



# The World of Lubavitch

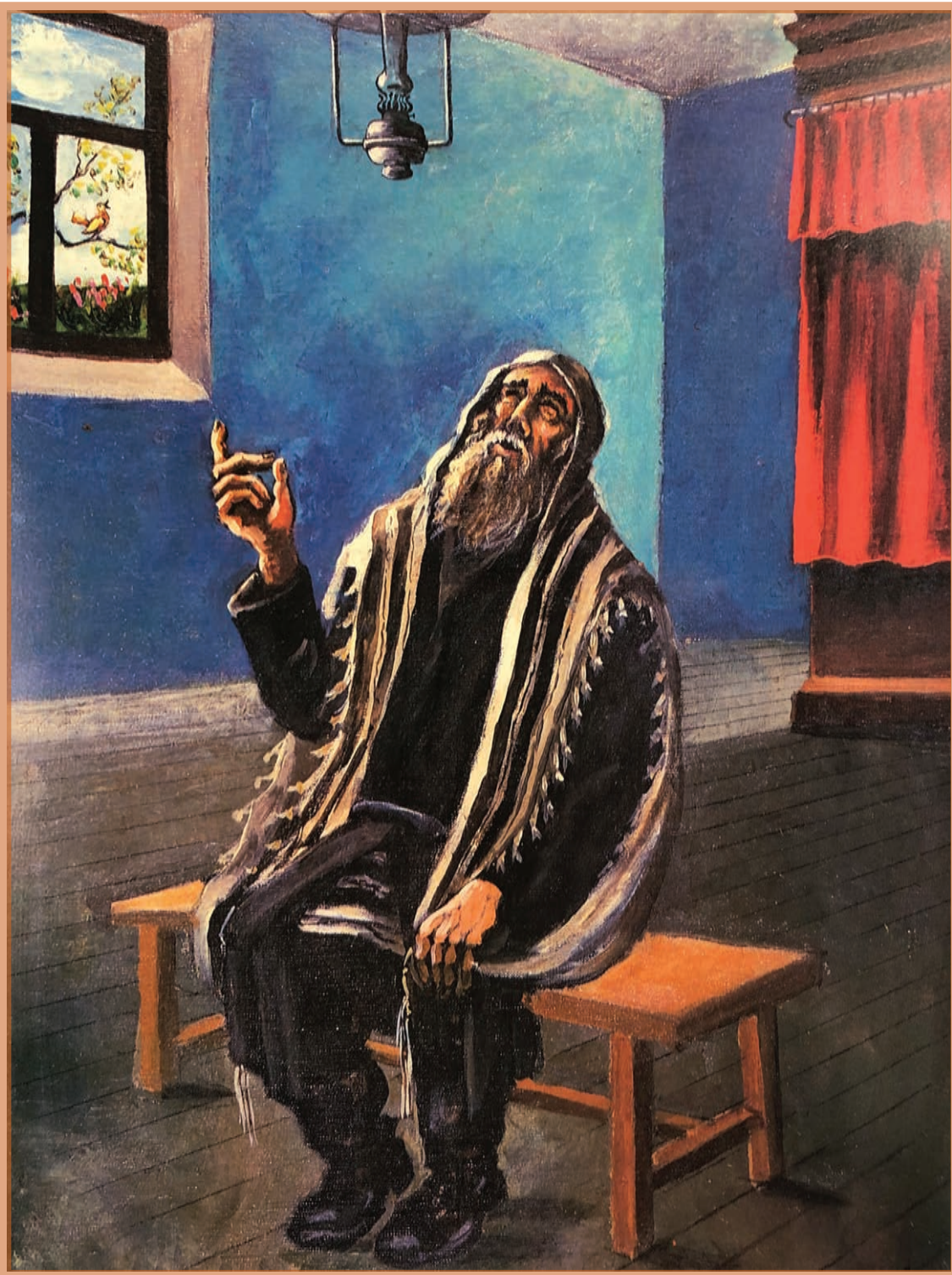
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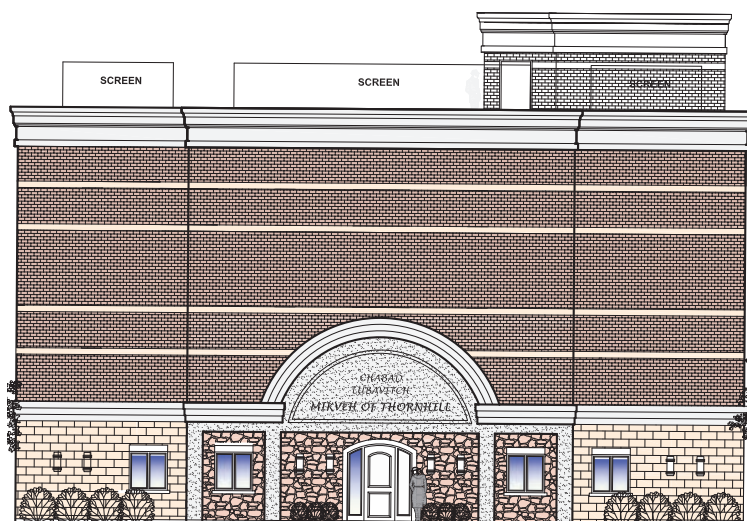
## New, Free Standing, Building Proposed for Chabad Headquarters

Just 35 years ago the north side of Steeles Avenue was primarily farmland. Traffic lights were positioned at the two kilometer crossroads throughout the sparsely populated municipality of Thornhill. When the rural township acquiesced to urban expansion a few of the leading land developers such as the late Joseph Tanenbaum, Herb Green, and Ernest Manson, encouraged Jewish agencies to consider the unfolding opportunity for growth. Indeed, with the community bulging and bottlenecked at the city's northern border it was quite obvious that the Jewish community would continue to migrate further up along the famed Bathurst corridor. Naturally, the influx of home buyers would need and

welcome the presence of Shuls, Yeshivas, Mikvaot, and purveyors of kosher food.

The Chabad Lubavitch Organization was amongst the trail

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## Going the Extra Mile

There is an old Yiddish proverb that notes, "Every humorous anecdote has some truth to it." This adage was reflected in a "What's App" image I recently received depicting a Chabad House on the moon. In fact, the only reason why there is no Chabad emissary dispatched to the closest lunar satellite is because there are no Jews spending time on its surface. Rest assured that in tandem with commercial space flights and exotic travel excursions bringing thrill seekers to explore the moon craters, Chabad will be there to offer them Tefillin and Shabbat candles.

Currently playing in Toronto is a theater production called, "Come From Away." The documentary is about the eastbound oversea's flight diversions that happened in the wake of the devastating 9/11 attacks. Many international flights were redirected to Gander, Newfoundland a remote town on the eastern shoreline of Canada. Sixteen years ago, this small municipality with a population of 10,000 became host to nearly 6,700, people almost doubling its population when 38 planes touched town for an unexpected grounding.

One of the scenes featured in the play, is a rabbi ministering to bewildered strangers he meets amongst the 7,000 refugees. In real life it is Levi Sudak, the Chabad Shliach to Edgware, a suburb of London, England. On that fateful day the rabbi had taken a flight from London to New York to visit the "Ohel," -resting place of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,- Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, obm, just ahead of Rosh HaShana, which would be observed the following week. Instead of returning to London that night as planned, Rabbi Sudak found himself in Gander for the better part of a week.

As a Chabad'nik Rabbi Sudak knew that being stranded in a strange and foreign environment meant that beneath all the heartache, pain and confusion there was a mission to accomplish. Sure enough, wandering the street of the town, he encountered a local Holocaust survivor who never told anyone, not even his wife, that he is Jewish. With a broken heart he divulged his origin that as a boy he had been tortured by the Nazis and later adopted by a British family. After a lengthy heart wrenching discussion and donning tefillin, Rabbi Sudak gave him a yarmulka, a siddur and tallit. Naturally they kept in touch and years later, after his passing, the survivor's son related that his father asked to be buried wrapped in the tallis and wearing the yarmulka the visiting rabbi had gifted him.

This anecdote sheds some light on the mission of Chabad Lubavitch to establish a presence wherever there are Jews to be found, even if they are far and few. Hence, there is a Chabad presence in St. John's, Newfoundland, and Reykjavik, Iceland.

On occasion the Rebbe, of blessed memory, addressed this quandary, "Why spend the time and effort to reach out even to the most remote locations," he asked rhetorically. Furthermore, "with limited resources, and much work still to be accomplished in the larger cities, should we not concentrate and consolidate the scope of our reach," he intoned. The Rebbe went on to explain that in order to prepare the world for the Messianic era, we have to do our utmost to reach even the most remote places and bring holiness to its surrounding. Our objective is to uncover the hidden sparks of holiness lying dormant within our brethren that may have strayed, be it in space or spirit.

The Midrash relates, when G-d said to Abraham, "Your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land," a reference to their eventual enslavement in Egypt. He concludes, "afterwards they will leave with great wealth." Upon hearing this Abraham responded, "Just grant them freedom, and they will gladly forgo the spoils." Factually, as promised, they left Egypt with great wealth, both materially and spiritually. They departed with valued treasures while they also succeeded to lift the embedded sparks of holiness from within its boundaries. So too, now as we await the arrival of Mashiach, the Shluchim of Chabad can be found wherever Jews may be. So if you find yourself stationed in an army base in the Philippines or vacationing in St. Barts, don't be surprised to encounter a Chabad'nik eager to be of help... the Jewish way.

Best wishes for a Kosher and Joyous Pesach.  
Rabbi Zalman A. Grossbaum

# The Freedom to Passover

By Yanki Tauber  
 On the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, it is a positive commandment (mitzvat assei) to relate the miracles and wonders that were performed for our forefathers in Egypt, as it is written, "Remember this day, on which you went out of Egypt"—just as it is written, "Remember the day of Shabbat."

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Leaven and Matzo, 7:1

What is freedom? When pressed to define this most basic human need and aspiration, we usually find ourselves explaining what freedom is *not*. Freedom is not slavery, it is not confinement, it is not inhibition. But is that all there is to freedom—the absence of subjugation? Or is there a positive/dynamic aspect to the state of freedom?

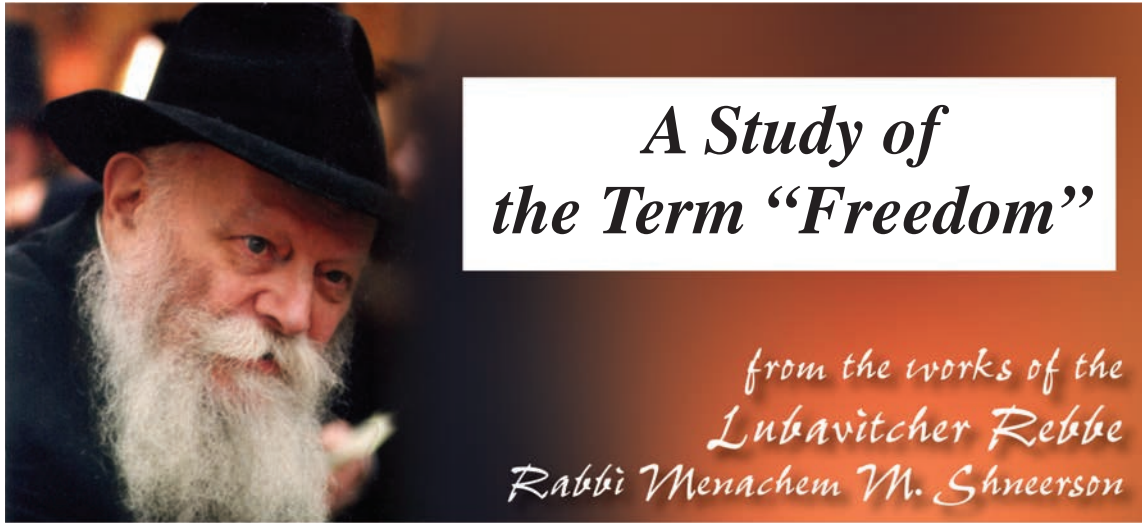
The same could be asked about another much desired and little understood state: rest. Rest is not movement, not toil, not creating; but what *is* it? Is it merely the negation of activity, or is rest itself an active pursuit?

The Torah implies that it is. In the second chapter of Genesis we read that "G-d concluded, on the seventh day, the work that He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done." But if G-d rested on the seventh day, why does the verse say that He concluded His work *on* the seventh day? Our sages explain: on the seventh day G-d created the final and culminating element of His creation—the element of rest. "What was the world lacking? Rest. With the onset of Shabbat came rest." Rest is a existent phenomenon, a *creation*, not merely the absence of work.

"Work" is the movement from self outward, the projection of one's creative powers to effect changes on one's environment; "rest" is the endeavor to focus inward, to withdraw to the quintessential core of one's being. For six days G-d projected outward, creating a universe that is "outside" and distinct of Himself. On the seventh day of creation He rested—He shifted His focus inward, drawing creation back into His omnipresent being. Thus Shabbat is a "holy" day, a day of heightened spiritual sensitivity; a day on which the created reality more deeply identifies with its supernal source.

The same applies, on the human level, to our weekly implementation of the divine cycle of creation in our own lives. Six days a week we project outward, developing and perfecting G-d's world. On Shabbat, we actualize our "partnership with G-d in creation" by resting: by delving into the inner essence of our own souls and of the soul of creation.

So Shabbat is not a day of inactivity, but a day devoted to the activity of rest. A day in



which we endeavor to seek our own spiritual center, to better attune ourselves to the self that is one with the divine essence of all. True, the laws of Shabbat are replete with forbidden activities—in order to rest, one must cease to outwardly project; but the prohibition against work is only one aspect of the phenomenon of rest. In the Torah, there are two versions of the Sixth Commandment: in Exodus 20 it reads, "Remember the day of Shabbat, to sanctify it," while in the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy it reads, "Keep the day of Shabbat." The Talmud explains that, "Remember and 'Keep' were expressed by G-d in a single ut-

terance." The dynamic inward focus of Shabbat ("Remember"), and the avoidance of materially creative deeds ("Keep"), are the active and passive dimensions of a single endeavor: the endeavor of rest.

Thus Maimonides begins his codification of the laws of Shabbat with the statement: "Resting from work on the seventh day is a positive commandment, as it is written, 'On the seventh day you shall rest.' Whoever works on this day, negates [this] positive commandment, and also transgresses a negative commandment—'Do not do any work'" Maimonides is emphasizing that although the bulk of Shabbat's

laws (twenty-eight out of the thirty chapters in Maimonides' own section on Shabbat) address what is *not* to be done on the seventh day, the imperative to rest on Shabbat is firstly and foremostly a *positive* commandment. "The positive commandment of Shabbat is to rest, not merely to cease working."

### A Dynamic Equation

This explains the enigmatic passage in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, quoted at the beginning of this essay, in which he compares the commandment to "Remember this day, on which you went out of Egypt" to the imperative to "Remember the day of Shabbat." Many of the *Mish-*

*neh Torah's* commentaries have puzzled over the significance of this comparison and have offered various *halachic* explanations for it.

Legal constructs aside, Maimonides is alluding to a conceptual correlation between the defining characteristic of Shabbat and that of Passover. On Passover, as on Shabbat, we are empowered to experience a state that, on the surface, seems to have no intrinsic content of its own, being only the negation of something else. But just as Shabbat rest is more than the absence of toil, so, too, the freedom of Passover is a dynamic freedom, not merely the absence of bondage.

Freedom is commonly perceived as the removal of all external constraints on a person's development and self-expression. Freedom is the natural state of man, this line of reasoning implies; free him of all outside forces that limit and inhibit him, and you have a free human being.

Passover embodies a far more ambitious freedom. The exodus from Egypt, which marked the end of Israel's subjugation to their Egyptian enslavers, was but the first step of a seven-week journey, a forty-nine step climb in the conquest and transcendence of self that culminated in

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## The Amphibian Soul

By Yanki Tauber  
 And the children of Israel walked on dry land within the sea.

Exodus 14:29

Everything that exists on land has its counterpart in the sea. Talmud, Chullin 127a

Land and sea mirror each other, yet they are vastly different worlds. Both are life-supporting environments, providing sustenance and protection to a myriad of creatures. Both are complex ecosystems, complete with the great variety of minerals, vegetation and animals which form a "food chain" and multi-runged ladder of life. But despite their similarities, land and sea are different in many ways, particularly in the manner in which the creatures who populate them relate to their environment.

