chernack, Sara Eldor, John Finkelstein, Marc Kimmel, Velvel Minkowitz, Rabbi New, Aaron Spiro, Jacob Tink, Chaim Treitel, Michael Zukor. And to our canvassers, corporate and event sponsors, whose combined effort and dedication made the MTC DRAW 2016 an outstanding success.

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Mark Strohl, CA of PWG audited the draw and oversaw the legalities.

Mark Smith won the grand prize of \$18,000. Michael & Avital Goldenblatt won the second prize of \$3,600. Michael Hollinger Insurance and Dan Wise of Crojack Capital Inc. won the third and fourth prizes of \$1,800 each. Jerry & Roslyn Convoy won the fifth prize of \$1,000.

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The Other Side of the Tapestry

by SHIFRA HENDRIE

S. Paul, Minnesota, February, 1979

I sat in the hall waiting for the program to start. I felt alone in a room filled with hundreds of people. I had missed my ride to the country. Instead, I was here, in this hall full of Chassidic Jews – a stranger in a strange land ...



Shifra Hendrie is a personal and spiritual coach who has been studying and teaching the principles of authentic Kabbalah for over 20 years.

Although my grandfather's stories told of a life of struggle and sacrifice, when he spoke of his life in the old world it seemed filled with magic and beauty.



A World That Was

I grew up like any other middle-class American. I went to college, dated, had fun with my friends. Although I happened to be Jewish – and was proud of it – my Judaism didn't play a big role in my life.

My mother grew up in Chicago in an observant home. Her father, my beloved grandfather, passed away in 1973. When I was little he held me on his lap and told me stories of his own childhood – stories that seemed like fairy tales to me.

When he was 6 years old and his little brother only 5, their parents left Europe for America to build a better life for the family. The two little boys – practically babies – were left in the old country. There, they lived and studied full time in a "yeshivah" – the kind of traditional Jewish school that didn't exist in America at that time.

The village they lived in was extremely poor, and their school had no budget for feeding the kids. The villagers helped out by opening their homes and sharing what little they had. Often that little was almost nothing.

At night, the children slept on benches in the school. They studied standing up so that they wouldn't fall asleep over the complex texts. All was for the purpose of passing the learning, the tradition, to the next generation in a pure and unbroken chain.

Although my grandfather's stories told of a life of struggle and sacrifice, when he spoke of his life in the old world it seemed filled with magic and beauty.

My great-grandparents worked hard, and by the time my grandfather was seventeen years old they were able to bring him and his brother to America. When he saw his mother for the first time in America, he was an adult. He didn't recognize her.

Nonetheless, the foresight and self-sacrifice of his parents saved the family's lives. Some years later, when the Nazis rolled into that very village, not one

person was left alive. The pictures of my grandfather's lost village, Eisheshuk, now cover the tower of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. They tell the story of a world that once was and is no more.

I loved my grandfather very, very much. But my grandparents had passed away several years before, and whatever little bit of connection to our Jewish roots my family still maintained was eroding. I was no longer an adoring little child. I was a hip college student, quite disinterested in tradition or religion.

And then, out of the blue, my 15-year-old brother suddenly declared that he wanted to be observant. My reaction was ... huh??? That's for grandparents, not for you! Judaism is beautiful, yes – in its place. In the past.

My Journey Begins

But my brother persisted, eventually introducing me to the vast mystical world of Kabbalah and Chassidut. Once I began to study, I was exposed to a profound and fascinating wisdom that was unlike anything I had seen or heard anywhere else. I sensed a truth that I couldn't deny. I began, tentatively, to eat kosher food and observe the Sabbath. But it still didn't seem to feel right. The problem wasn't with the observance itself. It was me. I felt acutely and painfully out of place, caught between two worlds without a solid foot in either one.

Hardly any of my friends were Jewish. In fact, I wasn't even sure that I believed in G-d – and I was sure that if there was a G-d, He wouldn't particularly notice or care about me.

So when the opportunity came up to drive to the country that Friday night with some friends I was tempted to go. But at the last minute, I decided to give the Shabbat one last try.

So there I sat, that Saturday night, feeling that I had very little in common with these odd people, but still curious to get one final glimpse into their fascinating, mystical world.

There Are No Accidents

The white-bearded Chassidic rabbi at the dais was a disciple of a Rebbe – a great Chassidic Master – whose passing, some 29 years before, was being commemorated this night.

"It's no accident that we're all here together on this particular night," began the rabbi in a deep, sonorous voice. "The Rebbe often quoted the Baal

Shem Tov, first of the chassidic masters, concerning the principle of Divine Providence. He constantly emphasized that everything a person sees, he's meant to see, and everything that he hears, he's meant to hear. He taught that whenever something happens that makes a particularly strong impression on a person, that person needs to be aware that this experience was custom-created by G-d specifically for him, in order to give him direction and insight in fulfilling his Divine mission.

"The fact that I'm here tonight, together with all of you, is surely significant."

The rabbi continued speaking. He talked about the Rebbe, telling stories of his life – stories that illuminated his greatness, his genius, his holiness, his kindness.

Then he began a story that caught my attention. In fact, it riveted me.

"In the months and years after the Holocaust," he told, "we had a fund. We collected money to distribute to the desperate refugees left in Europe after the war.

"Among those there at the time was a man by the name of Mr. Samuel Broida. He was the owner of a kosher meat packaging company in Chicago. He was also the president of our fund.

"Altogether we managed to collect \$180,000; a great deal of money at that time. Mr. Broida was delegated to take the money to Europe, to help a group of refugees who had fled from Russia to a suburb of Paris. When he returned home, he told us that something had happened to him; something he would never forget.

"When I was in Paris," said Mr. Broida, "I met a little boy about 8 years old. I asked him if there was something I could do for him. I thought the poor little boy would ask me for shoes, clothes, food, candy, a suit, a hat ... but I was wrong. He asked for none of those things. Instead, he said to me, 'I want to be able to go to America and see the Lubavitcher Rebbe someday.'"

"I myself," continued Mr. Broida, "am not a follower of the Rebbe, not at all. I've heard stories of the Rebbe, of his miracles, of the power of his blessings, of his holiness and greatness. But I didn't really believe them. I thought to myself: How is this possible? How is it possible for any human being to leave such a powerful impression on his followers, that he is more real to them than their hunger, their

devastation or their poverty? And this was a small child! His answer was completely spontaneous. How it is possible that a small child, a poor child, a hungry child, wants nothing in the world but to catch a glimpse of this holy man?"



PHOTO: HERITAGE PAMPHLINGS

"If a Rebbe," concluded Mr. Broida, "30 years after leaving a place, leaves this kind of impression, then it has to be because he truly is the kind of human being that the world knows nothing of. The kind of human being that I had assumed could not exist. The kind of human being that is head and shoulders greater than the rest of us..."

The Rebbe's Promise

"After this," the rabbi said, "Mr. Broida asked me if I would take him to New York to meet the Rebbe for himself. This was 1947, just a couple of years before the Rebbe's passing. The Rebbe's health by this time was frail. He had been imprisoned and severely tortured by the Russians who found his powerful religious leadership a great threat to the communist regime. He was able to see very few people each day and there was a long waiting list, but I managed to get Mr. Broida an appointment. And he told me afterwards that it was one of the most profound and incredible experiences of his life.

"But then," continued the rabbi, "Something even more amazing happened. A Rebbe, like any person who receives the confidence of others, never repeats a word of what happens in a private audience between him and any other person. If a

Samuel A. (Karklinsky) Broida (1887-1973) on left with two unknown men in Broida Brothers Dry Goods, Manufacturers and Mill, St. Louis, Missouri. Taken between 1910-1929.

Altogether we managed to collect \$180,000; a great deal of money at that time.