Our sages have said that "man is a miniature universe," a microcosm of the entire created existence. The human being thus includes both these worlds—man has both a terrestrial and an aquatic aspect to his life.

### The Secret of the Deep

Creatures of the land are to be found upon the land. Some species burrow under for a certain part of the day or year, and there are even species which rarely, if ever, show themselves above ground; but on the whole, land creatures live their lives on the surface of the earth. In fact, there is nothing to prevent them from severing all direct contact with the land for extended periods of time (20th-century man has all but done so).

Not so the creatures of the sea: they live submerged within their environment. And for most sea-dwelling animals, this submersion is a matter of life and death—a fish out of water is not only a creature out of its element, but a creature who cannot survive more than a short while.

Of course, the creatures of the land are no less dependent upon the land than their sister creatures of the sea are dependent upon the sea—without the land and its resources a land animal could not live. The difference lies in how this truth is reflected in their day-to-day, hour-to-hour, and minute-to-minute existence. With the sea creature, this dependence is constant and

obvious. The sea animal cannot separate itself from its sustaining environment; its life and its life-source are inexorably bound together. The land creature, on the other hand, can receive its nourishment from the earth and then forget about it, even deny it. Conceivably, a land creature can live an entire lifetime without acknowledging, or in any way demonstrating, from where its sustenance is derived.

This is the significance of the "land" and "sea" personalities within man. There is a part of man that is disconnected from

his purpose and source: a "land" self that is oblivious to the fact that his soul is a "spark of G-d above," that he is granted life anew, each and every moment of time, by his Creator, that his existence has meaning only in the context of its role in the divine purpose. A "land" self that defines its existence in the narrow terms of personal ego and its individual desires and aspirations.

But man also possesses a "sea" persona—a spiritual self which transcends ego and individuality to attune its every deed and thought to the higher goals for which he was created. When this self is manifest, nothing

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### ON OUR COVER



### Prayer

By famed Chassidic artist Hendel Leiberman.

The artist depicts a scene of a Chassid deep in prayer, pouring out his heart to his creator.

It is common in Chabad circles that moving melodies accompany prayer, as expressed, by the artist, by the snapping of the fingers.

See back page of The World of Lubavitch for more on Chassidic song.

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<small>We cannot take responsibility for the Kashruth of the items advertised in this publication.</small>		

## Camp Gan Israel to Build Additional Bunk Houses

Plans for another new double bunk house at Gan Israel Overnight Camp, have recently been submitted to the Haliburton Township for approval. While we hope to begin construction in the spring, regrettably the added space will not be completed for the upcoming summer. This expansion has been necessitated by the ever growing list of ap-

lications we receive from across North America and beyond. Ever since we launched this magnificent endeavour eight years ago, Camp Gan Israel, in picturesque Haliburton, enjoys an enrollment

that continues to grow year after year. Due to space limitations numerous requests cannot be accommodated and are deferred to a wait list. Still, seeing firsthand the positive impact that an intense, fun filled, four week, 24/7 experience has on the campers, the camp administration is committed to build more bunk houses and accommodate the "wait list."



Indeed, many applicants hail from small, isolated communities and collage towns, where their parents serve as Chabad emissaries. These youngsters, while receiving a comprehensive Jewish education "on line," don't have

the luxury to interact with like minded friends and for them the camaraderie offered at Gan Israel is of utmost importance. The new double bunk house will enable us to add two additional groups and accommodate another 30 youngsters.

But that's not all. As a result of a special fund that has been established by Sidney and Naomi Spiegel, all initiatives that improve the facility are given due consideration. In fact, even before arriving at the 207 acre site the returning campers and counsellors will be amazed to notice the widening and reconstruction of the 3 kilometer trail into camp. This will enable coach buses and large trucks to drive right into camp and save time and spare undue hardship. So too, a large area was cleared, levelled, and seeded for an additional sports field, graciously facilitated by Allen and Jerry Werger.

The summer of 2018 was our seventh year of operation. These formative years, reflect the ordinary order of civilization and correspond to the seven days of the week. This year we are about to launch our eighth season, and from a Chassidic perspective, the number "eight" signifies going over and above the norm. Indeed, our Rebbe of blessed memory, who launched the camp Gan Israel initiative some 60 years ago, often stressed the virtue of taking a giant leap forward "over and above" with regards to enhancing Jewish life, especially when the initiative involves the youth.

While the younger participants were enthralled with a dramatic reading of the Purim story by their group leader, the teen groups reenacted and performed its narrative. After distributing musical instruments our beloved music therapist, Racheli Hershkop led a Purim "sing along", with a mix of old favourites and new ones. Next on the agenda was to creatively

## Friendship Circle Hosts Purim Celebration and Masquerade

Youngsters with special needs enjoyed a pre Purim party and masquerade together with their 1/1 buddies (shadows). The exotic and humorous costumes did wonders to create a joyous and festive atmosphere. With unbridled enthusiasm each participant related to the entire assembly what they were dressed up to portray.

Through a selected variety of interactive activities the special children were introduced to the famed narrative of the Book of Esther and traditional Holiday customs. This was especially meaningful for some of the children who are not able to attend a Jewish day school and thus not afforded the opportunity to become familiar with the intricacies of Holiday celebrations and practices.

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prepared boxes of Mishloach Manot by the youngsters for their parents. Some moms and dads were handed empty packages, with a specially designed Purim greeting card, since for some of the youngsters the Purim treats and delicacies proved to be too tempting and could not control themselves from eating the goodies they were to present to their parents. Still, having spent the whole morning enjoying and familiarizing themselves with the Purim experience, helped them celebrate Purim day in a more meaningful way.

## Electronic Bulletin Board Gets a Facelift

Chabad's electronic bulletin board has recently undergone an upgrade to full colour and greater matrix resolution. The newly installed state of the art technology has enabled us to feature attractive motion graphics as well. Embedded in an attractive flagstone wall the message board which has graced the landscape for the past fifteen years has become a landmark at the corner of Bathurst and Chabad Gate. Whether the information offered is candle lighting time, the Omer count, holiday bulletins, it has been well received by pedestrians and commuters alike.



At its inception, fifteen years back, the bright, red-on-black display was the height of technology and has served faithfully for many years. Recently, though, much more advanced formats have become the norm so it was time to make the investment in a full colour sign. In order for the messages to be clearly seen, even in bright sunlight, a high intensity sign was installed. Various designers, some in house talent while others are contracted to do the designs, are busy churning out creative graphics and animations to inform and entertain the many tens of thousands riding up Bathurst on a daily basis.

If traffic signal has you stopped at Chabad Gate you will likely get to see the full rotation of messages for the day. If you are passing by you'll catch one or two messages.

Programmed to operate

continuously 24/6 vital information is imparted non stop to Thornhill residents and visitors. (Shabbat and Holidays, the sign displays a constant Shabbat Shalom or Chag Sameach)

blazers that eagerly embraced the challenge and opportunity. Soon after acquiring a 3 acre site, a 26,000 sq. ft. multipurpose facility was built, which housed a Shul, Mikvah, lending library, and classrooms. Indeed, with a comprehensive network of amenities and glowing popularity around the world, the 'city above Toronto' attracted Jews from all walks of life and became a haven for emigrants

## Megillah Read at Toronto City Hall

The sound of Graggers drowning out the name of Haman, emanating from Committee Room 3 in Toronto City Hall, had heads turning as curious passersby peeked in to see what the commotion was.

Once again, this year, Rabbi Moshe Spalter, administrator of Chabad Lubavitch of Southern Ontario, led a lunchtime Megillah reading for those who work downtown and are unable to hear the Megilla read in Shul.

With the help of Councillor James Pasternak and his staff a room was secured in City Hall for Purim day, to facilitate the Purim celebration.

Mishloach Manot packages were distributed to all participants enabling them to fulfill the mitzvah of sharing food gifts with a friend on Purim.



Rabbi Moshe Spalter with Councillor James Pasternak at Toronto City Hall

## New, Free Standing, Building Proposed for Chabad Headquarters

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from around the globe. To accommodate the influx of participants, twelve years ago, an additional 5,000 sq ft, was added to the shul, auditorium, and library.

Still, for some of our most popular youth programs such as the Friendship Circle, and the Lubavitch Day Camp, our existing space is far too inadequate. Many worthy initiatives are curtailed while others are held off site or cancelled. It has become evident that in order to properly service the community we would need to once again create

more space.

After much consideration and deliberation it was decided to construct an auxiliary free standing structure with a foot print of five thousand square feet. The ground level will house a new and enlarged woman's Mikvah. One of the seven aesthetically designed preparation room will incorporate all the amenities needed to accommodate physically challenged patrons as well. Dedicated parking and stately and discreet entry will be from the Lony Court cul de sac. The

auxiliary utility rooms on the upper floors will have a separate entrance from the north side. The proposed eight spacious multipurpose rooms above will provide much needed room for the Friendship Circle, Lubavitch Day Camp, and numerous youth programs. Currently, we are engaged in the planning, design, and approval stage. All being well and on schedule, we hope, with G-d's help, to be shovel ready in the fall of 2019.

# LDC...THE PLACE TO BE!

As parents, there are many decisions to make from the moment a child is born. Which brand of diapers are the best? Is the Britax the safest car seat? Hire a nanny look into daycare or quit work? These decisions may or may not impact your child's future, but you want to make certain that you did all in your power to ensure that your child has the advantage, confidence and ability to achieve everything they want. We are here to take out the guess work of one of the yearly decisions, one that lasts eight weeks long, when the weather is beautiful and everyone should be HAPPY!

Send your child to Lubavitch Day Camp, it's that simple! Not convinced? Here are the top ten reasons this is the best decision you'll make.

## 1. Because what's a summer without tons of fun?



In LDC there is never a dull moment! Special activities, singing (lots!) dance, sports, friends new and old, all day, every day. The sparkle in their eyes will tell you how much they enjoyed their time.

## 2. Because the camp counselors are amazing



Our counselors are hand-picked from around the globe, brought it so your child will have the best summer ever. They are kind, courteous, attentive, and energetic, and will quickly become a role-model for your child.

## 3. Because the food is kosher



At LDC all our food is cooked in house. Campers have many healthy options throughout the day to keep them well-nourished. Hot lunches daily. Snack bar is open all day and food is plentiful. From gefilte fish to chicken soup, and everything in between, we'll take care of the kids like a real Jewish Bubby

## 4. Because, let's admit it, you also need a break . . .



LDC offers door-to-door bussing, hot meals and all snacks, and an all-inclusive program. It's as simple as waving goodbye to them in the morning and hugging them at the end of the day as they are brought to your doorstep. Now it's time to start your own "top ten things to do when the kids are at LDC" list!

## 5. Because they will come home happy!



In Judaism, happiness is a great thing, a state we strive to be in at all times. Jewish camps do everything in their power to make your child happy.

## 6. Because we go on lots of TRIPS!



Every week, even twice a week, we go on a field trip. No place is too far or too expensive. We experience it all. African Lion Safari, Chicopee Tube Park, Woodbine Center, bowling, even Canada's Wonderland! There are too many to list, I guess you would have to sign up to see them all!

## 7. Because we love every child!



That is a fact! In LDC every kid is loved, accepted and cherished for who they are. Quirky? Energetic? Lonely? We will embrace them all and make them a star in the bunk!

## 8. Because every child is equal!



In LDC every child gets the same treatment. EVERYONE enjoys hot lunches, EVERYONE can partake in all camp specialties, and EVERYONE gets instructional sports, dance, art, drumming and tennis. In other camps it's only offered to the children who have parents that can afford the extra fees. We do not want any child to feel left out, or non-deserving, so if one child gets it they all do!

## 9. Because our Olympic size outdoor pool is HEATED!



As Torontonians we need to take advantage of every single summer day. The campers go swimming every day, aside from full-day trip days. If it's a bit chilly, our pool gets more heated!

## 10. Because a proud Jew is a happy, healthy Jew.



And you want your children to have the greatest spiritual health. When children attend LDC, they are able to stretch their Jewish "muscles," grow, and explore their place among our people. With weekly Jewish themes, and song they will experience how great it is to be a Jew.

So send your child to Lubavitch Day Camp—you will be happy you did, and your child will love you for it!

# The Backstory of the Chasidim Who Got Criminal Justice Reform Done in the US

Inspired by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, a group saw prison reform through from proposal to law

By Dovid Margolin

The U.S. Senate's overwhelming 87-12 approval last year of the First Step Act, the most sweeping package of criminal justice reforms in a generation, was lauded by those on the right and the left as a much-needed step in the right direction for the U.S. criminal justice system. The bill will expand early transfer to home confinement via participation in job training and re-entry programming designed to reduce recidivism; modify some mandatory sentencing laws; and ensure that the incarcerated stay more closely connected to their families by placing them within 500 miles of their homes, among other steps.

The bill went back to the House of Representatives, where

Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—that Rabbi Sholom Lipskar, founded the Aleph Institute in 1981. The Rebbe was a strong and early pioneer of criminal justice reform, seeing a fundamental flaw in incarceration disconnected from re-education and rehabilitation.

"If a person is being held in prison, the goal should not be punishment but rather to give him the chance to reflect on the undesirable actions for which he was incarcerated," the Rebbe said in Yiddish in a 1976 talk. "He should be given the opportunity to earn, improve himself and prepare for his release when he will commence an honest, peaceful, new life, having used his days in in prison toward this end.

a parent in prison and "two-thirds of these children's parents were incarcerated for nonviolent offenses." The Sentencing Project found that approximately 10 million children in the United States have experienced parental incarceration in their lives.

As a grown adult, Margaret began volunteering to visit people in prison. On one such trip to the Otisville Correctional Facility in New York in the late 2000s, he was in the waiting room when he witnessed a mother with her children showing their incarcerated father their Passover projects. One by one, the children recited "Mah Nishtanah"—the Four Questions traditionally said at the family seder—but in this case, instead they recited the Hebrew text in the sterile environs of a federal prison. Unable to contain herself, the mother burst out in tears.

"It was a horrible scene," Margaret says on a short documentary telling the story of the First Step Act. "... At that time I figured, I'm going to go home, I will be sitting ... at a beautiful seder. Those kids, look what they're going through. I felt, no more. I'm going to jump in; we have to do something."

Margaret is careful to note that there is obviously a job for the criminal justice system to do, and those who commit crimes must pay their debt to society. The question was how to reduce the grave impact it has on the families of inmates, in some cases the greatest human victims (especially in many white-collar crimes), and also to be more effective about how the system goes about it. With the immensely high rate of recidivism for released prisoners, was it working as efficiently as it could? Were the heavy sentences handed down according to sentencing guidelines a fair way to deal with offenders? Could inmates earn



their way back into society as opposed to wasting away behind bars?

In 2009, a prisoner Margaret had been visiting told him that if he was serious about wading into the murky waters of criminal justice reform, he needed to get in touch with Rabbi Zvi Boyarsky, the Los Angeles-based director of constitutional advocacy for the Aleph Institute.

A quiet, behind-the-scenes type of guy, Boyarsky is something of a legend within the criminal justice community. When, for example, Brooklyn businessman Jacob Ostreicher was caught up in a Bolivian extortion scheme connected with a rice-farming business he ran, and was arrested and imprisoned without charge, Boyarsky sprang into action. Through Hollywood connections he enlisted the help of actor Sean Penn, who eventually flew to Bolivia to investigate the case for himself. Penn has relationships with a number of South American leaders, including Bolivia's Evo Morales, and managed to have him freed.

Among other things, Boyarsky also played a key role in the formation of Aleph's 2016 Alternative Sentencing Summit at Georgetown University, which brought together 200 judges, prosecutors and lawyers, including politicians who later led the successful effort to pass the First Step Act, and was televised on C-SPAN.

So, back in 2009, Margaret got in touch with Boyarsky, telling him that he was determined to effect change in the criminal justice system.

"Moshe was incredibly passionate, and his dedication was beyond inspiring," Boyarsky shares in the documentary. The concept Margaret was working on—educational and faith-based programs, participation in which

would reduce prison time while also reducing recidivism—was "long overdue, and Moshe was committed to seeing it through, with G d's help, recognizing the incredible impact this would have on thousands of families."

Washington is a tricky place to do business, especially when trying to push an idea people have strongly held beliefs about. Still, it was impossible to know at the time that it would be almost 2019 when reform would actually be passed.

"This shows the impact even one person can have," stresses Boyarsky. "Change can happen if you try."

## A Moral Imperative

Rabbi Sholom Lipskar was at the Rebbe's farbrengen gathering in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1981 when he heard the Rebbe comment that while so much effort was being made to connect Jews from all walks of life to their Judaism, there were hundreds of Jews in prison, ready and waiting to study Torah, and yet no one was reaching them. The very next day, the Aleph Institute was born.

Those early years were spent working on basics: making sure Jewish prisoners could have access to kosher food and other essentials, sending rabbis and visitors to arrange Jewish holiday programming and the like (Aleph has a second duty, geared to assist Jews in the U.S. military and their families, and today is one of only two organizations that certify Jewish chaplains). Almost immediately, Aleph became known as a pioneer. It was among the first organizations to begin family support groups and was instrumental in the introduction of electronic monitoring into the prison system, allowing individuals to spend more time with their families even under such

Continued on page 6



Moshe Margareten and the Aleph Institute's Rabbi Zvi Boyarsky not long after they initially met in 2009.

it passed by a massive 358-36 majority, and the next day was signed into law by President Donald Trump—who had been vocal in his support for the legislation—in the Oval Office.

The legislation's path to fruition, however, was not as simple it might appear. "For the bill's supporters, Tuesday's vote was the culmination of a five-year campaign on Capitol Hill that only months ago appeared to be out of reach ...," reported The New York Times. "Much of the same coalition that pushed the First Step Act had rallied around similar legislation, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 ... ." That bill was shelved in the run-up to the 2016 elections when it wasn't allowed on the Senate floor for a vote, dealing a blow to its longtime backers.

But who are these "bill's supporters" the Times references—members of the "same coalition" that has been working at this for years?

The little-known answer is that the First Step Act was initiated, drafted and spearheaded by a small group of passionate Jewish community activists led by Moshe Margareten, a member of the Skverer Chassidic group. This activism was aided by the expertise and institutional knowledge of the Aleph Institute, the leading organization caring for the Jewish incarcerated and their families. The bill, which garnered national attention, will have a transformative impact on the American criminal justice system, affecting tens of thousands of inmates, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

It was at the urging of the

"In order for this to be a reality a prisoner must be allowed to maintain a sense that he is created in the image of God; he is a human being who can be a reflection of Godliness in this world. But when a prisoner is denied this sense and feels subjugated and controlled; never allowed to raise up his head, then the prison system not only fails at its purpose, it creates in him a greater criminal than before. One of the goals of the prison system is to help Jewish inmates and non-Jewish inmates ... to raise up their spirits and to encourage them, providing the sense, to the degree possible, that they are just as human as those that are free; just as human as the prison guards. In this way they can be empowered to improve themselves ..."

Driven by the Rebbe's vision, Margaret and the bipartisan Washington D.C.-based team he assembled proved tenacious enough to see the criminal justice reform bill over hurdle after hurdle, ultimately to its historic passage and signing into law.

## 'The Family Collapsed'

As a child growing up in New York, Margaret recalls seeing a neighbor getting arrested. The imprisoned man had children Margaret's age with whom he played, and as time passed he saw the deepening impact the father's incarceration had on the family.

"I watched as the family collapsed," says Margaret. "From then on, I developed a strong feeling for the impacted family members. It became a passion."

Such circumstances are increasingly prevalent. According to a report by Pew Charitable Trusts, 2.7 million children have



Federal Judge Jack B. Weinstein, then-chief and today senior judge on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York, receives a dollar and a blessing from the Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—on Dec. 17, 1989, as Rabbi Sholom Lipskar, founder of the Aleph Institute, looks on. Weinstein was on his way to testify before the Federal Sentencing Commission and told the Rebbe he would be presenting the Rebbe's ideas before them. "You will support my views also, not just report them?" the Rebbe asks, to which Weinstein responded he would. (Photo: Jewish Educational Media/The Living Archive)

extreme circumstance.

As it grew and built a name for itself on the federal, state and local levels, Aleph and its philosophy continued to be guided by the Rebbe, who stressed the need to treat each and every incarcerated individual with the dignity and respect they deserve as human beings, and assist them in fulfilling their G d-given missions on earth.

“Similarly in regard to each individual, those who find themselves in a state of personal [exile]—there is no cause for discouragement and despondency, G d forbid,” the Rebbe wrote in a letter to Jewish prisoners in 1977. “On the contrary, one must find increasing strength in complete trust in the Creator and Master of the Universe that their personal deliverance from distress and confinement is on its speedy way. All the more so when this trust is expressed in a growing commitment to the fulfillment of G d’s Will in the daily life and conduct in accordance with His Torah and Mitzvos.”

One of the early backers of

the Jewish tradition. Every person has a mission and calling in this world—one they would be unable to fulfill if they were warehoused away; therefore, the Torah provides other methods of punishments, after which the convicted can go back to their lives and missions as human beings. However it evolved, Western countries had adopted prison as a model punishment, but, the Rebbe said, education and rehabilitation must remain at its core or else it would not respect the prisoner as an individual created by G d, thus not allowing him or her to return to their path.

It would also not be effective. This philosophy is borne out by the numbers. For example, a 2005-10 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that within five years of release, a staggering 76.6 percent of released prisoners are rearrested. Correctional facilities have been keeping the convicted off the streets, but were not being nearly effective enough in helping inmates turn their lives around.

The prison system was far

termed “mass incarceration.”

Therefore, in March of 2011, Margareten hired a lobbying group with experience in criminal justice reform, the Mitchell Firm, to begin working to convince legislators—with a focus on Republicans—of the pressing need for reform.

“For me, I saw it would be better for society if we were able to come up with a way that [inmates] could earn their way out

*Continued on page 15*

## Teen Wins Table Tennis Gold While Observing Jewish Fast Day

By Faygie Levy Holt

That a Shabbat-observant teen on her way to the 2020 Olympics took home the gold for the Under-20 Girls’ Doubles with her partner, Linda Shu, from Texas is an impressive feat. But what made the victory truly extraordinary is that she was competing in the high-energy, high-stress match on Asarah B’Tevet (10th of Tevet), a Jewish fast day.

Estee Ackerman, 17, explains that she had a strategy to make it through the day of competition at the U.S. Open in table tennis. She focused on hoarding calories before the fast. She ramped up her training on Monday night, when she could still eat, and didn’t have any practice sessions on Tuesday morning before the meet began.

“Nothing was going to stop me from a gold medal. I realized I put much work and dedication into this and, baruch Hashem [thank G d], I’m 17 and in good shape,” Estee notes, adding that she was careful not to overdo it when she wasn’t playing.

“I truly felt Hashem was with me for every point,” she says.

The doubles’ victory wasn’t Estee’s only impressive feat at the U.S. Open. On Dec. 19, she beat out No. 1 speed and veteran table-tennis champ Lily Yip to win the Women’s Hardbat Singles’ event competition in Orlando, Fla. “For me, being able to not only compete against her, and win and claim myself as best female hardbat player in America, is something I will never forget. I treated it as one of my greatest wins in my ping-pong career.”

“Hardbat” refers to the type of racquet used in play, Estee explains, noting that her win was far from secure.

“[Yip] got the first game, and if you asked me or my father, we had a bit of a letdown because I’d lost,” says Estee. “But if you know me well, second place isn’t in my vocabulary, and I go into tournaments with the mindset of one goal: a gold medal.”

‘Inspired by Her Success and Her Commitment’

Estee says her motivation to succeed in table tennis come in part from the public reaction to an event that happened back in 2012. That year, when she was just 11, the youngster decided to forfeit a match rather than play on Shabbat.

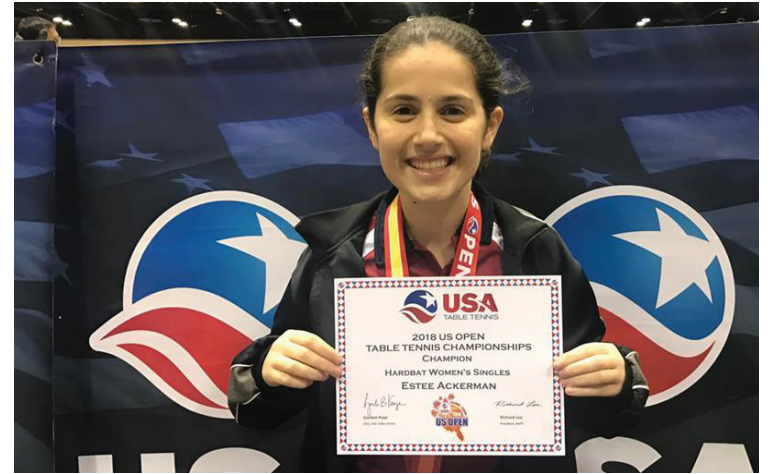
“I was amazed and humbled that year when I got letters and calls from people I didn’t know—people who were Reform, Conservative, religious—telling me that they were inspired to be more involved,” she recalls. “Who would have



thought ping-pong would lead to such a thing?

“We are part of the Jewish nation,” says Estee. “People sometimes forget how big a zechus [‘reward’] it is to be a

Chabad of Orlando with his wife, Chani. “One of the members, David Segel, spoke about his own table-tennis experience and how he played in his youth against some very famous



Estee Ackerman, 17, had a strategy to make it through a day of competition at the U.S. Open in table tennis while observing the Jewish fast day of Asarah B’Tevet.

bas Yisrael [the ‘daughter of Israel’], bas Melech [the ‘daughter of the King’], and that was really my motivation to keep going.

“There are ups and downs, and definitely challenges” in pursuing her dream sport, she acknowledges, adding that those challenges bring her closer to G d.

During her week in Orlando, Estee spent Shabbat with Chabad of Orlando, where she addressed synagogue members following Saturday-morning services.

“The community members and guests who were present were so inspired by her success, but even more so, by her commitment to Yiddishkeit and her decision to place Shabbat before anything else,” said Rabbi Yosef Konikov, co-director of

players, including the Seemiller brothers [table-tennis world champions Ricky and Danny Seemiller, the latter who is also in the sport’s U.S. Hall of Fame]. He then noted how impressed he was to hear from a shomer Shabbat teenager, who spoke so proudly of her Judaism and her merit to sanctify G d’s name while doing the sport she’s so passionate about.”

As 2019 dawns, Estee has her eyes on some more regional table-tennis competitions in her path to the Olympics. For now, though, she’s focused on finishing her senior year in high school (where she plays on the school basketball team), going to Israel in the fall to continue her Jewish education and encouraging other people to follow their passion.



Philanthropist Shlomo Rechnitz presents actor Sean Penn with an award in appreciation of his work getting Brooklyn businessman Jacob Ostreicher out of his unjust imprisonment in Bolivia.

Aleph’s work was Judge Jack B. Weinstein, a former chief judge, and today, at age 97, an extremely active senior judge, on the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of New York.

Lipskar and the team at the Aleph Institute, wrote Weinstein, “understand and force us to face the fact that each person deserves to be treated with respect as an individual personality and not as ... a faceless number ...”

Lipskar recalls the time in 1985 when he got permission from the Bureau of Prisons to take a group of 20 screened prisoners from 12 federal facilities to take part in a mentorship program run outside of prison by Aleph. They all traveled to New York, and on Shabbat, Lipskar arranged for the men to join the Rebbe’s farbrengen at his synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. It being a packed crowd, Lipskar pulled strings to have a table saved for his group so that they could be guaranteed seats together.

At 1:30, just before the farbrengen was set to start, the Rebbe sent a message to Lipskar via a secretary: The group should not sit together. People would see the prisoners come in together, recognize they did not look like Chassidim and ask them where they came from. This might cause the prisoners embarrassment; instead, the Rebbe said, they should be spread about the room.

On more than one occasion, including that day when the prisoners were in attendance, the Rebbe pointed out that imprisonment is not a punishment prescribed by the Torah, and is for the most part not found in

smaller back when Aleph started; according to the Bureau of Prisons, there were 26,313 people in the federal system in 1982. Today, there are 180,843 prisoners, down from a high of 219,298 in 2013. According to the latest Bureau of Justice Statistics report, a total of 2,172,800 people are incarcerated in America, not including people on probation or parole.

“The Rebbe was very much ahead of the curve,” says Lipskar, noting that the United States by now has 22 percent of the world’s prisoners, but only 4.4 percent of the total world population. “He saw what was happening, and he pressed that prisoners be treated with dignity, and that they be given educational opportunities so that they could use their time in the facilities for the better. Our focus on education in prison has been central because of this.”

It took years for others to get on board.

**Mr. Margareten Goes to Washington**

Aggressive legislation to combat urban crime, the drug war and to crack down on white-collar financial crimes came into effect in the 1980s, causing the U.S. prison population to balloon. While many of these efforts were pushed in good faith, there have been many unintended consequences. Mandatory minimum-sentencing rules set in place at the time meant that it was often not a judge who would be making the decision of how steep a sentence a convict would receive, but a math calculation. In an attempt to crackdown on crime, people stopped being considered as individuals. This has resulted in what’s by now been

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## Art and Design Meet in Chabad of Korea's New Mikvah

By Frayda Kaplan

Chabad of Korea is putting the finishing touches on a beautifully designed women's mikvah—the first for the Asian country. Since 2008, Rabbi Osher and Mussy Litzman have been serving South Korea's Jewish community of 500-1,000 Jews living in Seoul. "Until now, women who wished to visit a mikvah were forced to take the two-hour flight to the closest one in Tokyo, Japan or use the waters of the sea in Incheon, a two-hour drive from Seoul," shares Mussy. "It's a big challenge, financially and logistically, and, in many cases, must be done once a month."

The mikvah sits on a secluded property that was purchased by Chabad in November 2017. A fifteen minute walk from the Chabad center, the mikvah is easily accessible by public transportation. The second floor will house a luxurious couple's suite to be used by



Chabad builds first mikvah in Korea

women who may not be able to return home immediately after using the mikvah, such as on Friday nights when they cannot drive back home, or to serve the needs of women who travel there from a distance. The facility will not charge user fees, but will depend on donations.

It will be the sixteenth Chabad mikvah in Asia with

four in mainland China, four in Thailand, two in Japan and one each in Vietnam, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Singapore and India.


Though she no longer lives in Seoul, Miriam Tobias welcomes the news of the mikvah's imminent opening in the spring of 2019. Currently based in Sierra Vista, Arizona, the mother of three lived in South Korea for four and a half years while her husband Eli, a cybersecurity expert for the US Army, was stationed there. Miriam is familiar with the challenges of arranging last minute flights to Tokyo or finding a safe, secluded spot along the shores of the sea in Incheon. "I am glad that it will soon be easier for other Jewish women in Korea to keep the age-old mitzvah," she said.

Designed by the Litzmans, the mikvah is uniquely Korean. Its roof is reminiscent of the curved, tiled designs that feature prominently in royal Korean architecture, and the waved aluminium panels on the left side of the building are a nod to the modern, high-tech vibe currently sweeping the country. The mikvah pool features intricate mosaic tiles placed along the walls that were artfully formed in the shape of a single droplet of water, encouraging one to contemplate the sanctity and rebirth associated with the waters of the mikvah.











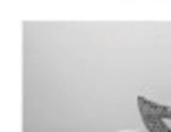


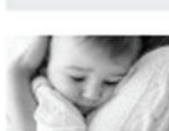


For the past ten years, the Litzmans have budgeted donations to Chabad carefully, reserving all additional resources for the building of the mikvah. They are short one-third of the necessary funds and are working to raise it in time for the scheduled opening in April 2019.

"We set out to build a mikvah that women would be excited to use," shares Mussy Litzman, "the mikvah has not even opened yet, and the feedback has been amazing."





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## Tackling the Text in Braille, JLI Teaches Torah to the Blind

By Mussi Sharfstein

One year ago, retired pulmonologist Dr. Jeff Aronson, was introduced to Rabbi Eli Rivkin of Chabad of Northridge, California, at a nearby class he was giving on Judaism. Aronson and Rivkin developed a rapport, and the doctor began participating in other Chabad programs. But when he started attending the rabbi's six-week "Wrestling with Faith" course, he ran into an obstacle.