Tapestry

(cont'd)

lawyer or a doctor is bound by confidentiality, how much more so a Rebbe! Nevertheless, after Mr. Broida saw the Rebbe, the Rebbe called me into his office to tell me about his meeting with Mr. Broida.

I knew what had happened to the Rebbe's promise. Mr. Broida was my grandfather.

The Other Side of the Tapestry

The rabbi began that night his talk with a discussion of Divine Providence. That was no accident. Nothing ever is.

Though he was only in his 50s, this rabbi – Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Hecht of Chicago – unexpectedly passed away a short few months after that evening. If he had not been there at that time, if I had taken the Friday night ride to the country, if he had told a different story, if he had told this one and just not mentioned my grandfather's name . . . I would be living an entirely different life. And you would not be reading these words today.

On that night, I, the agnostic, was granted a rare privilege. I was given an open glimpse of an alternate plane of reality.

In that glimpse I saw many things. I saw the complex and awesome power of Divine Providence and the infinite care with which G-d weaves together the events of every person's unique and personal life. I saw the awesome power of a true *tzaddik*, his ability to see beyond time and beyond worlds, to reach into the reservoir of souls and empower a specific soul to fulfill its destiny, to make a promise and keep it.

And finally, I saw that G-d plants messages for us all, and those messages, if we allow them to, can change our lives. ■

"Mr. Broida came in to me today,' the Rebbe told me. 'I asked him about his business, his community work. We talked. And when we were done talking, I asked him: "And what are your children doing?" He burst into tears and told me that of his six children, none were observant anymore. I promised him,' continued the Rebbe, 'that he would have the joy of seeing his

Judaism come alive again one day in his grandchildren.'

"I have often wondered since then," concluded the rabbi, "what happened to the Rebbe's promise. Mr. Broida passed away years ago and I don't know what happened to his family. But one thing I do know. The promise of a *tzaddik*, of a Rebbe, is never made in vain."

The speech was over. I sat in my seat with tears pouring down my face.



PHOTO: HECHT FAMILY

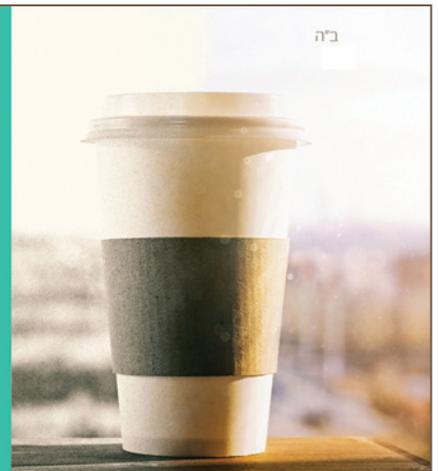
Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Hecht, fifth from left, with his mother and brothers

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A Lost Phone and a Found Coin

by JAY GOTTEINER

14/04/2016

Last Friday afternoon, I left my office at 5:00 pm knowing I had two hours left for Shabbat preparations before candle lighting time. I had a fifteen-minute drive home where I could grill some fish, broil some beef kebabs, make a couple of salads and down two beers, all in an hour. In the meantime, my wife was coordinating our children's haircuts and running other errands.

Since I had a couple of minutes to spare, I stopped at a convenience store in Town of Mont Royal, (half way between my office and home) to buy a lottery ticket. After a quick chat with the clerk, I headed home. As I turned past Cote-Des-Neiges Plaza, I suddenly realized I did not have my lifeline to the world – my cellphone. Did I leave it at the convenience store? Or did I leave it at the office? I quickly turned the car around and started to head back to the store. To my horror, the fifteen-minute drive from work to home was not so easily negotiable in reverse on a Friday afternoon. Every short cut and every street was blocked by traffic. It was clear that I could never make it to the store and back home, finish my preparations and be ready for Shabbat. I dare say, most of us, as I do, have a love affair with our phones. Being without one is nerve-wracking enough. When it is lost, that's all you can think about.

I decided that I would return after Shabbat and look for the phone. Once I made that decision I felt free. I was not going to ruminate over it; it was out of my control now. I was going to embrace the freedom of Shabbat.

I arrived home, cooked and prepared, when my sister-in-law from Brooklyn called. During the conversation, the second line beeped. It was my wife. "I have your phone."

How could that be possible? My wife travels no more than a two kilometer radius from our home 99% of the time. She went to TMR to get my son a haircut because his regular barber was not available. The last time she went to that part of town was over a year ago. After unsuccessfully texting me several times she called me and the clerk answered the phone. "The owner of this telephone left

it here." The barber shop is two doors away from that particular convenience store. My wife showed up, picked up the phone and headed home. My sister-in-law, waiting on the other line, was as surprised as I was.



*I suddenly realized I did not
have my lifeline to the world –
my cellphone. Did I leave it
at the convenience store?*

Or did I leave it at the office?

She said, "That was the result of your positive attitude. You made Shabbat your priority over all else, even your cellphone!"

It left me uplifted and strengthened in my faith about Who runs the world.

After Shabbat I checked the lottery ticket. I won \$20. And much more in spiritual dollars!

26/7/2016

At my office one Tuesday, I interrupted my work at about 8:45 am and put on my tefillin, as has become my daily ritual for the last twenty months or so.

My practice is to reach into a cabinet behind my desk, into a coffee can in which there are coins that I use for tzedakah. This particular time I reached in and pulled out a toonie. I am not proud to share this, but my spontaneous reaction was, "A toonie! Why couldn't I pull out a quarter or a dime?"

An absurd thought. The coins are sitting there dormant and not there for me to live off. It was my inner cheapness, my *yetzer hara* (selfish inclination), rearing its ugly head. A number of thoughts raced through my mind. First I scolded myself for being cheap. Then I thought that tzedakah pays itself back. Then I scolded myself for giving tzedakah so I could benefit! While reproaching myself on my miserly and self-serving tzedakah habits, the thought flashed through my mind as I was about to start my morning prayer, that when I read the Shema I do it quickly, so as to finish and go back to work as soon as possible. No real meaning or commitment there. So I told myself, "Say it slowly, say it with purpose and say it with meaning." I did so; both in Hebrew and in English. I carefully put away my tefillin and sat at my desk. At that precise moment, an email came into my inbox. It was a reply to an email I had sent about a year earlier. "Sorry I did not get back to you sooner. We are considering a new supplier and would like to know if you can meet with us."

I have been targeting this company for twelve years. They are a huge multi-national conglomerate. I have sent emails, made phone calls, sent specialized presentations and have received nothing but the cold response: "We are happy with our suppliers. Don't bother quoting." Even that discouraging comment I was only lucky enough to receive twice, despite dozens of attempts at communication. For twelve years I have been hounding them to no avail and today, now, I got this...

The question I ask myself now is: Am I getting messages every day and not noticing them? ■

MTC Moments



The Jerusalem Rabbi

Who Met President Ulysses S. Grant

by DR. YITZCHOK LEVINE

Dr. Yitzchok Levine is a professor at the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey.



Ulysses S. Grant

By 1860, as a young man, he traveled to India, Persia, China and Australia, to raise funds for the poor of Jerusalem and Hebron.

The tradition of representatives of various communities and charities in the Holy Land coming to America to collect funds dates back to the seventeenth century. One of the most fascinating of these *meshulachim* was Rabbi Chaim (Hayyim) Tzvi (Zevi, Zvi) Schneerson, who came to America in 1869.

Rabbi Schneerson was born in Russia in 1833 or 1834. He was a great-grandson of the *Baal HaTanya*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Chassidus. In 1840, he emigrated to the Holy Land (then known as Palestine) with his family. "His brilliance in Talmudic learning moved the rabbis to ordain him at his bar mitzvah. By 1860, as a young man, he traveled to India, Persia, China and Australia, to raise funds for the poor of Jerusalem and Hebron; also to rebuild the walled city of Jerusalem." He also spent time in Romania. Considering the difficulties of travel in the 19th century, one has to marvel at how he overcame the obstacles he must have encountered en route to these far-flung places.