Aronson has been blind since age sixty, and the course is mostly based around student textbooks.

Not one to shy away from a challenge, Rabbi Rivkin called up the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute (JLI), the course creators, known for their cutting-edge content and inclusive environment, and asked if they had any textbooks in Braille.

They did. Already ten years earlier, Rabbi Mendel Bluming of Chabad of Potomac, Maryland, had helped arrange a partnership between JLI and the Jewish Braille Institute (JBI) to translate the standard JLI textbooks into Braille.

It was Anita Cohen, a regular attendee at Chabad of Potomac's programs and adult education seminars, who initiated the partnership. She attended Bluming's JLI course, but her vision-impairment hindered her ability to fully participate. Relevant portions of the text are read by the students and many worksheets are filled out individually. Anita was frustrated and felt left out. She would wait silently while her classmates worked.

"I felt that it was unacceptable that she wasn't fully included in the studies, and I asked her to help me find a way to enable her to participate," says Bluming.

Anita suggested contacting the Jewish Braille Institute, whose library provides visu-

ally-impaired individuals with books, magazines, and special publications of Jewish and general interest in audio, large print, and Braille formats—all free of charge. The JBI was glad to take on this project.

"I said, it's not just a simple class. It's the largest Jewish adult education network in the world," Bluming said. JLI courses are given at Chabad centers in over 900 communities across the globe. "And the mission of the JBI Library is to help people who are visually challenged be included in the Jewish experience. It just made sense." That's when the Jewish Braille Institute began working with the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute to produce the textbooks in Braille.

Anita, who passed away two years ago, was a staunch participant of her JLI class, proudly reading aloud from her Braille book, following along with the lesson. Once each course was completed, Bluming would bring her book to JLI headquarters in Brooklyn so they could reuse them.

Thanks to the partnership between the JBI and JLI, Dr. Aronson has just completed his first full course and is looking forward to the next one. He's now working on learning the Hebrew alphabet in Braille, an entirely new language.

"Chabad's mission is to disseminate the teachings of Judaism and Chasidism to the outside," says Bluming quoting the famous Chasidic teaching that the "wellsprings" of Torah are meant to be spread to the far corners of the world. "This program is truly bringing rich Torah education to every person, regardless of their personal limitations and we are so proud to be a part of facilitating that."

For more information on the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, visit [www.MyJLI.com](http://www.MyJLI.com).



Dr. Jeff Aronson enjoying a JLI course at Chabad of Northridge, CA



## Rabbi's 'Be Kind' Message Inspires Others to Break the 'Spiral of Negativity'

By Kevin Ritchie

Six months ago, David Masinter announced his intention to launch a series of public artworks to get the people in Johannesburg to start treating

it, a negative energy is created. On the other hand, if one does good, speaks good, a positive energy is created."

The campaign, stark in its simplicity, merely injunctions



Johannesburg - At the corner of Rivonia Road and Sandton Drive in Johannesburg, just outside Sandton City, there are two words, one on top of the other. Be Kind, they say. They're the first in what David Masinter hopes will ultimately be a series of 18 art installations around Johannesburg.

each other better.

It was simple. "Be Kind," was the mantra. What he never bargained for was the overwhelming response from readers and the community at large - or the fact that his idea would be copied.

The Johannesburg rabbi had begun the process with a soft launch of advertising poster boards between September and November last year. In January, through a local newspaper, he'd asked for suggestions about where to place these 18 art installations and invited people who wanted to know more to contact him.

In the process, two separate billboards put up by local businesses; one carrying the exhortation "Be Kind" and the other, wholly unrelated in terms of locality or ownership, enjoining: "Be Kinder."

Masinter isn't upset at all at someone taking his idea, in fact, he's rather pleased.

"This is the whole point of the campaign. The fact that companies are using the tag line for their own gain is irrelevant. They're helping to promote kindness in their own way - and that's what we are trying to do, in any case."

Masinter wants the campaign to break the spiral of negativity that always seems to have Johannesburg in its thrall.

"There's a teaching," he says, "that if someone does bad, speaks it or even thinks

to drivers and passers-by: "Tell someone They Look Great" read one; "Just Be Kind" instructed another; "Complain Less, Smile More"; "Make Someone A Coffee" and even, "Call Your Mom".

The current project builds on the Chabad House rabbi's earlier campaign: Acts of Random Kindness, the little yellow plastic boxes that have been distributed to Johannesburgers for the past five years for them to fill up with unwanted change and given randomly to those in need.

So far 700,000 boxes have been distributed since 2014, with Masinter's goal being a million within the next few years. About 140,000 underprivileged children have benefited from the parallel Chabad House literacy programme that establishes township libraries and trains teachers.

The art project and the billboard campaign build on this.

"We're not selling anything, we're only advertising kindness," he says. "These outdoor signage companies are welcome to take part. They don't need to create their own artwork, we'll even supply it to them for free - if they really want to make a difference.

"All we are hoping to accomplish is to foster an increase in acts of goodness and kindness in our city and beyond - and, by doing that, change the world for good."

## Rare Kindness: Kidney-Donor Rabbi Now Donates His Liver

By Menachem Posner

Adam Levitz, a 44-year-old married father of three, was in liver failure. Things were getting worse and he knew it. On Dec. 20, he received a new liver and a new lease on life. His donor, Chabad Rabbi Ephraim Simon, is one of only a handful of individuals to have ever donated both a kidney and a liver, a procedure most hospitals won't even allow.

The two men had never met until just days before the lifesaving surgery, but Simon says that's exactly what he was looking for.

"As a rabbi, I do a lot of talking about love, doing things for others and altruism," says the 50-year-old father of nine who co-directs Chabad of Bergen County in Teaneck, N.J., with his wife, Nechamy. "A rabbi's greatest sermon and a parent's greatest lecture is the way they live their lives," said the rabbi following the surgery. "The Rebbe imbued his Chassidim with Ahavas Yisrael [love for a fellow Jew]. It's something we all speak about, but how often do we have the opportunity to really set ourselves aside for another? This was my opportunity to do that, and I didn't want to let it go. Adam allowed me to actually give the gift of life, perhaps the greatest chessed, kindness, I can imagine."

The rabbi's route to donation was not an easy one. It was a circuitous chain of kindness that involved many, most notably Chaya Lipschutz, a woman from Brooklyn, N.Y., who donated a kidney to a stranger and devoted her life to matching kidney donors and recipients.

Since she had matched him up with the recipient of the kidney he donated in 2009, he approached her again and asked if she was aware of anyone who could make use of his liver.

"Rabbi Simon approached me in 2012 and told me that he wanted to donate a portion of his liver altruistically," says Lipschutz. "That is unique. It is extremely rare for someone to donate a kidney and then a liver, but he was so very motivated to give this gift to someone."

While Lipschutz is aware of two individuals who donated kidneys and then went on to donate their livers to children (who require just a small portion of an adult liver), at the time Simon was the only kidney donor she encountered who wanted to give his liver to an adult.

Through the introduction of Chanie Wilhelm of Chabad of Milford, Conn., Lipschutz had been aware of Levitz, a resident of Long Island whose parents were leading members of Wilhelm's congregation.

Diagnosed with Crohn's disease at age 15, Levitz was no stranger to pain and medical complications and managed to

live a productive life despite the condition, which has no known cure. However, when the disease affected his liver, things got much worse. Levitz had been working in finance until his health prevented him from continuing. "Around nine years ago, the Crohn's caused PSC, short for 'primary sclerosing cholangitis,' and I was hospitalized numerous times in the past three years."

Levitz was placed on a donor registry in several places and had even rushed twice to Philadelphia in the hopes of receiving livers from deceased donors, but both times, his hopes were dashed. In one case, the liver wasn't in good enough condition, and the other was too large.

In retrospect, Levitz reflects, it was all G d's hand since his doctors had advised him that he really needed a liver from a living donor.

In the meantime, Simon had his share of false starts as well, prospective liver recipients who turned out not to be suitable for him. "For years, Rabbi Simon kept on hoping that there was someone out there who could use his liver, and he was so grateful every time we thought we found someone," says Lipschutz, who has been making donor-recipient matches since 2005. "He just so wanted to help others."

Through Lipschutz's networking, the shidduch was made, but things were far from simple.

As a previous donor, Simon was considered by most hospitals to be high-risk, and so they refused to consider him as a candidate. In addition, donors who do not know their recipients are viewed with suspicion and often categorically rejected on those grounds alone.

### Cleveland Clinic's Unique Philosophy

The only place in the country they were able to find that would do the surgery for them was Ohio's acclaimed Cleveland Clinic, which has a unique philosophy about working with people to save lives at all costs.

The date for the surgery was set for Dec. 20, but the rabbi had a lot to do before he would be able to check himself into the hospital for several weeks.

"Giving a liver makes donating a kidney look like a walk in the park. With liver donation, the surgery is very invasive and the recovery can take several weeks. It's a very big deal." Since he would be out of commission for the last few weeks of 2018, when he traditionally raises the funds needed to cover the year's operating expenses for his Chabad House, he hustled to get things set up several weeks earlier.

"I could never have done this without key partners," says the rabbi with characteristic humility. "First and foremost is my wife Nechamy, who has been

with me throughout both of my donations. It is easier to be in pain than to have to sit there and watch someone you love suffer, so she is the one who deserves to be recognized. Then there are my children who have stepped up to take care of things in our absence. My 22-year-old son and 19-year-old daughter have taken over the household, and knowing that things are running smoothly at home has allowed us to focus on the surgery and recovery. And then there is the community—both our Chabad congregation and the broader Teaneck community—which has rallied around us and supported us with prayers, well wishes and more. And much of my day-to-day work has been taken over by my fellow shliach, youth and teen director Rabbi Michael Goldin."

Before entering into surgery (the two men were operated in adjoining rooms), Simon and Levitz met for the first time, in an experience both described as "emotional."

### 'He Was a New Person'

However, Simon says the more moving meeting took place two days after the procedure when he was able to see the effect of his gift. "His skin color, the light in his eyes, his movement, everything was new and different," says the rabbi. "You could tell that he was a new person. He was living again, and G d had allowed me to be a part of it."

During the procedure, when the doctors opened Levitz and removed his liver, they saw that it was even worse than they had previously estimated. Shrunken and hard, it was failing fast, and if they would have waited even another few days, it was not clear if the surgery would have still been viable.

"I am so thankful to G d and to Rabbi Simon, whom I call my guardian angel. He represents everything that I have grown to love and respect about Chabad. He never once asked me how religious I am or anything else. I was a fellow human being, a fellow Jew, and he was happy to be able to help me."

Having grown up affiliated with an Orthodox congregation but not strictly observant, Levitz says many of his family members have recently become involved with Chabad in their hometowns. His youngest son currently attends Hebrew School at Town of Oyster Bay Chabad near his home in Woodbury, N.Y.

Despite his exposure to Chabad rabbis and their open approach, Levitz says he is still trying to "wrap [his] head around the rabbi's thought process. Every time we meet, he tells me how grateful he is for allowing him to save my life. With G d's help, I'm going to be able to watch my kids grow up because of the mitzvah he did. He saved me, and here he is thanking me."



Rabbi Ephraim Simon and Adam Levitz after the partial liver transplant that saved Levitz's life.



By Ahava Spillman

**AS. What prompted the decision to establish a Chabad House at Mt. Pleasant and Eglinton**

**SG.** After we got married Mushkie and I wanted to dedicate our lives to be part of the Rebbe's Shluchim (messengers) and help bring Yiddishkeit to the unaffiliated. The opportunity of the Mt. Pleasant / Davisville neighbourhood came up. We looked into it and saw that it has a fair number of Jewish homes which will only increase as a result of its close proximity to downtown, but there aren't many Jewish organizations nearby. In midtown, where everything you need is around the corner, we felt that it's important to bring Yiddishkeit around the corner as well.

**AS. How long have you been there and tell us about your family?**

**SG.** We've been here for about a year and half now.

I was raised in Thornhill and am the youngest of 11 children. My parents direct the Chabad Lubavitch of Ontario. Mushkie was raised in Buffalo Grove, IL where her parents direct the Chabad center. We have one child, Mendel,

**AS. What surprised you most about life in midtown Toronto?**

**SG.** Born and raised in Thornhill where it's much quieter, I can't say it was a surprise, but city life is always different and exciting. What we like about our neighbourhood is that on the one hand you have the main Roads with city busyness and excitement, but on the other hand you have residential side streets with beautiful parks, corner stores and backyard barbecues.

**AS. How did you first introduce yourself to the neighbourhood?**

**SG.** We simply knocked on doors and introduced ourselves. Everyone was so welcoming. "finally Chabad is here", or "there is not much close by catering to the Jewish community" or "I have been waiting so long for this knock on the door" were some of the responses we got.

**AS. Describe an unexpected reaction you have received as a "newcomer"?**

**SG.** I was taking a walk down the road and someone stopped me and commented "I didn't know there was an ortho-



In this issue we interview Rabbi Shmuel Grossbaum who, with his wife Mushki, runs the new Chabad on the Eastside

dox community here?" I smiled as I thought 'not yet'

**AS. What were your initial expectations? Have they changed?**

**SG.** Honestly we didn't really have expectations. We expected it to be challenging to start building a community, as any beginnings come with challenges, but the good news is we are already seeing exciting results.

Our goal is to bring the Jewish community together and to help each individual grow on his or her level in Yiddishkeit. In just a year we see that growth in a major way.

**AS I understand there was a Menorah lighting last Chanukah. Tell us about this.**

**SG.** What was special about the Davisville Menorah is that the vice chair of the Midtown Yonge BIA, Mr. Jayson Schwarz, reached out to Chabad to put up a Menorah, the summer before we came, so it was really nice to start off before even knowing anyone, with a foot in. This year we held our second Menorah lighting at the Davisville station. We are fortunate to have community support from the Midtown Yonge Business Improvement Area and the TTC. This past Chanukah we had a large crowd, some them we knew before and many new faces, both locals and some passers-by. We had live Chanukah music and hot soup, which the participants really enjoyed.

**AS. Mt. Pleasant and Eglinton is known as an upwardly mobile community filled with professionals and young families, also pets. How many Jews do live there and how do you find them?**

**SG.** It's hard to know the

exact Jewish population. I estimate between 5-10 % Jewish.

As I said we started off by meeting people at their homes. As time passes the word is getting out more and more, and people contact us.

**AS. Do you have Shabbat services?**

**SG.** After Rosh Hashana, we started once a month Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat services followed by a Kiddush.

**AS. Tell us about the your most successful programs to date**

**SG.** Being that we are relatively new, with each program we see growth. The latest was Chanukah where aside from the Menorah lighting at the Davisville station which had a nice crowd, we hosted a family Chanukah party at our home Sunday afternoon on the first night of Chanukah. It was a really nice way to start off the holiday. What was nice about the private party was the warmth of entertaining our guests in our personal space. At the end of the day our main goal is to build personal relationships, and help each individual grow in Yiddishkeit.

Also, we held a Megillah reading in our home on Purim evening, with some L'chaims and refreshments. It was a nice small crowd. One individual, who we met not long after we came, told me how inspired he felt. He followed along the whole reading, and the last time he did so was before his Bar Mitzvah.

Purim afternoon we held a Purim glow-in-the-dark party at the Roehampton Hotel. Everyone really enjoyed it, and we were delighted with the many new faces.

**AS What is planned for Pesach?**

**SG.** We will be distributing handmade Shmurah Matzah, as the Rebbe stressed the importance for every Jew to have Shmurah Matzah at the Seder.

We also plan on bringing children to the model Matzah bakery at Chabad Lubavitch in Thornhill.

**AS. How can you describe the power of the Rebbe to a Jew who has never had the experience of seeing the Rebbe personally?**

**SG.** I too don't remember seeing the Rebbe, being that I was very young at the Rebbe's passing, nevertheless I was brought up in a home devoted to the Rebbe and his mission. It is my personal connection that I try to express. Today one can look around and see the constant influence of the Rebbe, with Shluchim and Chabad houses worldwide constantly growing,

devoted to the Rebbe's goal of helping each Jew grow with one Mitzvah at a time. This is something everyone can relate to.

**AS. Are you planning a pre-school program or tiny tots camp program?**

**SG.** As of now my wife Mushki runs a Mommy and Me program throughout the year for mothers with babies, a special place for mother and baby's to spend quality time together in a warm Jewish environment.

**AS. How are you marketing your services?**

**SG.** Through Email and

Facebook, and a few times a year with a mailing. But the most effective way of marketing is speaking with people directly.

**AS. Do you give classes and on what topics?**

**SG.** We don't yet have official classes, but I learn with some one on one.

**AS. Do you find it extraordinary that adults who work all day want to come to you and learn in the little spare time they have left?**

**SG.** It inspires me how important it is to them, after a busy day to come learn or join services.

**AS. How do you generate income?**

**SG.** Manly by raising funds. Since we are still new, I tutor on the side and my wife teaches in a nearby Chabad Hebrew school.

**AS. It's commendable that you have decided to devote your time and energy to spreading Yiddishkeit to Mt. Pleasant and Eglinton. Kol Ha'kavod!. If any of our readers would like to send you a well-deserved donation, to where should they send it?**

**SG.** Donations can be given through our website [www.ChabadOnTheEastSide.com](http://www.ChabadOnTheEastSide.com)

## The Freedom to Passover

Continued from page 2

our receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai on the festival of Shavuot. Nor does Shavuot represent the final realization of freedom: at Sinai, we were granted the potential and challenge to attain yet a deeper dimension of liberty and self-transcendence.

Thus Shavuot is the only festival that has no calendar date—the Torah designates it not as a certain day of a certain month (as it does all other festivals) but as the day that follows a seven-week count from the festival of Passover. This is to emphasize that Shavuot is an outgrowth of Passover—that the significance of the Exodus came to light only on the day we stood at Sinai. As G-d tells Moses at the onset of his mission to liberate the Jewish people, "This is your sign that I have sent you: when you take this nation out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d at this mountain." Standing before Pharaoh, Moses did not merely demand, in the name of G-d, that he "Let My people go," but "Let My people go, that they may serve Me."

What is the significance of this liberating "service"? It means that man, no matter how free of external constraints, is a finite creature, ever subject to the limits of his own nature and character. That to attain true freedom he must therefore transcend his humanity—his emotional, intellectual, even spiritual self—and access the "spark of G-dliness" that is his infinite, supra-human self. The Torah, G-d's blueprint for life on earth, outlines the observances and practices that enable us realize our divine essence in our daily lives.

The day we left the borders of Egypt we were "free" in the conventional sense—no longer could an alien taskmaster dictate what we must or may not do. We then proceeded to also free ourselves of the alien influences that constrained us from within: the pagan habits and mind-set that centuries of subjection to the depraved culture of Egypt had

imposed on us, and our own in-born negative inclinations. Then, at Sinai, we were empowered to strive for yet a deeper dimension of freedom—a freedom that is not the negation of adversarial forces and influences, but the surmounting of our own, positive psychic and behavioral patterns. There is nothing negative about our human potential; but we are capable of more, of raising our achievements to a level in relation to which yesterday's "liberated" self is limited and subjective.

Thus our sages have said: "In every generation a person must see himself as if he has himself come out from Mitzrayim (Egypt)."

The Hebrew word for "Egypt," *mitzrayim*, means "boundaries," and the endeavor to free ourselves from yesterday's boundaries is a perpetual one. For freedom is more than the drive to escape foreign and negative inhibitors: no matter how free of them we are, we remain defined by the boundaries of self and self-definition. Freedom is the incessant drive to "pass over" these boundaries, to draw on our divine, infinite potential to constantly overreach what we are.

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# Dear Rebbby

By Rabbi Aron Moss



## The Roosters and the Frogs

**When it comes to the Pesach Seder, I always get stuck in the ten plagues that were visited on the Egyptians. The Nile River turns to blood, the land is covered in frogs, the people riddled with lice. It all sounds a bit weird. Why would the Almighty G-d afflict a people with these particular plagues? He could have just zapped them, and yet He sends them....frogs?!**

**Answer:**

I too have been baffled by the plagues, especially the frogs. It is a bit incongruous, like calling a football team "The Roosters." It just doesn't sound so menacing.

You can only understand the plagues if you listen to how G-d Himself described them. He told Moses, "I will smite the Egyptians and bring justice to their gods." G-d was not only punishing the Egyptian people for enslaving the Israelites, He was also smashing the Egyptian value system, their false gods.

People rarely do evil thinking that it is evil. Most villains believe they are doing good, because their value system is so twisted as to view darkness as light, justify evil as good, and explain wickedness as righteousness.

So G-d wanted to not only afflict the Egyptians, but to strike the source of their immorality. Each plague was an attack on the core beliefs of Egypt, the beliefs that led them to drown Israelite babies and become the most immoral society of the day. Let's look at the three examples you mentioned, the river turning to blood, the frogs and the lice.

The Egyptians worshipped the Nile as a god, for the Nile was their source of irrigation, livelihood and wealth. Thus the Nile represents materialism to the extreme, making a god out of money. That's why it was afflicted first. Where money is god, blood will flow.

The frog was another Egyptian deity. It was the god of fertility. Having children is a noble goal, but for the Egyptians, children were no more than a power base, and being fruitful like a frog meant expanding your clan and extending your influence. When children are seen as frogs, then humans have lost their humanity.

But it was the third plague, the plague of lice, which forced the Egyptians to recognize that the finger of G-d was at play. The Egyptian sorcerers were able to replicate the first two plagues through black magic, and so they weren't convinced that they were being divinely punished. But when lice swarmed over every Egyptian, they lifted their hands up in defeat. This is because as powerful as Egyptian sorcery was, it could not impact something as small as a louse. Egyptian spirituality dealt with big things, major issues, not minute details. They didn't give impor-

tance to the small things. They couldn't affect a louse.

We left Egypt and its ugly beliefs behind, to embrace a value system that was its polar opposite. Money is not a god, merely a means to do good. Our children are not trophies, but rather souls entrusted to us by G-d to care for and pass on our values. And the little things do matter. Most of our life is made up not of dramatic choices and big events, but of small details and subtle choices, and they all make a difference.

So on Pesach we go through the ten plagues, and reflect on the values that made Egypt into oppressors, the values we left behind, and the values that have kept us coming to Seder for three thousand years.

## Why is Seder Night Always a Full Moon?

**I am very connected to the zodiac and was wondering if there is a link between the stars and the timing of Pesach. I have also noticed that the Seder always coincides with the full moon. What is the significance of all this?**

**Answer:**

There is deep astrological significance to the date of Pesach. We celebrate the festival of freedom on the night of the 15th of Nissan in the Hebrew calendar, the night the Israelites were freed from Egypt. This is the full moon of the month of Aries, the ram.

The Egyptians worshipped the ram as a god. Aries is the leader of the star signs, the first and most powerful, and the Egyptians saw themselves as the leaders of the world, receiving their strength and fortitude from their god, the ram.

So the strongest time for the Egyptians would have been the month of Aries, when their god is ascendant. And the strongest day on that month would be its full moon. Egyptian power would reach its zenith on the 15th of Nissan.

And that is exactly when the Israelites left Egypt. Aries was rendered impotent at its very moment of strength.

But there's more. The Israelites ate a festive meal on the night before the exodus, and the main course was a lamb roasted on a spit. They were eating the Egyptian deity, the ram, under the full moon of the month of the ram, in the eyes of all Egypt, and they got away with it.

The message is unmistakable. The world is not run by capricious forces and amoral star signs. There is a G-d who rules heaven and earth, who cares for the innocent and exacts justice from the corrupt. To the stars, our actions make no difference. To G-d, our actions do matter. The zodiac demands nothing from us. G-d demands we live a life of goodness.

The Jews themselves didn't always get this message. After the exodus, some in the Israelite camp suggested that while the ram of Egypt (Aries) had indeed been trumped, it was not G-d's doing, but rather the next

star sign, Taurus, the bull who had beaten Aries. And so they made an idol honouring Taurus, known as the Golden Calf. It's very tempting to fall back on idolatrous beliefs, because they relieve us of responsibility. But they also rob us of our freedom.

Pesach is a celebration not only of freedom of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, but also freedom from being bound by destiny. Our lives are not subject to the impersonal forces of the zodiac. We are free to rise above the limitations of fate and conquer our birth sign. Your fortunes may predict one course for your life. You are free to create another. This idea was brought home on the night of the full moon of Aries.

## Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher Home?

**My very religious brother is coming to visit from Israel for a couple of weeks. As you know, my family is proudly Jewish but we do not keep kosher. I invited him to stay with us, but then suddenly thought that it might be a disaster. Can someone keep kosher in a non-kosher home? Are we going to have to turn our life upside down to accommodate him? Or is it better he stays at a kosher friend and we keep the peace?**

**Answer:**

This question has little to do with religiosity, and all to do with personality.

There are relatively simple solutions for keeping kosher in a non-kosher home. You can create for your brother a little kosher corner in your kitchen. All you need to do is get some new pots and pans, a stash of disposable cutlery and crockery, and allow him to rampage through the kitchen with a blowtorch. It's no big deal.

The real question is: are the two of you willing to bend a little for each other? It would be so much easier for both of you if he stayed somewhere else. For your brother, it might be awkward to eat in a home where others are eating non-kosher. For you, it might be inconvenient to give up some of your kitchen for a blowtorch wielding fundamentalist. But that's what you do for family.

Religious differences can tear a family apart, or bring a family closer. It really depends on the people. If we are stubborn, insecure and intolerant then religion serves as a great excuse to

not get along. But the issue is in the relationship, not the religion. If you and your brother value your connection and are willing to work together, you can live, and love, with your differences.

Peace in the family is itself a religious value. We should all be willing to compromise on our own convenience to keep the family together. You can be strict about kosher and strict about brotherly love too. The Torah teaches us to separate milk and meat, not brother and brother.

## Would You Eat Bacon for \$10 Million?

**I was watching a debate between the famous atheist Richard Dawkins and some rabbi about religion and G-d. Dawkins said that religions are just money machines, and its leaders fleece their gullible followers of their cash and come out rich. What do you have to say about that?**

**Answer:**

So Dawkins is saying that for believers, money trumps morality. I assume he holds that atheists are different. Let's test that hypothesis. What happens when people need to choose between money and principles? Let's try the following theoretical experiment.

Imagine you put Richard Dawkins in a sealed room all alone, with no one watching, no recording devices or CCTV's, and you offer him a deal: "I will give you ten million dollars if you will make the following statement right here and now: G-d most certainly does exist, He created the universe, and atheism is a delusion. I will never tell anyone that you said it. There will be no record of this one off event. Just make the statement, get the cash, and it will all be forgotten."

Does anyone have any doubt that Richard Dawkins would go for it and take the money? Can you think of any reason in the world for him to refuse that offer? Would he even hesitate to accept it? I think clearly not.

Now imagine you put the rabbi he debated in that same sealed room, all alone, and made this offer: "Rabbi, you will receive ten million dollars cash, tax free, no strings attached, but on one condition - you eat this piece of bacon. No one will ever find

out, it will not go beyond this room, it will be forgotten forever. Just eat and take the prize."

What would the rabbi do? Would he too sell his principles for ten million dollars? After all, it's just a one-off, and no one will ever know.

Let's be honest. Rabbis are humans too, and some rabbis may find the temptation too hard to resist. But I would say that the overwhelming majority of rabbis would refuse this offer and walk away. And not just rabbis, but many observant Jews, including those who could desperately use the money, would be able to withstand the test and not eat the bacon.

I am not suggesting that religious people do no wrong. I am saying that a religious person has reason to stand for their principles even when they can get away with it, and reason to regret it when they fail. It makes no difference that no one will find out or no one is looking. G-d is always looking. An atheist doesn't have that restriction. I don't believe that even one single atheist in their right mind would refuse to abrogate their atheism when there is something to gain and no one will find out.

Money is indeed a powerful corrupter. But in a choice between money and G-d, at least G-d has a chance. Between money and atheism, there is no contest.

## Are Jews a Race or a Religion?

**Are Jews a race or a religion? Or both? Or neither?**

**Answer:**

We are all of the above. A race. A religion. Both. And neither. We're a bit complicated. And really quite simple. Let's use some talmudic-style deduction to get to the bottom of it.

Jews are members of a religion called Judaism. We descend from spiritual trailblazers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, founders of a belief system around one G-d and moral living. Our nationhood did not start in a country, but in an idea. Our identity comes from the Torah. So being a Jew is clearly a religious thing.

But if Jewishness is a religious identity, then a Jew who is not religious, doesn't believe in G-d or follow the Torah would





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# Dear Rebbby

By Rabbi Aron Moss



no longer be Jewish. And that it not the case at all. A Jew is a Jew no matter what they do. This is not so with other religions. A Catholic who never steps foot in church is no longer called Catholic. A Muslim who repudiates Islam is called an apostate. But a Jew who never goes to shul is called business as usual.

You can't be a part of a religion if you don't practice it. Yet a non-practicing Jew is still a Jew, often proudly so. Which implies that we are not a religion but a race. Being Jewish is something you are born with and it remains who you are regardless of your actions or beliefs. You can't rescind your ethnicity. So obviously being Jewish is not a religious thing but rather a racial thing.

But if that is true, how is it that Jews are so ethnically diverse? We have pale Jews from Poland and dark Jews from Dehli, Jews who have their gefilte fish sweet, Jews who have their gefilte fish salty, and Jews who never have gefilte fish at all. What ethnic ties could possibly bind such polar opposites?

And furthermore, if being Jewish is an ethnic thing, how is it possible to convert to Judaism? There is no such thing as changing ethnicity. You can choose to become a citizen of Greece, but you can't choose to become an ethnic Greek. Yet anyone can choose to become a Jew by converting according to Jewish law.

The possibility of choosing Jewishness makes it seem like a religious identity. The impossibility of losing Jewishness makes it seem like an ethnic identity. So what is it?

It is both. And neither. Being Jewish is deeper than religion, and deeper than race.

Jewishness is in your soul. It is a soul identity.

You get a Jewish soul by being born to a Jewish mother, or converting according to Jewish law. Whether by birth or by choice, once you have the Jewish soul, it is the deepest layer of your identity. And it never goes away.

You can deny that you're Jewish, ignore it, practice another

religion or no religion at all. But you are still Jewish. Because your soul is. The colour of your skin or the flavour of your gefilte fish can't change the fact. You have a Jewish soul. And every Jewish soul wants to be Jewish and live Jewishly.

On the surface a Jew may seem disconnected from Judaism. But beneath the surface the fire of their soul is always burning. Jewishness sometimes gets buried under layers of resistance, caused by pain from bad experiences, fear of persecution, or just ignorance. But when a little crack appears in those layers, the light of the soul shines through, and the Jew returns to Judaism.

Every Jewish soul eventually comes back home. It may take years. It may take generations. But we can't stay away from our Jewishness. It's not just a race we belong to, it's not just a religion we believe in, it's our soul, it's who we are.

## Can I Preset my TV for Shabbos?

**I am almost 100% committed to keep Shabbos this week. There's just one issue. My favourite TV show screens Fridays 7:30 pm. So I was thinking, if it's permissible to set a timer before Shabbos to turn the lights on and off, then why isn't it permissible to set a timer before Shabbos to turn my television on and off? I can't see what the difference is.**

**Answer:**

My favorite show is also on Fridays at 7:30pm. And I never miss it. It's a hilarious reality show, and my kids star in it. We call it "The Shabbos Table."

The formula is pretty standard every week. We eat. We sing. We try to start a meaningful discussion. One of the kids makes a cheeky comment. Everyone laughs. We change the subject. A guest starts talking politics. A heated argument ensues. We change the subject. We

share inspiring stories and the kids show off what they learnt at school. We eat more. We sing more. The kids fall asleep on the couch. We say grace after meals. Show's over.

That's the show you should never miss. When you tune in to your own family, when you listen to the people around you, you'll find real life dramas and sitcoms, soap operas and breaking news flashes. This show is unrehearsed, unscripted and messy. But it's real, and it's yours. And there are no ads.

This is what Shabbos is for, to connect to family and friends, to commune with people and G-d. Rather than following the lives of strangers on a screen, we give full attention to the real people who actually matter to us. Rather than wasting our time on the passing fads of pop culture, we immerse in the eternal truths and soulful wisdom of our own culture.