Rabbi Schneerson possessed daring and adaptability to an unusual degree. When he traveled as a *meshulach*, he wore a white robe over a long yellow vest, a thick colorful belt, and a red oriental fez. He was a handsome man with piercing eyes. In short, as the portrait included in this article clearly indicates, he made a striking and exotic impression on all who met him.

Visit to America

In the late 1860s, Rabbi Schneerson left from Jerusalem for Paris and London, and finally arrived in New York in early 1869. However, he did not come to America to raise money. His goal was to improve relations between the United States and Palestine through his personal diplomatic intervention. On February 17, 1869, Rabbi Schneerson delivered a lecture at the New York Historical Society by invitation.

Shortly thereafter, Rabbi Schneerson traveled to Washington, D.C. As told in *Palestine and Roumania: A Description of the Holy Land*: "He lectured twice in the presence of large and appreciative audiences, among them the Turkish ambassador, members of the President's family, and several of the Ministry and of Congress. His eloquence and fluency in the English language were generally admired, and his words made a good impression upon the audience."

He then managed to obtain an interview with Secretary of State Hamilton Fish. Rabbi Schneerson pointed out that the American Consul to Jerusalem had been mixing Christian proselytizing with his diplomatic duties. Indeed, the consul had personally tried to entice a Jewish girl to convert to Christianity. Not long after his meeting with Fish, Rabbi Schneerson was invited to meet the President of the United States.

Meeting with President Ulysses S. Grant

As told in *The First Rabbi and Palestine and Roumania*: "The story of his visit, reported in *The National Intelligencer* of the capital city, was that Schneerson, attired in his oriental costume, addressed the President. Grant then rose courteously to receive the Rabbi who thereupon said:

"Mr. President, permit me to give my thanks to the Alm-ghty, whose mercy brought me here to behold the face of the chosen by the millions of this great nation.... I come to your Excellency from the East, ... to entreat you in the name of G-d, who created all men equal, to listen to the prayer of your humble servant, standing before you to advocate the cause of his oppressed brethren in the Holy Land.

The Israelites in Palestine possess no political or civil rights whatever, and oftentimes deprived of protection by the representatives of the civilized nations which the Christians enjoy, are exposed to violence and arbitrary rule. The only shelter the Israelites occasionally find is in the courts of the different European consulates, where one of their co-religionists is employed either as interpreter or deputy consul, who convey their grievances to the proper channel. This free republic, alone, whose banner covers the oppressed, whose foundation is based on equality, toleration, and liberty of conscience, has no Israelites employed near the consul at Jerusalem.

"I do pray, therefore, your Excellency, to turn your attention to the deplorable condition of my brethren in the Orient, that the principles of this Government may be truly embodied in its representatives abroad; and I do further pray that your Excellency may show me that mark of favor which will enable my brethren in the Holy Land in the hour of need to seek refuge under the Stars and Stripes, that this free country and its exalted chief should be blessed on the sacred spot of our common ancestors!

"At the close of his address, the President, evidently deeply moved by the Rabbi's sincere and

feeling words, inquired with interest as to the circumstances affecting the Jews at Jerusalem which might be guarded by the American Consulate; and replied, with his wonted quick decision, 'I shall look into this matter with care.'

"The Rabbi then closed the interview with the following fervent invocation: 'Before I part from you, Mr. President, allow me to offer my fervent prayer from the depth of my heart: Alm-ghty G-d, Whose dominion is an everlasting kingdom, may He bless and preserve, guard and assist your Excellency and your family. May the Supreme King of Kings grant you a long life, and inspire you with benevolence and friendship towards all mankind.'

"At its close, the whole crowd, who had forgotten each his own personal interest in the impressive scene which was passing, were seen to be affected, some even to tears; and from some lips a fervent 'Amen' was heard in response. The President replied, with evident feeling, 'I thank you for your wishes and prayers!'

"While he was making a note for future reference, the Rabbi and his friends retired. Even office seekers seemed to say, 'That man's mission ought not to fail! Of course, American sympathy will respond to such an appeal; and the American Government cannot refuse so humble a request as that the Israelites of our own and other lands shall have in the American Consulate at Jerusalem, an advocate whose voice will be heard throughout Christendom, as well as at the court of the greatest of the Mahomedan powers.'

Amazingly, as told in *Roumania, America and World Jewry*, "The erring diplomat was recalled, to the satisfaction of Palestinian Jewry and the delight of the *meshulach* who accomplished it. Why Grant and Fish willingly met the oddly clad foreigner is unclear, even though the global responsibilities of American presidents were not very taxing.

"Curiosity or cordiality aside, the new president, only three months in office, desired to please Jewish opinion which had shown during the Presidential campaign of 1868 that it remembered his anti-Jewish General Order No. 11 of Civil War days."

His Trip Across America

Shortly after meeting with President Grant, Rabbi Schneerson embarked upon a tour that took him all the way across America to California.

In May, he traveled to Cincinnati, where he told audiences that he felt he could discern the finger of G-d pointing to a day "not far distant, he hoped, when the great deliverance would take place and the land [of Israel] be restored to the Jewish people."

Returning to New York, Rabbi Schneerson lectured at Cooper Institute, introduced by the Christian clergyman, the Reverend Dr. Howard Crosby. He stressed the need to purchase land and erect buildings. He pointed out that Abraham too, bought land, even though it had been divinely promised to him. America, he felt, was the chosen agent for the restoration of the Jewish homeland.

He returned to New York for Pesach and then, on April 27, 1870, began the long railroad trip that would take him cross-country to California. (The transcontinental railroad was completed on May 10, 1869.) There he delivered major addresses in Los Angeles and San Francisco. As he traveled across America, Rabbi Schneerson received a number of invitations to speak before Jewish and non-Jewish audience such as this one, from *Palestine and Roumania*:

SALT LAKE CITY, UT, November, 1870.

RABBI H. Z. Sneersohn, San Francisco:

DEAR SIR — Your favor of 29th ult. is to hand. In reply permit me to say it will afford our citizens much pleasure to have you address them in the Tabernacle on subjects of such deep and abiding interest to us all as the past history and present condition of G-d's covenant people, Israel.

If possible please inform me, a day or two in advance of your coming, when you will be here, so that the people may be notified through the Press of your intended visit, and the Tabernacle be prepared for your lecture.

I remain, Dear Sir, Very Sincerely Yours,

In the cause of Israel,

BRIGHAM YOUNG.

(I have not been able to determine if Rabbi Schneerson actually accepted Brigham Young's invitation to address the Mormons.)



רבי חיים צבי שניאורסון
(תקצ"ד—תרמ"ב)

Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Schneerson

Jerusalem Rabbi

(cont'd)

Behind the scenes, Rabbi Schneerson lobbied for the appointment of Benjamin Franklin Peixotto (1834 – 1890) as consul to Romania.

*This article is based on the following sources: (1) *The First Rabbi: Origins of Conflict Between Orthodox and Reform: Jewish Polemic Warfare in Pre-Civil War America: A Biographical History*, by I. Harold Sharman, Pangloss Pr, Santa Barbara, California, U.S.A., 1988, pages 527 - 531; (2) *Roumania, America, and World Jewry: Consul Peixotto in Bucharest, 1870 – 1876* by Lloyd P. Gartner, *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (1961- 1978); Sep 1968-Jun 1969; 58; and (3) *Palestine and Roumania: A Description of the Holy Land and the Past and Present State of Roumania and the Roumanian Jews* by Hayyim Zvi Sneersohn, Arno Press, New York, 1977.*

Efforts on Behalf of Romanian Jewry

Rabbi Schneerson visited Romania twice during the 1860s. While there, he witnessed the terrible state of degradation in which the country's 500,000 Jews were forced to live. Beginning in 1866, orders were issued confiscating Jewish property. Jewish farmers were expelled from their farms, and contracts made by Jewish farmers with either the government or private persons were annulled. Many Jews were indiscriminately arrested by the army and forced to leave Romania without due process. In short, the lives of the Jews of Romania became intolerable.

In light of his success in getting the American consul to Jerusalem removed, Rabbi Schneerson, on January 19, 1870, while visiting Chicago, wrote a long letter to President Grant on behalf of his downtrodden brethren in Romania. After thanking the President for appointing a new consul to Jerusalem, he continued:

"Therefore, I feel myself encouraged in again praying to the great American people and their chosen chieftain. Five hundred thousand souls in Roumania are ... subject to the malicious will of all. Their crime is their belief in One G-d; their sin, that they are scions of the stock of Abraham.

"The children of Israel live there as a scattered flock of defenseless sheep – as helpless orphans. None takes heed of their wailings. On all the earth, there is no Israelite the occupant of a throne or in any position of might, whence he could speak a weighty word for these unfortunates.

"The influence of the United States can be exerted in two different ways ... in the appointment of consuls friendly toward our race in that country [Romania]; but more especially would such an appointment prove efficacious ... if a Jewish citizen were sent there as consul... . (*The First Rabbi*)

After his signature on this letter, he added the title "Rabbi from Jerusalem," implicitly giving the impression that his request had some sort of diplomatic status.

Behind the scenes, Rabbi Schneerson lobbied for the appointment of Benjamin Franklin Peixotto (1834 – 1890) as consul to Romania. He had met Peixotto in California and was most impressed by him.

Peixotto, a descendent of colonial Sephardic Jewry, was the grandson of Moses Levi Maduro

Peixotto (1767 – 1828), who served as Hazzan of Congregation Shearith Israel of New York from 1816 to 1828. His father was Dr. Daniel Levy Maduro Peixotto (1800 – 1843), a well-known physician.

There were other contenders for the position and few expected Rabbi Schneerson's efforts to be successful. However, on July 8, 1870, the Jewish Messenger reported Peixotto's confirmation by the Senate in this unsalaried post.

Peixotto left San Francisco on November 2, 1870, and sailed from New York seven weeks later. He finally arrived in Bucharest on February 11, 1871. Rabbi Aaron J. Messing of San Francisco trumpeted the diplomatic feat achieved in Washington in the European Hebrew and Yiddish press. His words must have been music to Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Schneerson's ears, for he had again accomplished what many thought impossible! Rabbi Schneerson was given full credit for the historic appointment.

The First Proto-Israeli Diplomat

Rabbi Schneerson eventually returned to Jerusalem, becoming an American citizen before his departure from the United States. He died in South Africa in 1881 or 1882 while on a mission to collect funds for the needy in Israel. He had one son, Moshe, and two daughters. There is no record of any grandchildren.

In most of his talks, Rabbi Schneerson stressed the idea that the Jews would soon be given control of the Holy Land. He proposed plans for the return of the Jews in large numbers to the Holy Land and for the building of viable Jewish agricultural communities there.

At the time, many felt that his proposals were mere dreams, but we know from a historical perspective that his proposals were indeed achievable.

Rabbi Schneerson became convinced that "the Stars and Stripes would be a banner protecting the oppressed people of Israel."

His success in influencing the appointment of a new consul to Jerusalem and a Jewish consul in Bucharest, Romania, made him the first proto-Israeli diplomat. ■

TFS

Young Leadership

MTL's Jewish Young Adult Community

TFS Young Leadership has evolved from a volunteer project for young adults, to a dynamic community of Jewish 20's and 30's, who power The Family Store and enjoy a wide array of social and educational programs.

The Family Store is a subsidized grocery warehouse that caters to over 500 modest-income families, in a manner that maintains the dignity of the patron.

The Family Store and TFS Young Leadership is a collaborative project of the Chai Center and Montreal Torah Center (MTC.)

For more info please contact Rabbi Getzy at getzy@themtc.com



Mazeltovs

Rabbi & Nechama New and family on the birth of a daughter to **Yossi & Chaya Schera Spalter**, on the birth of a daughter to **Rivkah & Levi Levitin** and on the birth of a daughter to **Leizer Dovid/Doodz & Mushky New**



Getzy & Shaina Markowitz and family on the birth of twin boys



Itchy & Zeldie Treitel and family on the birth of a daughter to

Moshe & Mushky Hecht and on the marriage of **Ari Treitel & Rivka Herson**



Velvel & Baila Minkowitz and family on the Bar Mitzva of **Naftoli Minkowitz** and on the birth of a son

Yossi & Nathalie Davis on the birth of a grandson

Letovsky & Gates families on the marriage of **Eric & Bethia Letovsky**

Diament & Hagar families on the birth of a daughter to **Sholom & Sarah Diament**

Eldor & Karachinsky families on the birth of a daughter to **Mark & Tania Karachinsky**

Gabe & Lindsey Benhamron on the birth of twins, a boy & a girl

Greenspoon & Cobrin families on the Bar Mitzvah of **Jonah Greenspoon**

Medina & Erdos families on the birth of twin boys to **David & Lisa Medina**

Gerry & Frances Kessner and family on the Bar Mitzvah of **Tzvi Binyomin/Tylor Benjamin Field**

Rosenfeld, Treitel & Hurwitz families on the birth of a son to **Eli & Rivky Hurwitz**

Treitel & Grossbaum families on the birth of a daughter to **Bentzion & Feigie Treitel**

Sara Eldor & Shlomo Simhon on their marriage

Strasser & Segal families on the Bar Mitzvah of **Spencer Strasser**

Nathan & Sara Light on the birth of a daughter

Rosenfeld & Treitel families on the Bar Mitzvah of **Moshe Rosenfeld**

Rosenthal & Jivotovsky families on the birth of a son to **Shawn & Annat Rosenthal**

Tsibidis & Goldberg families on the Bar Mitzvah of **Jarred (Yehuda) Tsibidis**

Moshe Cling & Leah Appel on their marriage

Elisabeth & Gad Abudarham on the Bar Mitzvah of their son **Ezra David Binyamin**

Joy & Larry Kurlender on the birth of a son to **Lisa & Omri Butbul**

Kugler family on the engagement of **Perlyne Kugler & Jacques Balayla**

Eric & Ilka Gozlan on the birth of a daughter

Gansbourg & Marasow families on the marriage of **Levi Ganzbourg & Perel Marozow**

Spiro & Sculnick families on the birth of a daughter to **Aaron & Sara Riva (Amanda) Spiro**

Harvey & Barbara Dubrofsky and Yona & Ezra Levy of Los Angeles on the engagement of **Lonny Dubrofsky & Natalie Levy**

Blankrot family on the engagement of **Liat Zilberstein & Avrum Levi**

Levy & Benaroch families on the birth of a daughter to **Shirley & David Levy**

Amar & Charlap families on **Elijah's Bar Mitzah**

Levi & Chanie Rosenfeld and family on the birth of a son

Berel & Eliana Solomon and family on the birth of a daughter

Youth Director Rochel Zirkind and family on her marriage to **Yanki Abrams**

Kastner & Greenberg families on the Bar Mitzva of **Blake Kastner**

Sholom & Sarah Diament and family on the Bat Mitzva of their daughter **Bella**

Perez & Avitan families on the marriage of **Idit & David Avitan**

Rosenfeld & Treitel on the birth of a son to **Shmullie & Chana Wolosow**

Elkin & Indig families on the birth of a daughter to **Moshe David & Shaina Elkin**

Ashley & Jeff Liberman on the birth of a daughter

Abramovitch & Alblia families on the birth of a daughter to **Jamie & Natasha Abramovitch**