The laws of Shabbos set the tone for this immersion. We are allowed to preset a timer to turn on the lights, because that will enhance our Shabbos. But we can't set a timer to turn on the TV, because that will destroy our Shabbos. Watching television on Shabbos is choosing someone else's reality over your own. The show must go on. But the show must be yours.

Reality TV is an oxymoron, and fake news is a redundancy. If you want to get real, you need to get Shabbos.

## Are You Up for the Challenge?

**I've just seen a disturbing post of a young man I know. We once acted in a play together but we've kept in minimal touch since. He's just posted a very distressing message: "I'm sorry everyone. I am giving up. Thanks for trying." It appears he has been suffering from depression, and is now institutionalized. They are monitoring him closely and he**

**is getting whatever treatment he needs. But as a friend, what words of encouragement or wisdom could I possibly offer that might make a difference?**

**Answer:**

Firstly may I commend you for reaching out to him. Any message of support, just saying you care and you are there, has immense power. Anything but silence is already a positive step.

But maybe there is another way to make a difference. Rather than help him, you can turn it around. Ask him for help.

When you contact him, put aside the illness as if it didn't exist for a moment, and ask him for some advice. Think of his area of expertise and talent and tell him you need his assistance.

He is an actor and you are working on a drama piece. Ask him how he would approach a difficult scene or how to present a particular character. This will be more than just telling him "you matter and you are needed", it will be actually making him needed.

Now obviously we are dealing here with some serious health issues. They will not go away with one little conversation. It might not work at all. He may not even be receptive to being asked, or incapable of responding. But if you have even a slight chance of getting through to him, it is worth a try. It might give him a moment of not being absorbed in his own issues. If he can focus on someone else for even a short time, that may serve as a little gasp of air, and he may be lifted, if even momentarily, above his darkness.

Sometimes the trap of depression is the self-absorption it brings. The best antidote for that is serving others. Give him a chance to do that. If nothing else, you will have expressed to him that whatever he is going through, he can still contribute to the world, and you value him enough to ask. That may be just what he needs to hear.

## Why don't My Kids Respect Me?

**Can you explain my children to me? I have dedicated my life to looking after their every need. But if I ask one of them to get me a glass of water they moan and groan. Why is it that one parent can care for three children but three children can't seem to care for one parent?**

**Answer:**

We are all descendants of Adam and Eve, the first human beings. We have inherited from them the basic ingredients of human nature. They didn't have parents. They were created, not born. They had no umbilical cords. They probably didn't even have belly buttons. So any normal human being has an innate desire to look after their children. But looking after our parents (and our belly buttons) is a skill

that doesn't always come naturally.

The genes we pass on to our children are not enough. We must pass on to them a moral code too. If they are raised to think of themselves as mere intelligent animals, then they will follow their instincts, which program them to care for themselves and their young, not their parents.

But if we teach our children that they are moral beings that can go beyond their genetic programming, then we raise them to know that life is about doing what is right rather than what feels right, what is good rather than what feels good. We are not just apes with intelligence, but ethical beings with a belly button.

## Why Do Mourners Tear their Clothes?

**What is the reason for the custom of mourners ripping their clothing on the death of a loved one?**

**Answer:**

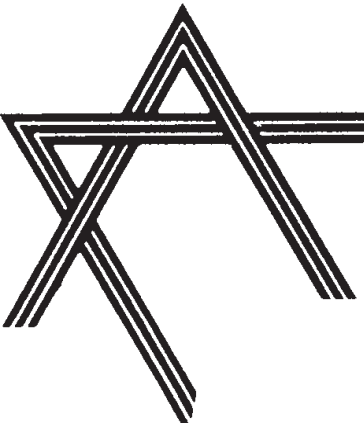
The experience of loss arouses several emotions. On the one hand, death is a tragedy. A loved one is lost to their family and friends, who are left feeling a profound sense of separation and distance that seems beyond repair. For this reason, we observe a seven day intense mourning period, during which the family sits at home and feels the pain and loss, followed by a year of mourning. This helps them slowly accept the new reality, that their loved one is gone.

But often, the mourners feel that it isn't really true, it didn't really happen, they haven't really gone. This is not just denial. In a way they are right. Death is not the end. Our souls existed before we were born, and they continue to exist after we die. The souls that have passed on are still with us. We can't see them, but we sense they are there. We can't hear them, but we know that they hear us. On the surface, we are apart. On a deeper level, nothing can separate us.

So we tear our garments. This has a dual symbolism. We are recognising the loss, accepting the reality, our hearts are torn, and there is a hole in our lives that can never be healed. But that is only true on the bodily level. The loss is a physical one. But the soul lives on.

The body is no more than a garment that the soul wears. Death is when we strip one uniform and take on another. The garment may be torn, but the essence of the person, the soul, is still intact.

From our worldly perspective death is indeed a tragedy, and the sorrow experienced by the mourners is real. But as they tear their garments we hope that within their pain they can sense a glimmer of a deeper truth: that souls never die.



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*Q&A With Author Tzvi Freeman on His Latest Book: 'Wisdom to Heal the Earth' A new articulation of the Rebbe's teachings on humanity's collective mission*

By Yaakov Ort October 31, 2018 10:17 AM

Is the created world as we know it essentially broken and bad from start to finish, or is it fundamentally beautiful and good from beginning to end? Should we aspire to make the planet a better place, solving one big problem at a time, or should we focus on helping G d create a radically different world? Either way, is it not only audacious but absurd to believe that an individual can be responsible for the whole world, and all the more so, for the perfection of G d's creation?

In *Wisdom to Heal the Earth*, the latest book by acclaimed author Rabbi Tzvi Freeman, we return to the roots of humankind's collective mission to heal the world, physically and spiritually, reconnecting that mission to its Biblical, Midrashic and Kabbalistic sources—all as articulated and made sublimely practical in the teachings of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory.

The book, produced by Chabad.org and published by Ezra Press, an imprint of Kehot Publication Society, expresses the Rebbe's teachings in a new light—as deeply grounded counsel for every individual striving to find meaning, spirituality and purpose in his or her engagement with a rapidly evolving and increasingly high-tech world. To the Rebbe, every daily act and every earthly struggle is set aflame with meaning. Each detail of every life burns with purpose—vital purpose, in the final uphill battle of humankind to attain its ultimate goal. Chabad.org senior editor Yaakov Ort sat down with Tzvi Freeman to discuss his new book.

**YO: I'd like to start by focusing on the book's title: *Wisdom to Heal the Earth*. What are the most important ways that the world needs to be healed, and what does a healed world look like to you?**

**TF:** Healing isn't accomplished with a Band-Aid, by masking the problems or just treating the symptoms. Real healing means to ensure that the illness cannot return. So a truly healed person is one who is living at a whole new level of health, beyond the state that allowed illness to begin with.

So, too, with the world. If we focus all our energies on putting out the fires—containing conflicts, providing foreign aid, reducing the carbon footprint—yes, those things are important and vital, but we haven't really healed anything. To heal life on Planet Earth, we need to get to the core of the problem and find a solution at its source—so that none of these problems could possibly return.

The core of the problem is our attitude, our state of consciousness. We look at our world and we say, "This is a wild jungle with neither master nor meaning. How can I get all I can out of it before some other beast does? How do I avoid being eaten by some beast bigger than me?" As though all of life is a zero-sum game.

One of the Rebbe's strongest points was that the world is not a meaningless jungle. It's a masterfully exquisite garden. And we are both students and partners of its Creator. In this garden there is an underlying harmony, an inherent peace. In its every detail, you

can detect the soul of the master gardener. When you recognize and appreciate that, you naturally tread carefully and responsibly. You do all you can to not only preserve the garden but to understand it better—so that you can further nurture and even enhance its beauty.

So a healed world, first and foremost, is one whose every inhabitant sees this world for what it truly is: A divine garden. And so, of course, we treat it that way. And we live in harmony with that divine beauty.

**YO: Your first book, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth*, has become somewhat of a Jewish classic. You've written a few more since then. Is this book similar or distinct from your previous books?**

**TF:** It's both similar and very different, in both format and content.

On the one hand, I found the format of bite-size "meditations" very effective. I want people to not just read, but ponder the thoughts. This format makes the thoughts memorable and easier to digest.

On the other hand, there are key concepts that require a longer form of prose. So now there are short essays that serve as introductions, providing greater scope and depth to each chapter of meditations.

Also, with the help of several scholars, we've managed to document the sources for the bulk of the material for those wishing to further explore the Rebbe's teachings.

**YO: Every parent I know wants to leave a better world to his or her children, but many people today wonder if that's possible. Most educated people believe that if, in fact, the world can be made better, the agents of change are going to come from the realms of science, economics and politics—not from religion. What then do you mean by *Wisdom*, and what is *Wisdom's* place and role in healing the earth, in confronting the challenges of the 21st century?**

**TF:** The Talmud has something amazing to say on this. It tells us that every person is an entire world. That each one of us must think of ourselves as Adam, the first human being—a single individual responsible for the entire world.

That's not just a metaphor. The Rebbe, in the tradition of the 16th-century Jewish philosopher Rabbi Yehuda Loewe of Prague, took that very literally. He understood it as a radical redefinition of the term "world."

This world is actually many, many worlds. It is one world for the cow in the field, another world for the tree in the forest, another world for a tribeswoman in Africa, and another world for Joe Cohen in New York. Each individual consciousness is the center of his, her or its world, which comprises everything that revolves about and affects that center.

Then there's another step. There's an ancient Jewish belief, enconced in the Mishnah, that absolutely nothing is superfluous in G d's world. No person, no living being, no object or event enters your life without purpose—divine purpose. Every detail is essential in reaching the ultimate goal to which this world is heading.

So you can think of your world as a massive, organic web of individuated consciousness, in which the movement of any node reverberates and shifts the state and modality of the entire web. Each

movement is the movement because every movement is essential. But there's only one node that has volition, and that's you.

Of course, that could seem an irresolvable paradox. How could each one of us stand at the center of the world? And I deal with that in the book. But it helps us understand a statement of Maimonides that the Rebbe often cited: that every person must see himself and the entire world as sitting on a finely balanced scale. Any deliberate action on your part could tip the entire scale to one side or the other.

The point is that whatever G d has dropped in your lap, that's the most important thing in the world. And right now is the most important moment to do it. It may look small and insignificant to you, but if you take care of it with integrity, putting yourself aside for the moment, then it could be the tipping point needed to transform the entire world.



**YO: You've devoted your life to disseminating the Lubavitcher Rebbe's teachings in words and images that people can understand and be motivated by, and this is now your fifth book. What's so different and special about the Rebbe's concerns and approach that have so engaged your imagination?**

**TF:** When the roots run deep, the tree grows strong, tall and wide. The Rebbe's teachings have deep and ancient roots, and he had the education, the wisdom and the vision needed to apply that wisdom to the modern era. He was eminently qualified—a great scholar in Talmudic studies, Jewish philosophy and mysticism, while at the same time a graduate of the University of Berlin and the Sorbonne—and a leader and advisor to every kind of person, including men and women of great power and influence.

Perhaps most importantly, he was a man who demonstrated the kind of love for his fellow human beings I've never seen elsewhere. He possessed a kind of humble dignity, integrity and transcendence that made you understand what Moses must have been like.

Look, we all face personal issues today that seem unprecedented. And the global issues appear frighteningly beyond human solution. It's liberating to know that none of this is entirely new.

The problems may be of greater magnitude and complexity, but the human condition hasn't essentially changed. It's just that it takes an almost superhuman insight to see how solutions of the past can resolve problems of the present. Which is what the Rebbe provides.

**YO: How does the Rebbe's advice differ from that of others?**

**TF:** Take a look at the solutions concocted by human reason implemented in the 20th century, such as fascism, Marxism, racism and Nazism. These were radical solutions in the original sense of the word; they tore themselves out from the roots of the past and built towers without foundations. So naturally, they fell—and with a loud bang.

Environmentalism is a posi-

tive movement that made the same error. Rather than gluing the movement to Biblical roots, its leaders decided to forcefully divorce those roots and attempt to grow something new out of the air. And the movement has suffered considerably as a result.

Spiritual solutions have been offered as well, but very rarely with a practical agenda.

On the other hand, here we have a kind of wisdom that is at once both spiritual and down-to-earth, ancient and relevant, mysterious and practical.

What aches me is that the Rebbe's teachings remain so inaccessible except to a small few. That's what drives me to get these nuggets of wisdom and counsel out there in a format that all can digest.

**YO: Much of the book focuses on providing a broader and deeper understanding of the core Kabbalistic concept of *Tikun Olam*. Can you briefly summarize what it is and why it is meant to be a key driver of all human effort?**

**TF:** From Genesis to the Midrash and the later Kabbalists, we find the human being in a pivotal role within Creation. When you look objectively at the original sources, you see that the general understanding was that with the creation of the human being, the divine act of creation did not end, but was extended. The world was created incomplete in order for us to participate in bringing it to its ultimate perfection.

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the 16th-century Kabbalist known as "the Arizal," took that much further. He described our world occurring as the artifact of a deliberate shattering, or implosion/explosion. Everything we encounter is sustained by a spark that fell from that initial divine cataclysm, and our job is to reassemble and reconnect the pieces, imbue them with a new divine consciousness, and thereby create a form that will hold permanently.

The Arizal called that process *birurim* and that ultimate world *tikun*. It is the Creator's way of granting us a partnership in His act of creation: He creates from the top down, and we, His creations, refine and recreate from bottom up.

The Chassidic masters took that much further. Particularly in Chassidut Chabad, the major focus of all spiritual and material endeavor is not getting to heaven, but the *tikun* of this very earthly world. "World" in Hebrew is *olam*, which is related to the word for "concealment," *helem*.

So *Tikun Olam* means to repair or refine the concealment of this world. It means to remove the dust, harmonize the noise, allow the pores to breathe and open the windows so that the sunlight can shine through, the music can be heard, and the world can be recognized for what it truly is—a divine symphony heard and appreciated by every living being. Since that is the entire purpose of humanity's creation, there cannot be anything we do that is outside of that purpose. Every human activity either delays that *tikun* or furthers it.

The Rebbe was adamant that this *tikun* is fundamentally complete. The basics are already in place. At this point, it could be any one action that could be the tipping point. That's why there was such urgency in his voice and such emphasis on the value of every deed of every individual.

**YO: To what degree is *Tikun Olam* an exclusively Jewish pursuit, and to what extent it is meant to be universally applicable in motive and action?**

**TF:** Jonathan Sacks has pointed out that one of the vital contributions the Jewish people are able to make to the world is what he called "the dignity of difference." That's because a global *shtetl* is not made sustainable by homogenizing all ethnicity, or by finely granulat-

ing humanity into detached, self-defined individuals, but by each community taking pride in its distinct contribution to the patchwork of nations, while recognizing and respecting the differences of unique contributions of others.

So, yes, the Jewish people have a distinct role in *Tikun Olam*. We have a Torah, mitzvot, Jewish customs and a distinct heritage. A Jew refrains from work on Shabbat, from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday, sitting with family and guests for a special meal to celebrate the creation of heaven and earth.

A Jew has a special diet, which also plays a role in his or her *Tikun Olam*. Fixing and perfecting the world, after all, begins with yourself, your family and your community. But those rules are particular for Jews. Other peoples and cultures have their distinct ways of bringing the One Creator of heaven and earth into their lives.

Nevertheless, all of us have this in common: All of us are responsible to leave behind a world in a better state than we found it. We have to be aware that life is a divine gift—every life—and that planet Earth is our responsibility. Really, every individual has his or her particular role and responsibility in this grand mission. We have to know that whatever our Creator has dropped in our lap—no matter how small and insignificant it may seem—it's our mission, and it may just be the mission that tips the bucket.

**YO: What are the three most important changes in perspective or behavior that you hope your readers will be left with after completing *Wisdom to Heal the Earth*?**

**TF:** Individual responsibility, a higher awareness and a sense of urgency. My generation, the boomers, generally gets a bad rap for chucking individual responsibility and resting upon the hard work of others. Personally, I don't think that's entirely fair, but whatever the case, it's up to us to get the message out: Nothing good happens as long as you're relying on someone else to get it done.