Zukor & Kestenbaum families on the birth of a son to **Jordan & Riva Kestenbaum**

Levi & Cola families on the birth of a son to **Jeremy & Mandy Levi**

Bauer & Gill families on the Bar Mitzvah of **Liam Bauer**

Glazer, Kramer & Migicovsky families on the Bar Mitzvah of **Ryan Glazer**

Suss family on the birth of a daughter to **Daniel & Ji-Hae Suss**

Cola & Hasen families on the birth of a daughter to **Joshua & Michelle Hasen**

Roselee Sztern and family on the birth of a son to **Faigie and Aryeh Sztern**

Shore and Seidman families on the birth of a son to **Loren & Jessica Shore**

Harroch, Amar & Steinman families on the birth of a son to **Mindy & Daniel Harroch**

Greenberg and Horowitz families on the engagement of **Adam Greenberg & Julia Horowitz**

Spiro & Benatar families on the birth of a daughter to **Adam & Racheli Spiro**

Jay & Nathalie Gotteiner and the Gotteiner & Bendavid families on **Jonathan's Bar Mitzvah**

Assaf & Rita Simhon on the birth of a daughter

Simhon & Attias families
on the engagement of
Danny Simhon & Sarah Attias

Adler & Aslatei families on
the birth of a daughter to
Mitchell & Lauren Adler

Goldberg & Reider families
on the engagement of
Sara Goldberg & Stu Reider

Sidel & Miller families on
the birth of a daughter to
Johanna & Noah Sidel

Berman & Tenenbaum families
on the birth of a son to
Shimon & Devora Berman

**John & Merle Finkelstein &
Bruce & Judy Taub families**
on the birth of a daughter to
Harley & Lindsay Finkelstein

Patrick & Anne Perez on
the Bar Mitzvah of their
son Binyamin

Cons & Spector families on the
Bar Mitzvah of Shimmy Cons

Stewart & Chana Diament
on the marriage of Tzemach
Diament and Batya Cohen

Lach & Ram families on the
marriage of Samantha Lach
& Michael Ram

Berkowicz & Zwecker families
on the engagement of Daniella
Berkowicz & Phil Zwecker

Mikey Gottesman and family
on the engagement of
Ari Gottesman & Ayelet Bender

**Gottesman & Shpigelman
families** on the marriage
of Penina Gotteman &
Yankie Shpigelman

**Jack & Esther Berkowicz and
family** on the birth of
a daughter to Yehoshua &
Chani Berkowicz

**Avichail Abrams and Miriam
Lahiany** on their marriage

Gozlan & Eckstein families
on the Bar Mitzva of
Benyamin Gozlan

Cons & Lebovic families on the
Bat Mitzvah of Hannah Cons

Kovac family on the marriage
of Evan to Victoria Ayoub

Sariel & Alanna Garbman on
the birth of a daughter

Corber & Scheim families on
the marriage of Jordan Corber
and Laura Scheim

Ricky and Rachelle Merovitz
on the Bar Mitsvah of
their son Dylan

Sympathies

Sidel & Gevis families on the
passing of **Mr. Paul Gevis**

Morton & Wilk families on the
passing of **Matthew Morton**

Mrs. Terry Lisak on the
passing of **her brother**

Gurevitch family on the passing
of **Mrs. Greta Gurevitch**

Smith family on the passing
of **Mrs. Sybill Smith**

Aber & Halickman families on the
passing of **Julius Lionel Aber**

Diament family on the passing
of **Mrs. Goldie Diament**

Darwiche family on the passing
of **Mr. Simantob Darwiche**

Amar family on the passing of
Mrs. Sylvia Amar

Gutman & Barr families on the
passing of **Mr. Mitya Gutman**

Greenspoon and Finkelstein
families on the passing of
Mrs. Judith Bacchio

ErDOS & Medina families on the
passing of **Mr. Zoltan ErDOS**

Warren Hill & family on the
passing of his mother,
Mrs. Eva Hill

Garellek family on the passing
of Salena's mother,
Mrs. Nadia Sporn

Seidman, Diner & Bloom
families on the passing of
Mr. Harold Seidman

Shlomo Simhon on the passing
of his brother **Benjamin Simhon**

Brenda Wiseman & family
on the passing of her husband
Ron Wiseman

Yaffy family on the passing of
Mr. Martin Yaffy

Reiss & Haozi family on the
passing of **Rabbi Haozi**

Schachter family on the passing
of **Johnny Schachter**

Burke & Stern families on the
passing of **Ruth Siminovitch**

Howard family on the passing
of **Mr. Earle Howard**

Ronnie Elkin and family on
the passing of his sister
Merle Margles

Yalovsky & Sigler family on the
passing of **Dr. Harold Yalovsky**

Pinchuk family on the passing
of **Mrs. Miriam Pinchuk**

Lavut & Cantor families on the
passing of **Mrs. Betty Lavut**

Hascalovici & Benschabat families
on the passing of **Mrs. Marietta
Hascalovici—Itescu**

*May they be spared further
sorrow and know only of
simchas.*

Rabbi New & family on
the passing of his brother
Reb Chaim New

MTC Kids





My Journey

from Kuwaiti Arab to Jerusalemite Jew

by MARK HALAWA

It seems like it was only yesterday that I was a young teenager wearing a *dish-dasha* (white robe) in Kuwait, and now I wear a *kipah* and live in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is where my grandparents on my mother's side met. My Jewish grandmother met my Palestinian Muslim grandfather when they were both in their late teens. She later converted to Islam, got married to my grandfather, and lived in Shechem for many years. Following the 1970 Black September uprising, my grandfather – who was a high-ranking officer in Jordan's Arab Legion – was cashiered when King Hussein purged his army of Palestinians. The family relocated to Kuwait, where oil profits were fueling huge business and construction projects. In Kuwait, my mother met my father and got married.

My father was born in Beisan (Beit She'an in Hebrew), Israel, and owned a successful construction company in Kuwait that built some of Kuwait's popular landmarks (which I proudly show off to my friends over Google Earth today). My father attended university in Egypt and was a staunch follower of the Nasser school of thought, Pan Arabism – the unification of the Arab World. I was brought up to believe that Israel was the only obstacle to Arab unity, a satellite presence planted by Western colonial powers to keep the Arab world divided. Therefore, Israel had to be destroyed.

Our family was as secular as a family can be in Arabia. My father was more of a deist than an atheist – he believed in a creator, but strongly rejected all religions, especially Islam. My mother wasn't into religion either at the time, as her priorities were our home and social events. At home we were loosely traditional; we partially observed Ramadan (not the fasting part) and celebrated the two Eid holidays by hosting feasts and visiting friends, family and business partners.

The only religious influence around was my grandfather. Out of love for him, I accompanied him to mosque several times. I never really learned how to pray; I'd stand, kneel and bow in sync with everyone else, then sit on the ground and listen to the sermon. The "sermon" often consisted of the imam's nonstop screaming and shouting about the evils of the Jews. The imam would tell many stories of the horrible things Jews did to Prophet Mohammad, and explain how Allah doomed them to the level of animals, and that fighting the Jews was the duty of every Muslim who loved his religion.

I'll never forget how the imam described Joseph's brothers as "evil Jewish brothers of the prophet of Islam, who threw him down the well and then sold him into slavery." The imam then said, "You see how Jews treat their own brothers!" That story angered me. Then, according to custom, the imam finished his sermon with a stream of supplications calling for the destruction of the Jewish people, while the crowd responded to each supplication with a thunderous "Amen!" Even then, as a ten-year-old, this was quite chilling.

After an eventful prayer session, we'd walk back together to my grandparents' home to have lunch with everyone. The smells of my grandmother's delicious food took my mind off of the horrible stories I heard at mosque. But as we ate, I'd think to myself, *How could my sweet grandmother have belonged to an evil Jewish cult built on killing of innocent people? Is that why she left? And was she a descendant of pigs and monkeys? Or perhaps the imam was exaggerating?* After all, my father told me that religious people were crazy: "Never trust people with beards!"