As soon as you reach the age that you begin to think for yourself, you need to think of how your presence affects the world around you. Are you here just to grab and to get, or to give and make real change for the good? Even before that, children have to be given a sense that their actions matter, that they, too, are valuable contributors to society—in some ways even more than adults.

You get out into the world, and let's say you're a businessperson or an entrepreneur. You have to stop and ask yourself, "Am I really contributing fair value? Am I being a responsible, contributing member of my community and the global community?" If you're a parent, your life is wrapped up with responsibility to your kids. If you're a teacher, well, hey, you've got more responsibility towards society than all the presidents and prime ministers in the world.

As for higher awareness, that's key. Materialism is a philosophy—a religion, actually—that is both absurd and destructive. We are conscious, living beings in a world created out of consciousness. If we can't sense that in our daily lives, then there's no firm basis to whatever progress we make.

What's the point of saving the ecology of the planet if it all appeared by some material accident? What's the value of human life, or its meaning or purpose if there is nothing there more than a carbon-consuming mechanism? But at the same time, that higher awareness can't be stuck on spirituality alone. The point of enlightenment, awareness, higher consciousness—whatever you want to call it—is to bring that down to earth. To store it as fuel to heal the Earth, and make this truly the best of all possible worlds.

*Wisdom to Heal the Earth* can be purchased at Jewish bookstores everywhere.

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**WEEKLY CLASSES - SUMMER SCHEDULE****SUNDAY**

8:00 AM	CHASSIDIC THOUGHT	RABBI GANSBURG
10:00 AM	PARSHAT HASHAVUA	RABBI SCHOCHET
10:00 AM	LIKKUTEI SICHOS	RABBI GANSBURG
11:15 AM	TALMUD (CHAGIGAH)	RABBI SPALTER
7:00 PM	CHASSIDIC DISCOURSES	RABBI GANSBURG
8:30 PM	SHULCHAN ARUCH	RABBI CHAIKIN
8:30 PM	DUTIES OF THE HEART	RABBI JACKS

**MONDAY**

11:30 AM	THE JOY OF JUDAISM	RABBI SPALTER
7:45 PM	THE WEEKLY TORAH REVIEW	RABBI GANSBURG

**TUESDAY**

6:20 AM	CHASSIDUS	RABBI A. WAGNER
11:30 AM	JLI TORAH STUDIES - PARSHA	RABBI GANSBURG
8:00 PM	TALMUD (BAVA METZIA)	RABBI SPALTER
9:00 PM	HALACHA (ADVANCED)	RABBI ELISHA SCHOCHET

**WEDNESDAY**

12:00 PM	JLI - THE ART OF PRAYER (MAY-JUNE)	RABBI GANSBURG
7:30-9:00 PM	THE JEWISH LEARNING INSTITUTE	RABBI GANSBURG
8:30 PM	TALMUD (PESOGHIM) ADVANCED	RABBI GRAJ

**THURSDAY**

6:20 AM	CHASSIDUS	RABBI A. WAGNER
11:30 AM	TANYA (HEBREW)	RABBI GANSBURG
8:00 PM	IN DEPTH PARSHA STUDY	RABBI Z.A. GROSSBAUM
8:15-9:15 PM	TALMUD (PESOGHIM)	RABBI SPALTER
8:30 PM	LEKUTEI SICHOS	RABBI B. LANDA

**SHABBOS**

9:00 AM	CHASSIDUS	RABBI GANSBURG
9:00 AM	CHASSIDUS (INTERMEDIATE)	RABBI WILHELM
1 HR BEFORE MINCHA	CHASSIDUS	RABBI GANSBURG
1 HR BEFORE MINCHA	HALACHA	RABBI SPALTER

**DAILY CLASSES**

SUN-THU	9:00 PM	RAMBAM	ALTERNATING
MON-FRI	5:00 AM	CHASSIDIC THOUGHT	RABBI YARMUSH
MON-FRI	6:30 AM	TALMUD	RABBI SCHOCHET
MON-FRI	7:10 AM	CHASSIDIC THOUGHT	RABBI GANSBURG

MON-FRI	10AM-12PM	KOLLEL TIFERES ZEKEINIM LEVI YITZCHOK TALMUD, MISHNAH, HALACHA & CHUMASH - RABBI CHAIKIN
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## “Don’t Conduct!”

Continued from page 16

vodka).

When he started passing filled shot glasses to all the singers I could no longer contain myself. “What is going on here?” “We’re going to have a farbrengen,” one of the Hasidim responded. “Here? Now? Why?” I asked in chagrin. The Hasidim tried to calm me down. I was informed again that they were not professional singers. They could not simply approach a microphone and sing. Because they were doing the bidding of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, it was necessary for them to “warm up” both physically and spiritually. This could only be accomplished through a farbrengen.

“How long will this farbrengen last?” I asked rather timidly. “This farbrengen will last as long as it lasts, not one minute longer,” came the reply. A Hasid took out a photograph of the Rebbe and attached it to the wall with a thumb tack.

The cake and the spirits were passed around, with soda for the women and children. Each singer toasted the Rebbe in absentia, and wished the others good luck in the duty they were about to perform. As the conductor, I was asked to join in the l’hayyim (toast) and was given a small glass filled with vodka. Never having drunk alcohol of this strength, I imagined that the effect was similar to drinking Drano, the special liquid touted in commercials as unclogging everything on its way down.

The producers and sound engineers looked on from the control room in amazement. “I don’t believe this. We should get a reporter and a camera man from the entertainment newspaper Variety, because no one will believe that this scene happened unless it is documented.”

My singers and the other Hasidim took their time—fifty minutes in all. When the farbrengen ended, the soda, the vodka and the cake were whisked away. All those not performing were shunted to the sidelines of the studio and my sixteen singers and three “ringers” stepped up to the waiting microphones. One Hasid proclaimed, “Now we are ready to do the bidding of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.”

I finally felt that I had control of the situation. However, just before I gave the downbeat to the orchestra, Rabbi Zalmanoff approached me. “Before we begin I need a small favor from you.” “Certainly,” I replied, what is it?” “It’s a small favor,” he repeated. “Please don’t conduct.” “Please what?” I asked in astonishment. “What do you mean, ‘don’t conduct?’” For some reason, he must have thought I was having trouble with his English. “Don’t make with the hands,” he said. “Sit down, you’ll get paid any-

way.”

“What do you mean, ‘sit down?’” I retorted. “I spent six months of my life rehearsing this group to get them ready for this recording, and now you tell me not to conduct? Please, tell me—what is the problem?” “I see that you are a difficult man, so I will tell you the truth. You can conduct, but nobody will watch you.” “Why will they not watch me?” “Because if they watch you, it will get in the way of their kavvonah (concentration),” he replied.

There it was, out in the open. I moved toward the chorus and gave the downbeat. The instrumentalists picked up the introduction while sixteen pairs of eyes closed on me. I could have been in another state as far as my singers were concerned. They sang with joy and fervor and the intensity of their singing permeated the entire studio. I realized that at the very least I had prepared them well enough to be able to sing their own melody and keep time with the instrumentalists.

Thus began our recording session. We moved along briskly until approximately 10 o’clock, when something unexpected occurred. Like most recording studios, ours had a light outside its door. Since any movement or noise can be picked up by the sophisticated recording equipment, the sound engineer would turn on the light when actual recording—rather than rehearsing—took place. It is the rule in all recording establishments that when this light is on one does not move around, enter or exit the studio. We began rehearsing the well-known UForatsto (“Israel shall expand in all directions”).

In his celestial abode, G-d often creates truly interesting shiddukhim (matches) on earth below. Our main recording studio was attached to a secondary studio, which had access to the hallway and restrooms only through ours. The smaller studio had been rented for the evening to a troupe of ballet dancers who rehearsed clad in skintight leotards. One of the young female dancers, needing to use the outside facilities and noting that the light was not on, quietly entered the main studio and made her way to the hall.

Because I was busy conducting the instrumentalists I did not notice her, nor did I see what transpired behind me in the studio. Suddenly, I was brought up short by a cry of “cut” from the control room.

I looked back and discovered that my singers had disappeared. Where are they?” I shouted. No one seemed to know. I ran into the hallway and found it empty. I quickly took the elevator down to the street level. Outside, on Eighth Avenue, I found my Lubavitch chorus.

“What are you doing out here?” I asked trying to restrain myself. “You did not see what happened up there in the studio?” “What happened?” I asked. “A girl in almost no clothing came into the room as we were singing UForatsto,” they replied.

“So?” I asked in bewilderment. “So we left,” said a Hasid. “So you left?” I demanded, trying to control myself. “Yes,” the Hasid replied. You see, Rabbi Pasternak” (Hasidim sometimes grant honorary ordination to people who work for them, and although I did not have a degree in rabbinics, I was nevertheless awarded the title), “you do not understand who we are.

Suppose for a minute that we were in the middle of prayers in the synagogue and a scantily-

dressed woman walked in. What would we do? We would simply close our prayer books and leave the synagogue. The same thing is true here. You have thought of us all along as a group of singers. The truth of the matter is that we are not singers; we are Hasidim, here to do the bidding of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. For us this recording is similar to a worship service. So in a situation like this, we must do exactly what we would do in a synagogue.”

I felt the blood rush to my head. I said to them in disbelief: “The age of miracles is not past. I, who had my eyes open, did not see the scantily dressed girl enter the room; but you, who had your eyes closed, were able to see her?” “All right, Rabbi, no jokes.”



“Okay, it’s over. Let’s get back to the recording,” I responded. I was told that unless the dancers were moved to another studio, my singers would not return. “How am I to change their studio?” I asked. “You are a bright man. We’re sure that you will find a way.” I took the elevator up to the office and looked for the manager. “We must change the studio of the ballet dancers,” I said. “Impossible!” said the manager. “Do you know who my people are?” I asked. No, and frankly I don’t care,” replied the manager.

“They are a group of Amish from Lancaster, Pennsylvania and they are here with their spiritual leader to record their music,” I explained. “And if they can’t finish tonight, it will be a financial and spiritual disaster for them.” The manager hesitated. After all, for Amish one should

have respect even if one doesn’t fully understand their lifestyle.

He was thoroughly convinced, however, when I offered the remains of a bottle of 192-proof vodka. While I went to get the bottle, the manager found a different studio for the dancers.

There is an expression in Yiddish: men lakht mit yashrishkes (loosely translated as, “you laugh on the outside but with heartache on the inside”). Although, when looking back, I find the incident quite comical, it did not seem funny when it happened. To the credit of the Lubavitch Hasidim, they were right and I was wrong. They were handpicked Hasidim, instructed to present to the world the first recorded music of Lubavitch, at the bidding of the Rebbe. As such, they treated the project with much more religious conviction and feeling than I had.

But singers come in many varieties. Among these are singers who sing flat (pull down from the tone) and those who sing sharp (overshoot the tone). Given the choice of either of these types, a vocal coach would probably choose the one that sings sharp. He might conclude that this singer, in an attempt to reach the correct tone, moves above it, whereas the singer who sings flat is not aiming at all.

During the Lubavitch recording session described above, a major problem could not be resolved. When the Hasidim sang three dveikus (meditative) melodies attributed to the first Rebbe of Lubavitch, the pitch began to rise a quarter-tone, a half-tone, and finally a full tone in each song. In music, this is quite a distance. Because they were untrained singers I assumed they were not hearing the instrumentalists positioned in front of them. The solution, I thought, would be to take the musicians playing portable instruments and place them next to the Hasidim. I positioned the violinist, clarinet, trumpet and flautist each between two Lubavitch Hasidim, so that the instruments were only several inches from the singers’ ears.

For a few moments the singing was steady, but soon it again began to rise. No matter how many times we tried, the results were the same. I finally came

to realize that, although the Hasidim were ostensibly singing these songs for me, their conductor, they were really directing their songs to God on high. As they strove to lift the melody heavenward, the pitch kept rising.

The recording of these three songs could not be salvaged. Consequently, the Hasidim were brought back to the studio several weeks later, to record the three dveikus niggunim a cappella (unaccompanied). After they left, the sound engineer overdubbed an accordion accompaniment to the vocals. When the pitch of the singers rose, the engineer adjusted the recording speed of the accordion to match the new pitch of the Lubavitch Hasidim.

Thankfully, the songs were saved and included on the recording. When it was released, a critical review in the London Jewish Chronicle proclaimed this to be one of the finest recordings of authentic Jewish music ever made.

Several months later, the producers received a call from Leonard Bernstein’s office in New

York City. They were told that the world-famous conductor had come across the Lubavitcher recording and wanted to use one of the selections for a program of religious folk music. Truly flattered, and at the same time awed by the knowledge that this great musician would even listen to Hasidic music, they gave permission. Fifty years later, their ensuing embarrassment can be revealed. Yes, the selection was played—on Christmas Eve—which in that year happened to fall on a Friday night.

Velvel Pasternak, a noted ethnomusicologist, has worked over four decades to capture and transmit the musical traditions of world Jewish communities. His ten recordings and twelve books of Hasidic music are acknowledged as definitive studies in their field. Since 1971 he has served as editor for Tara Publications. A gifted lecturer, he brings the joy of Hasidic music to audiences throughout North America and Israel. This article is reprinted, with permission, from *Beyond Hava Nagila*, the 1999 retelling of his music projects with Hasidim.

## The Amphibian Soul

Continued from page 2

about the person is distinct from his connection to his source; like a fish in water, his every living moment is an attestation to his utter dependence upon, and devotion to, his source of nourishment and life.

The Kabbalistic masters tell us that there are tzaddikim (righteous individuals) who live their entire lives as “fishes of the sea,” wholly submerged within a perpetual awareness of and subjugation to the divine reality. Such an individual was Moses, whose name expresses the “aquatic” nature of his soul (“And she called his name Moses and said: Because I drew him from the water”). Thus the Torah attests that “Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth.” Moses was certainly aware of his own greatness; certainly he knew that he was the single human being chosen by G-d to serve as the conveyor of His wisdom and will to man. Yet Moses did not view his qualities as his “own” attainments, for he had utterly nullified and submerged his self within the sea of the divine reality. His own life was merely the divine plan being realized through an egoless

vehicle; his teachings, the “Divine presence speaking from his throat.”

Land Fish

This is not to say that our “terrestrial” self—our sense of identity and individuality—is to be uprooted or suppressed. Selfhood is not, in and of itself, a negative trait; it is only that, left to its own devices, it is prone to develop some very negative attributes. If a person fails to develop an “aquatic” consciousness and behavior—if he loses sight of the source and goal of life—his self is sure to turn selfish, identity translating into self-centeredness and individuality becoming disconnectedness and rootlessness.

Only when we have submerged ourselves within the sea of the divine reality can we exploit our ego as the positive force it inherently is. Only then can we properly harness our unique worth as an individual to optimally realize our mission in life.

This is the ideal expressed in Jacob’s blessing to his grandchildren, Manasseh and Ephraim—

“They shall swarm as fish in the midst of the land.”

The ultimate challenge for man is not only to be a “fish,” but to be a fish “in the midst of the

land.”

Therein lies the deeper significance of the splitting of the Red Sea seven days after our Exodus from Egypt. In recounting the miracle, the Torah describes the children of Israel as “walking on dry land within the sea.” Following our redemption—in both the physical and spiritual sense—from Egypt and its pagan culture, we were empowered to “walk on dry land” as distinct and unique beings, and at the same time walk “within the sea”—immerse ourselves within the sea of the all-embracing, all-pervading, universal truth of truths.

Our sages tell us that the splitting of the Red Sea was but the first step of a process that spans the whole of our history; that the song which Moses and Israel sang upon traversing the sea is but the first stanza of a song that culminates in the era of Moshiach, the end-goal of creation. The splitting of the sea was the precedent that enables and directs our centuries-long quest for that perfect synthesis of land and sea which will be fully realized in the messianic age, when “The land shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea.”

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# Jewish FAMILY Life

## What a Married Woman Needs to be Happy

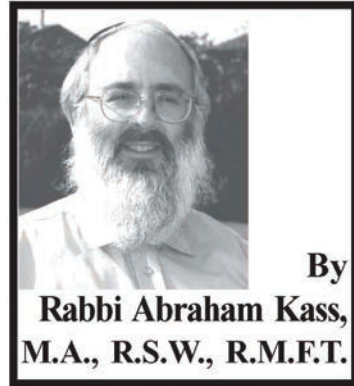
By Family Therapist Abe Kass MA, RSW, RMFT, CCHT

If you are a typical woman, you need the following feelings that come from your relationship with your husband to feel emotional fulfilled. As the body needs particular nutrients, so too, your emotional side needs particular feelings to feel fully happy and content. You get these feelings when you feel your husband: Cares about you, chooses you, and protects you.