When my parents went on vacation, they usually left us with our grandparents. As kids will do, I snooped around in my grandparents' room, and once found my grandmother's birth certificate, along with old pictures. The last name on the birth certificate was Mizrahi. It struck me as an odd name that I had never heard of. The header on the document was in Arabic, Hebrew and English. I didn't know what Hebrew looked like, but I recognized the letters I had seen in the small book my grandmother would sometimes read from when she sat alone in the guest room, tears trickling down her face. I suspected my grandmother was reciting Jewish prayers, because on the news, I had seen Jews praying by "Ha'it al Mabka" – the Wailing Wall in Arabic.

Anti-Semitism was commonplace in Kuwait. I remember a show that the Palestinian boy scouts would put on, which ended with the burning of the Israeli flag. One year, I took part in one of the shows. In a twisted way, the organizers wanted to show their success in creating a generation of defenders of the "cause," which helped them raise millions in donations from sympathizers.

My father was a strong supporter of the PLO himself. Since the 1960s, a portion of his monthly salary was deducted and sent to the organization founded by Yasser Arafat (also an engineer working



My grandmother was born to a Jewish family in Jerusalem.

I was brought up to believe that Israel was the only obstacle to Arab unity, a satellite presence planted by Western colonial powers to keep the Arab world divided.

in Kuwait at the time), which promised to finance armed groups to liberate Palestine one day. Arafat raised money from wealthy Palestinians working in Kuwait, as well as from Kuwaitis and the Kuwaiti government. Later, he'd turn against the same government that helped him become a political force, by aligning with Saddam Hussein against Kuwait. My father said that with the hundreds of millions of dollars Arafat raised, he could've created five-star services and infrastructure in the West Bank, but he decided to appropriate the money instead.

In the summer of 1990, when I was 12 years old, our lives changed completely. We were on vacation when Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded and annexed Kuwait. My father's business – along with much of the country – was ravaged. Our savings became worthless pieces of paper. We could not return to Kuwait, so we immigrated to Canada. My father managed to sneak back into Kuwait for a few days to retrieve important business documents that would later be useful in recovering compensation from a United Nations fund.

But life in the new world didn't suit my family well, and they returned to the Middle East, while I stayed in Canada to attend university.

During my final year at the University of Western Ontario, while I was studying at the Weldon Library, I went down to use the pay phone and found a man sitting at a small table cutting up a green apple. From his dress, he looked Jewish, so I went up to him and asked him straightforwardly, "Hi, are you a Jew?"

He looked up with a smile and answered, "No, but I like to dress this way."

I wondered to myself, *Are Jewish people supposed to be funny?* I introduced myself and told him that I wanted to do something to advance peace in the Middle East. I added that I didn't believe in religion and didn't completely hate Jews because my grandmother was Jewish.

He introduced himself to me as Dr. Yitzchok Block, a professor of philosophy from Harvard who taught at UWO. He invited me to sit down, and cut me a piece of his apple. He asked me, "Which side of the family is that grandmother from?"

I replied, "My mother's side. My father's parents died before I was born."

Dr. Block said gently, "If that's the case, then by Muslim law you're Muslim, and by Jewish law you're

a Jew. A Jew can convert 10 times and he'll still be a Jew, and by Jewish law religion is transferred by the mother, which makes your mother Jewish, and makes you a Jew. "

I was completely dumbfounded. Memories flooded into my mind – my grandmother, the "evil Jews," mosque sermons, Israeli TV...

I ran home and told my roommate, who said, "So that makes you a 'Mus-Jew.'" I was not amused.

I went up to my room, called my mom, and told her what happened. She told me to stay away from Dr. Block. But I called my grandmother, and we spoke for quite some time, and she told me about her family and younger brother who died in the early days of the establishment of Israel. I finally mustered the courage to ask her, "Tata, are you Jewish?" I never heard my grandmother as distressed in all my life. She cried and told me more stories about her family and how Jews and Arabs used to be friends.

I decided not to pursue the idea that I was a Jew, as I was finishing university and this wasn't a topic worth upsetting my family over. I did speak on the phone once with Dr. Block and met with his son-in-law, Rabbi Lazer Gurkow, who was a rabbi of a congregation close by. He recommended books to read and mentioned his synagogue.

One evening, while rollerblading on the street, I suddenly fell to the ground, although the street was smooth and there was no visible cause for the fall. I immediately felt that it was a "push" from up above. My right wrist was sprained and bandaged, and I couldn't go to work for some time.

That Saturday morning, I remembered that Jews went to synagogue on Saturdays. I contemplated going to Dr. Block's synagogue to check it out, but I was hesitant, thinking, "I look so Middle Eastern; I'll probably scare people off." I decided to go anyway. I looked up the address and called a cab, not knowing it would be the last time I would ride in a cab on Shabbat.

When I arrived at the *shul*, I thought, *I'll just go in, how bad could it be? If worst comes to worst, I won't come back again.* I opened the door, and



*In the summer of 1990,
when I was 12 years old,
our lives changed
completely.*

My Journey

(cont'd)

there stood an Indian gentleman, who handed me a *kipah* and greeted me with "Shabbat Shalom." Cool, I thought. I looked around for Dr. Block, and found him standing all the way in the back, with a book in his hands. He greeted me with the same reassuring, warm smile and said, "Good Shabbos."

I asked him, "What are you reading?"

He replied, "I like to learn on Shabbos."

"Aren't you done studying by now?" I asked, thinking to myself that he must be retired at this age.

He answered, "Even if I would live another lifetime, I wouldn't be done learning." That sentence didn't register until much later in life.

The congregation was a mix of all ages, and everyone was responding to the rabbi enthusiastically. I was handed a prayerbook, and someone was calling out the page numbers. Soon I found myself reading a song that I'd be reading every Shabbat from then on:

"Ve-shamru v'nei Yisrael et ha-Shabbat, la'asot et ha-Shabbat le-dorotam berit olam. Bei-ni u-vein b'nei Yisrael ot hi le-olam, ki shei-shet ya-mim ah-sah A-do-nai, et ha-sha-mayim ve-et ha-aretz uva-yom ha-shevi'i shavat va-yi-nafash."

"And the Children of Israel observed the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath for their generations an eternal covenant. Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever, that in six days did G-d make the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

I didn't understand Hebrew, but between my Arabic and the English translation, I could understand the words. "Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever." It was true. By then, my tears were streaminG-down.

I met a few people over Kiddush, including an African Falasha gentleman and an Egyptian couple who, when they learned of my birthplace, asked me in Arabic, "Do you speak Arabic?" I felt like saying, "Shush, the Jews are here!"

After the Kiddush, Dr. Block invited me to his home for lunch. I wasn't used to accepting too much from people, so I politely declined, but he said,

"We're having several guests, and one more won't be a bother. My wife makes delicious chicken."

I gave him a big smile and told him it would be my pleasure.

At Dr. Block's home, there were around ten people at that table, a mix of students and professionals. The conversation was lively, and people were encouraged to ask challenging questions. Later, we read parts of a story about a queen named Esther and how she strived to save her people from an evil man who wanted to destroy the Jews. It reminded me of the systematic anti-Jewish indoctrination I grew up with. We didn't finish the story of Esther, and I wondered whether the Jews were saved in the end.

Dr. Block was a great host. He walked me to the door and thanked me for coming over. I told him it felt like I'd done this before – it was weird. He said, "It's not hard to believe. Every Jew is born with a little Torah and a little menorah inside." He nudged me with his shoulder and said, "All it takes is for another Jew to bump into him to light it up."

When I got home, I waited until after sunset to turn my computer on, like I was advised, and I started searching until I found "The Book of Esther." I devoured the story until the end, sighing with relief that G-d had saved the Jews from the plot of those who wanted their destruction. I felt a sense of ownership of my newfound Jewish identity, and decided I wanted to experience Shabbat some more. I spoke with my employer, and I started observing Shabbat regularly.

A few months later, I moved to Toronto for further university studies. I started going to *shul* there too, and I studied at the Lubavitch yeshivah every Tuesday to learn more about my newfound background. The more I learned, the more I wanted to learn. I also taught myself Hebrew, and became more observant of Shabbat laws. Life started to have more meaning for me, and I felt comfortable telling my friends and family I was a Jew.

Initially, my family was tolerant of my Jewish involvement, viewing it as a passing phase. Then my mother started to become more religious as a Muslim. I learned that she had started to cover her hair after my aunt died in a car accident. As she became more observant, she started attacking me with the same words and phrases Muslims use against Jews. My mother's extreme religious level clashed with my father's anti-religious beliefs, and they eventually divorced.



*At Dr. Block's home,
there were around ten
people at that table,
a mix of students
and professionals.*



I didn't fare well with my father, either. Once, while we were discussing how terrorism and crime were becoming out of control in the Middle East, I asked, "Why is the life of an Israeli soldier fighting for his people worth less than that of a terrorist civilian aiming to kill and maim others because he was told to do so by a fanatic?" My dad himself had taught me that fanatics brainwash children into becoming suicide bombers, but when the topic involved Jews, the narrative suddenly changed. He called me a Zionist and threatened to remove me from his will.

One day, a rabbi told me that since I didn't have physical proof of my Jewish claims, and my family had been outside of Jewish life for a few generations, I'd have to convert. I had a difficult time wrapping my head around the idea of conversion. My family didn't want to speak with me, I had shed the skin I'd worn for the past 26 years of my life to become a completely different person – and now I had to convert? I reminded myself that deep inside, the main reason I wanted to be Jewish was to marry a Jewish girl and continue the family line.

I decided to take the plunge and went to the Beit Din in Toronto. We started the process, and later I was advised to spend some time at a yeshivah in Israel. I went to Israel and fell in love with the land and the people I had been told were "animals" and "killers." I found a genuine family of Jews from all around the world. Jews of all colors and nationalities, Jews who were creative, innovative, accepting and loving . . . just like the first Jew I encountered at UWU.

After three years of learning Jewish law and philosophy, I was invited for an interview with the Beit Din of Rav Nissim Karelitz. I was tested thoroughly on various topics of law, and I passed flawlessly. I was officially accepted as a member of the Jewish people. My dream finally came true – I could marry and have Jewish children, as Jewish as everyone else.

On August 6, 2014 – the day right after Tisha b'Av – I made my way to a Second Temple-period *mikvah* by the Western Wall in preparation for my wedding ceremony.

It was a beautiful summer day in Nes Harim, at the outskirts of Jerusalem, overlooking the Judean hills. Our guests included close friends from Israel, Canada, the United States, Finland, Sweden and the United Arab Emirates. My yeshivah rabbis, classmates and business associates also attended. Rabbi Israel Weisel officiated.

My bride Linda and I came from different sides of the planet, both geographically and culturally. Linda grew up the daughter of a Lutheran priest in Finland, and I a secular Muslim in Kuwait, but after our individual journeys to Judaism, this was more than we could both have dreamed of.

Today, I live in Jerusalem with my wife, where we plan to raise a family and build a Jewish home for generations to come, continuing where my grandmother left off. ■

I had a difficult time wrapping my head around the idea of conversion.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE – *continued from page 35*

study as "food for the soul," and the soul's appetite is infinite. MTC's pillar of learning has gone from strength to strength over the last two and a half decades. And if you ask our Rebbeim, I bet they'll tell you we're only getting started.

Simcha: the Baal Shem Tov taught that joy is not simply a detail of Jewish life, but a path of its own – a key and central path. Until MTC, I never saw Jewish joy as I witnessed year after year on Sukkos, Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, and on our many trips to the Rebbe's holy resting place. What

opportunities they have been to come away with buckets of simcha and blessings for the coming year. While these have been experiences to cherish and cling to, perhaps the deepest simcha for me has been the chance and privilege to serve – to play some role, however insignificant, in the Rebbe's vast army, and to be part of the grand process of Redemption that is unfolding before our eyes.

And for that, MTC family, I shall be eternally grateful. ■

A Reasoned Response

by RABBI LEVI NEW

It is a central tenet of any faith-system that there is an order to everything; that 'Something Above' is watching and orchestrating the world in a perfect manner. And so believers are wont to say "Everything happens for a reason". This response is typically after something has gone somewhat wrong, in the hope and faith that it might lead to a better something else.



What does it mean to say that? What do we hope the "reason" might be and can we do anything about it?

Spoiler alert: I am not going to suggest that I have the secret formula to understanding why and how G-d runs His universe. As Jewish philosophers have said¹ "If I would know, I would be". That is, so long as we are not G-d, we cannot profess to know Him or His often mysterious ways.

However, in the following lines we will present two distinct, though not opposing², Jewish views on the complex and highly nuanced question of Divine Intervention and Providence. To what degree does G-d supervise His world? And more importantly, to what end?

Approach Number One:

The Talmud relates³: Rabbi Akiva was travelling with a donkey with which to ride, a rooster to wake him and a candle to study at night. He stopped in the woods to rest for the night. A wind blew out the candle and his rooster and donkey were snatched as prey by wild animals.

Rabbi Akiva declared through all of this; "Everything G-d does is for the good".

The next morning, he discovered that there were bandits in the next town nearby. Were he to still have possession of his donkey, rooster or candle he would surely have been discovered.

Though there are many layers to this story, a general reading of classic Jewish texts⁴ will reveal that G-d supervises His world for the purposes of justice, so that the wicked receive their punishment and the righteous their reward. As such, it is only necessary for G-d to supervise that which can be righteous or wicked and can be rewarded or punished accordingly. Thus, Divine Providence extends exclusively to man who has the free choice in his/her behavior to be good or bad.

The animal and the inanimate realms, which do not have the choice between good and evil cannot be held accountable for their actions and therefore are not rewarded or punished. It is therefore only necessary for the Divine to make sure that as a whole, the various species survive. The particulars of this or that particular animal or object's existence is inconsequential.

For humans then, who are being supervised by the Divine for the sake of keeping track of their actions, it follows that if something negative happens one should "examine ones deeds" to see what negative behavior s/he is being punished for⁵. Moreover, punishment in this physical world is in fact a kindness, in that it prevents the much harsher punishment of Purgatory in the Afterlife⁶.

In contrast, when something good happens, one ought to be humbled by the experience knowing that "I am not deserving of such kindness and it is only by His grace that I have thus been treated"⁷.

In Conclusion: Whatever happens to me is the result and consequence of my past actions.

Approach Number Two:

The story is told of a student who complained to his Chassidic Rebbe, "I have tried everything prescribed by the holy books and yet I have not merited to meet Elijah the Prophet!"

Elijah the Prophet is described in Scripture as having ascended on high with his body⁸. Elijah is an intermediary of sorts between our world and the spiritual realms. The Talmud relates of a number of sages who merited to see him during their lifetime⁹.

The Rebbe looked puzzled. "Are you sure you tried everything?" asked the Rebbe.

"Yes, Rebbe. Everything".

Handing him a piece of paper with an address, the Rebbe tells his student, "When the festival of Sukkos comes up I want you to take a box of food and ask to spend the holiday with this family. This will help you get what you desire".

After the holiday, the student was disappointed at having spent his holiday with this poor family (who had only the food he brought to eat) all the while waiting in vain for Elijah the Prophet's revelation.

"Rebbe, I did what you said and nothing happened" the student complained "I stayed awake all night waiting for the revelation".