Here's how to increase the likelihood you will receive these emotional gifts from your husband:

**Cares for you.** Encourage your husband to show he "cares" about you by expressing your appreciation for the help and attention he does give you. Tell him what you like, not what you don't like. Let him know you need his help and involvement in your wellbeing to feel good about yourself and your relationship with him.

**Chooses you.** Your husband will choose to be with you when he feels good around you. Be interested in him. Ask him questions. Don't give advice unless he asks. Let him know you value his opinions and de-



By  
Rabbi Abraham Kass,  
M.A., R.S.W., R.M.F.T.

isions. Don't push him away with anger expressions, criticism, irritation or meanness. Make yourself pleasant and attractive and you will make it easy for him to choose to be

with you. Always remember, marriage is a voluntary arrangement. Marriage is a choice. Reward the choice by being positive and pleasant to be around.

**Understands you.** When you talk with your husband, check to see if he understands what you are saying. You may discover you need to talk slower, express simpler ideas, or choose a better time to talk. Guide by telling him you just want him to understand, not react, comment or advise. As well, your husband will be more willing to listen to you when you take the time to also understand him.

**Protects you.** You are competent and you can take care of yourself. Still, you want your husband to "protect you." You want a man that is strong. This means he can deal with emotional problems, provide materially for the family and take responsibility to fix both material and emotional prob-

lems. But even a strong person can be broken. If you criticize and shame your husband with harsh words, it's possible he will become weak. Treat him with respect and acknowledge his strength and when you seek his protection, you increase the likelihood he will be there.

In total, when you consistently experience the feeling generated from the above behaviors, you will feel "treasured" by your husband. This is the feeling you need to be fully happy and content. I know this because many women, in my work as a family therapist, have told me.

Here is what to do if you are a man:

Treat your wife in such a way that she feels she is your priceless "treasure." Learn from the words above and or from your wife's guidance and enthusiastically embrace these relationship ideals. When you do, your payoff will be that she will devote herself to your wellbeing. You will feel "respected" and "valued"—emotional nutrients that, as a man, you need.

As well, acknowledge all your wife's good efforts and thoughts on your behalf. Express your appreciation with a gift, kind words, and a helping hand. When your wife feels "treasured" by you, she will give you her admiration and love and together you will create peace and harmony in your home.

The formula is simple: When you treat your wife as a queen, she will treat you as a king.

=====

Abe Kass, M.A., R.S.W., R.M.F.T., is a registered Social Worker, registered Marriage and Family Therapist, certified Hypnotherapist and award winning educator. He has a clinical practice working with individuals, couples, and families in Toronto, Canada. For more information or to arrange an appointment he can be reached at, (905) 771-1087 or visit his web at, [www.AbeKass.com](http://www.AbeKass.com).



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## The Backstory of the Chasidim Who Got Criminal Justice Reform Done in the US

Continued from page 6

of that prison bed early and get back home," says Greg Mitchell of the Mitchell Firm on the documentary. After an initial failure due to lack of time—a reform bill passed the Senate Judiciary Committee strictly along party lines and therefore could not conceivably advance—Mitchell brought Brett Tolman on board. Tolman, a former U.S. Attorney for Utah and a former chief counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee when it was chaired by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), began working on drafting language for a new bill that could be introduced anew to legislators.

Nothing happened for almost a year, until Aug. 1, 2012, when

Margareten saw that Tolman was scheduled to testify in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Yet the focus on outreach to Republicans saw some Democrats begin slipping away from supporting the bill that was forming, and so Margareten hired the Democrat-leaning Podesta Group. The first result of their efforts was the Federal Prison Reform Bill of 2013, which was ultimately not allowed onto the Senate floor by then-Senate Majority leader Harry Reid. The bill was focused on prison reform and did not include any sentencing reform, and so Democrats didn't want to support it. It was back to the drawing board. The problem was too little consensus on Capitol Hill on what such a greatly ex-

panded criminal justice reform bill should look like. Margareten recalls those days as dark ones. He had been raising large sums of money to support his effort, but after such a failure, it began to dry out. Still, he persisted, and together with the Mitchell Firm, they chose to begin the process again.

This time the result was the greatly expanded Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015. The lobbying succeeded in getting bipartisan support for the sweeping bill, which flew through the committee 15-5, and was announced by Grassley as he stood flanked on one side by Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) and the other by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.).

form—as his attorney general.

But it wasn't over yet.

### Last Hurdle, First Step

The key, this time, was the president's son-in-law and senior advisor, Jared Kushner. Kushner's father had been incarcerated for 14 months in a federal prison, and like almost anyone with such firsthand experience, he felt strongly for the cause.

Meanwhile, Mitchell was able to find new House sponsors for the newly drafted First Step Act in the form of Collins and Jeffries. In the Senate, Cornyn was back on board, joined by Lee, a former federal prosecutor who had also recognized deep problems with the system, particularly the mandatory minimum-sentencing.

Lee has on a number of occasions told the story of how as a prosecutor in Salt Lake City, he had seen a father of two young children caught selling three dime bags of marijuana to a law-enforcement informant in a 72-hour period. The young man—a first-time offender—had been carrying a weapon, thus the judge was forced, due to the mandatory minimum-sentencing equation, to give him a 55-year sentence.

"The average federal sentence for assault is just two years. The average murderer only gets 15 years," wrote Lee in a Fox News article making his case for the First Step Act. "While acknowledging the obvious excessiveness of the sentence, the judge explained that the applicable federal statutes gave him no authority to impose a less-severe prison term, noting that 'only Congress can fix this problem.'"

Still, at the heart of this bill is education, higher, vocational and faith-based, which has been proven in test cases such as the Texas model to greatly reduce recidivism.

"When prisoners don't have anything to do in prison, they sit, watch television, play cards—in short, do nothing," Margareten

says. "Families are doing everything they can to see their loved ones come home, but when they finally do come home, they're so often different people. They don't get up to find a job, they're not involved with their family, they're moodless. They close down."

Offering them an education—whether higher or a GED, job training and skills they can use on the outside or religious learning, or the ability to deal with substance abuse, while at the same time giving them the ability to shave off prison time—has been proven to keep former inmates outside of prison. The bill included other aspects highlighting the humanity of the individual, such as banning the shackling of jailed pregnant and postpartum women. It further makes it easier for inmates to submit compassionate-release requests in extenuating cases and allows the Bureau of Prisons to transfer elderly or terminally ill inmates to home confinement, where they can be surrounded by their families and receive better care than a prison can offer.

"The bill fits with Jewish values of the sanctity of human life, redemption, repentance and compassion," notes Boyarsky. "But these are fundamentally American values as well. The First Step Act is a way for these values to be reflected in the law."

Margareten and his allies worked with Kushner and his team at the White House, and Collins and Jeffries in Congress, and the House version of the bill successfully passed in May. The Senate bill passed in December, went back to the House, and then was signed by Trump on December 21, who said in a statement that "the First Step Act will make communities safer and save tremendous taxpayers dollars," and it "brings much needed hope to many families ..."

The Talmudic Sage, Choni Hamagle once noticed a man planting a carob tree and inquired: "It will take seventy years to mature and bear fruit, do

you think you will live long enough to enjoy its fruit?" The man replied: "I found carob trees in existence when I entered the world, just like my father planted for me, so too I will plant for my children".

When planning for the future or writing a Will please consider the Chabad Lubavitch Organization of Southern Ontario. For further information and to arrange for special bequests.

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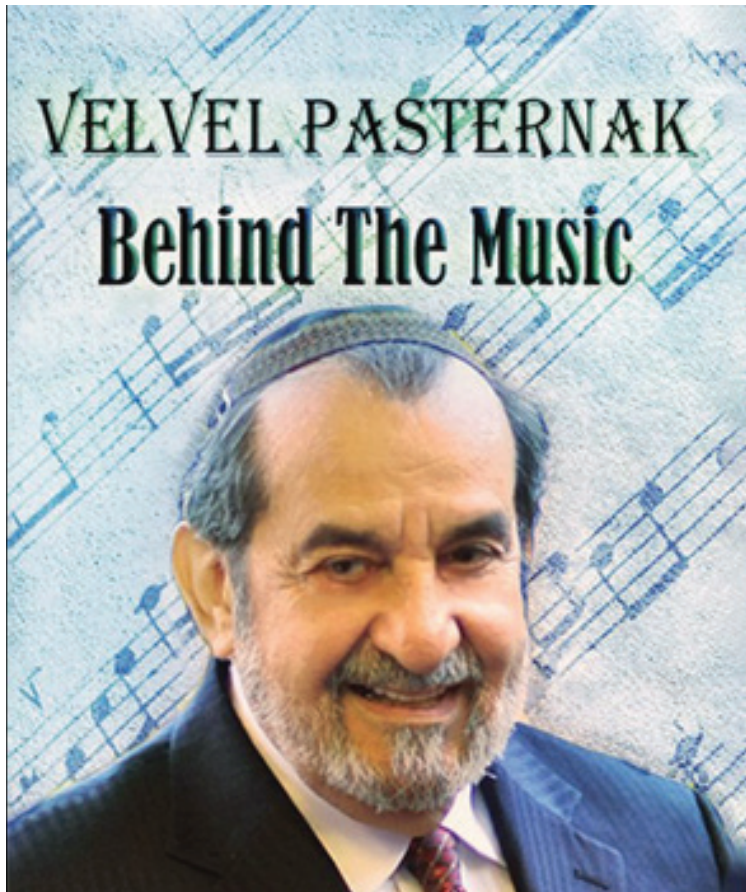
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## “Don’t Conduct!”

By *Velvel Pasternak*  
 Published in the *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Vol. 34, Fall 2009, pp. 118-125  
 © 2009 by the Cantors Assembly  
 In 1962 I was approached by

that took place several times a year at Lubavitch headquarters. The format of a Lubavitch farbrengen was constant. Hundreds of Hasidim gathered at 770 Eastern Parkway, and for several hours listened raptly



Benedict Stambler, a collector of Jewish music and a pioneer in the field of Hasidic recordings in the United States, to arrange and conduct a chorus of Lubavitch Hasidim for the first in a series of HaBaD recordings.

Rabbi Shmuel Zalmanoff, editor of both volumes of *Sefer HaNiggunim* (anthology of transcribed Lubavitch melodies) was appointed music consultant for this recording. He selected the songs and chose the Lubavitch Hasidim who were to sing in the chorus. Neither Stambler nor I had anything to do with the selection process. This was the “hand-picked chorus” that I would train and record.

At our first meeting, a copy of *Sefer HaNiggunim* was given to me and I was asked to play while the group sang through the program of melodies to be recorded. Because these Hasidim sang so many of the songs differently from the printed musical transcriptions, I found it necessary to rewrite most of the niggunim. Correct transcriptions were necessary for the backup singers and instrumental ensemble that would accompany the Hasidim. After the printed niggunim were corrected, I set about arranging them with simple harmonies.

Our first rehearsal took place in a basement in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and I was forced to quickly address an interesting problem. My rather forthright instruction that the chorus must begin and end together was met with very quizzical looks. “Hasidim always begin and end together,” they objected. It took me a little time to realize that the members of my chorus did most of their singing during farbrengen (special Hasidic gatherings)

to a discourse by Rabbi Menachem Mendl Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, punctuated at various times with the singing of niggunim by the entire gathering.

A designated Hasid who took his cue when the Rebbe motioned with his hand, began a niggun that was taken up by all assembled. The singing ended when the Rebbe motioned once again. Every eye focused on the Rebbe as he continued his discourse. For a young conductor to inform these singers that they needed to start together and end together served only to insult them. It took great effort to convince them that a taped recording of a farbrengen would prove beyond doubt that the beginnings and endings of the niggunim were ragged and far below the musical standards needed for a professional recording. When they finally agreed, I had won my first pyrrhic victory.

After several months of weekly rehearsals during which they learned to watch my hands, sing legato and produce some elementary shadings of tone, I found that, try as I might to teach them, none of the Hasidim were able to sing the harmonies that I had written. This was not due to the arrangements’ level of difficulty; the Hasidim were simply unable to concentrate on anything but the melody. With permission from Lubavitch I hired three “ringers” (professionals) to sing the harmonies. The rehearsals then went well. After several more months, when I felt I had taken the group musically as far as it could go, I asked that a recording date be scheduled.

I was told that the recording session must take place either on Monday evening after dark or on

Tuesday before dark. This was in keeping with the belief among traditional Jews that Tuesday, the third day of the week, is a day of mazel (good luck). In the Book of Genesis it is written that God looked out each day and “saw that it was good.” Only on the third day are the words “saw that it was good” repeated a second time. Tuesday therefore became a “doubly good” day.

Whenever possible, Jews choose Tuesday to announce an engagement, move to a new house or apartment, hold a wedding ceremony, open a new business, etc., all in the belief that this day holds good luck for those endeavors. In keeping with this idea the Lubavitch Hasidim requested that their first recording session be held on a Tuesday, the day of good luck.

According to the Jewish calendar, a new day begins with the preceding evening—Monday after dark is already considered to be Tuesday. The producers promised that they would schedule a recording studio and an engineer for “Tuesday.” When a studio was obtained and a final recording date (actually, a Monday night in early spring) was announced, Rabbi Zalmanoff instructed us that on the Saturday night before the recording we were to gather for a “mini farbrengen.” When I asked the reason I was told that, as Hasidim performing a task for Lubavitch, they needed an evening of good fellowship in which to wish each other luck with the recording.

Dutifully, the producers and I arrived at the home of one of the singers an hour after Shabbos was over. Upon entering we found tables filled with refreshments, drink and spirits. For the first time since the rehearsals began, I was afforded the opportunity of listening to each of my Hasidim sing solo. Some of them, on the merit of their vocal abilities, would never have been permitted to sing in any chorus. At the end of the evening, however, we left full of good cheer and spurred on to the forthcoming Lubavitch recording.

The producers had been able to rent a studio on Eighth Avenue near 57th Street in Manhattan. A well-known sound engineer, David Hancock, was engaged. Hancock had been one of the first sound engineers to transfer old seventy-eight r.p.m. recordings of the great cantors of the 20th century to magnetic tape for the Collectors Guild Record Company. In the process, much of the static and other extraneous noises were eliminated. Through this rather time consuming and tedious work, Hancock, who was not Jewish, became very familiar with—and developed great fondness for—Hebrew liturgical music. He looked forward to a live recording session of Hasidic music. His admonition to me was to get the “Lubos” (his endearing term for the Hasidim) into the studio no later than 7:30 p.m. At the then going rate of \$45.00 perhour, the studio was quite expensive. I made sure that each of my singers and “ringers” knew the cost and importance of being on time.

I was at the studio by 6:30 p.m., discussed microphone setup with our engineer, arranged placement of the chorus and instrumentalists, and set the order in which the selections would be recorded. At 7:20 p.m. Hancock asked, “Where are they?” Looking for my singers, I opened the window onto Eighth Avenue. The location of this studio happened to be a center of rock ‘n roll music, and the area was full of hippies, many of whom wore beards. To locate my bearded

Hasidim was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

At 7:25 I repeated the action and leaned far out of the window in order to get a better view of the street. This time I saw what looked like my Hasidim a block away. As they approached I noticed that there were far too many of them. I could only assume that my Hasidim had encountered another group of Hasidim in the subway and they were walking together up Eighth Avenue. I believed that at the entrance to the studio the group would split, and my Hasidim would enter the building while the others would continue to their destination.

Was I wrong! After the elevator disgorged its fifth load, there were more than sixty people in the studio. Only twenty-four of them belonged to my chorus and orchestra; the others were older Hasidim, women and children.

Before I had a chance to vent my anger, two men began removing bottles of soda from a crate, and several women unpacked baked goods that included honey cake and sponge cake. Finally, for the pièce de résistance, a Hasid opened two brown paper bags and revealed four bottles of “zeks un ninetsiger” (192-proof

*Continued on page 14*

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