*To what degree does
G-d supervise His world?
And more importantly,
to what end?*

"Strange" says the Rebbe, "Next week is the holiday of Simchas Torah. Please do the same. Take a box of food and spend your holiday with this family again."

Not doubting his Rebbe, the student is about to knock on the door of the poor home when he overhears from the other side of the flimsy wall the voice of the young daughter; "Ma! We have no food! How are we to spend the holiday like this?!" "Hush now my dear" replies the mother "Do you remember how on Sukkos we had no food and Elijah the Prophet showed up with a box full? Don't you worry my daughter, Elijah will surely be back for this holiday too"

The Baal Shem Tov taught¹⁰ that everything in G-d's world is only in existence because He willed it so. Should He cease to desire it, it would revert to the absolute nothingness from which it came. This is because, each individual item in this world has a purpose which only it can fulfill. This purpose is intertwined with the purpose of every other one of G-d's creations.

In other words, the entirety of G-d's doings awaits the fulfillment of the purpose of each individual creation, so that coming together, they can fulfill the one ultimate purpose of them all: The revelation of the Divine reality within creation¹¹.

Following this line of reasoning, G-d supervises every single part of His world to be sure that it is in the right time and place to meet the purpose for which He desires it into being¹².

If this is true for all of creation, how much more so is this true of man who has the free choice

to decide whether or not to fulfill his/her purpose.

Creation in general fulfills its purpose by the mere fact that G-d desires them to be in that particular place at that particular time¹³. Though man is also placed by G-d at a particular time and place, his/her purpose however, is not fulfilled by default. G-d waits for man to make the choice to fulfill the purpose for which He put them there. And this is the ultimate purpose; that man, who could choose otherwise, does what is expected of him by his Creator¹⁴.

And so G-d places a unique supervision on each and every individual human being to set him or her in the precise circumstance necessary for the fulfillment of the purpose of their existence.

In Conclusion: When something happens to someone, good or seemingly bad, one ought to ask¹⁵ "Why did G-d bring me here? What purpose does He have in mind for me?"

Instead of looking for Elijah to come to us as reward for our behavior, we are challenged to be the Elijah for someone else who might need it.

Who knows, maybe that is the "reason" why that thing happened in the first place? ■



"Rebbe, I did what you said and nothing happened" the student complained.

FOOTNOTES

1. See for example: Rabbi Nissim Girondey (1315-1376) Derashos HoRan, Derush 4. Rabbi Yosef Albo (late 1300's - early 1400's) Book of Ikrim Section 2 Chapter 30.
2. See Lekutay Sichos volume 18 page 199.
3. Berachot 60b.
4. See for example: Shomer Emunim end of 'The Second Debate', Ramban on genesis 18:19, Rambam in Guide to the Perplexed volume 3 chapter 17.
5. Talmud Berachot 5a.
6. See for example Mechilta to Yisro chapter 10 and Mishpatim chapter 9, Igeres HaTeshuvah chapter 12.
7. Talmud Chulin 89a, Igeres HaKodesh epistle 2.
8. Book of King II chapter 2.
9. See for example Talmud Ketubot 106a.
10. Shaar HaYichud VeHoemuna Chapter 1. See also Midrash to Tehilim 119:89.
11. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950) Maamer Al Kein Yomru 5696. See also the Rebbe Igres Kodesh volume 1 epistle 94.
12. LeKutey Diburim Kislev 19 5694. See also Talmud Chulin 63a and Rashi 'Umishpatecha'.
13. Tanya chapter 24.
14. Tanya chapter 36.
15. See for example Hayom Yom Tammuz 10 and Elul 18.

MTC Pre-school



MTC's 25th A Personal Perspective

by MICHAEL CHERNACK

1992. It seems like an eternity ago. 24 years. A blip on the screen on the great clock of time. I was 38 years old, married to my dear wife Barbara for 16 years with three daughters ranging in age from 3 to 9. Like thousands of others of the baby-boom generation, our focus was on making a living, raising a family, and caring for aging parents. Suffice it to say, the road of life seemed fairly straightforward, notwithstanding the inevitable bumps that we warily anticipated.

Passover of 1992 "passed-over" without much fanfare. Manischewitz matzohs, wine, and probably, gefilte fish as well. A cursory and incomplete reading of the Haggadah, much to my older daughter's chagrin. This was rather baffling, after all, we didn't expect JPPS to ignite any religious fires in our kids. Neither did we suspect that this might be a precursor of events yet to come...

The hand of the clock moved ever-so-slightly, and we approached the holiday of Shavuos. To say the least, not a strongly-observed date on our calendar (although widely-adored by children and teachers in Jewish day schools). Lubavitcher neighbours of ours, Shloime and Reva Denburg, extended an invitation for Shavuos lunch. One "little" catch, however: "please come with me to this new shul in Decarie Square, you won't be disappointed." My initial thought, "what's with the linkage?" And then displaying at Barbara's urging, an elementary sense of politeness, I reluctantly capitulated with I might add, a healthy dose of foreboding.

I guess one might say, the "rest is history," or more accurately, "history unfolding." That story, perhaps, for another time. This short essay is about perspectives on my 24 years in MTC's four cubits.

The Mishkan (Tabernacle) was the Jewish people's portable, spiritual sanctuary in the midst of the desert. It rested on pillars of acacia wood, planted by Jacob in Egypt in anticipation of our eventual exodus and redemption. I mention this only to make the following connection. From its original "Mishkan" state in Decarie Square through to its current Hampstead home, certain pillars that the MTC stands for have strongly resonated with me (likely because they represent some of my greatest challenges). They are principles that have remained firm and unwavering, regularly espoused by our spiritual leaders as drawn from the teachings of Chassidus.

Avahas Yisrael (Love of your fellow Jew): At the start of the Morning Service (Siddur, p.12), the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad Chassidus, writes

that it is appropriate to say before prayer: "I hereby undertake to fulfill the commandment, 'Love your fellowman as yourself'. This love is both the gateway to stand before G-d in prayer, and the merit by which one's prayers are accepted. At MTC, you can justifiably call Avahas Yisrael the overriding principle from which all others flow. The affection and care, first materially and then spiritually, that every person who walks through these doors receives is sacrosanct. In the early years, this theme was so recurrent in the Rabbi's talks that we couldn't resist making it a Purim skit. As the "newcomer" walked through MTC's doors, the poor chap was "ambushed" by a group of fervent Avahas Yisrael MTC'ers bent on making him feel at home. As the expression goes, "much truth in jest." We had all learned to be Esther's and Mordechai's.

Bittul (Humility): If love of your fellow Jew is the pre-eminent outreach teaching of MTC, then Bittul is undoubtedly the primary "in-reach." After all, how can you sincerely love your neighbour if you're primarily in love with yourself?! This has been a pillar of MTC learning for as long as I can remember, the spice-and-spirit of many an MTC farbrengen. Putting oneself under a self-guided microscope requires a lot of honesty, and more than a little help from someone who adheres to pillar #1 above! Actually, it wasn't until my first MTC Pesach that bittul became both a tangible and edible concept. I was struck by how central a role that matzah – flat, tasteless, simple – the bread of humility, played in the Pesach seder. And how much of it I had to eat! The message of that first seder can easily be an MTC motto: "Down with ego and arrogance. Strive to be a matzah!"

Learning: in the early years, the Montreal Torah Centre was a shul only on Shabbos, hence its name. For me, this was the magnet that kept me coming there Shabbos after Shabbos. I experienced a fairly diversified university education, but as for Torah, I was a blank slate. Learning was a new and exciting intellectual pursuit, like a stimulating lecture. But when a Jew starts learning Torah, he may think it's an intellectual exercise, but then something much deeper kicks-in. The Alter Rebbe refers to Torah

continued on page 31



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