



The World of Lubavitch

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TISHREI 5781



Chabad Launches “Shofar on the Corner”

The most important observance of Rosh HaShana is listening to the sound blasts of the Shofar. Due to the pandemic and the numerous restrictions and regulations imposed, many people will not be attending Shul this year. While prayers under prevailing conditions maybe recited in solitude, not everyone has access to a Shofar nor are they familiar with its intricate laws and customs.

As always, in response to a need and concern, Chabad Lubavitch will be hosting OUTDOOR gatherings for the sounding of the Shofar

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SOME THINGS SIMPLY CAN NOT BE ZOOMED

Thank you Hashem

By Rabbi Zalman A. Grossbaum

For the better part of this year we have been spending much time discussing and debating the ramifications of Covid 19 and how it has impacted our lives and life style. Yet, little has been said, or written about the virus, from a historical Judaic perspective.

The Midrash relates that during the rein of King David there was a mysterious plague. Each day some 100 people passed away. Recognizing that something out of the ordinary was amiss, the monarch invoked his divine perception and prophetically foretold that the antidote for the pestilence was to praise G-d 100 times throughout the day. Indeed, after he instituted the said quota the plague ceased.

This innovation carries through to this very day. Our three daily prayers as presented in the Siddur provide the requisite quota needed to comply with the edict of the Psalmist. All true, but factually the structured prayers found in the Siddur and recited throughout the day was compiled by Ezra the Scribe who led the Jews back to the Land of Israel after 70 years of exile in Babylon. This epic return occurred some five hundred years after the sovereign leadership of King David.

Hence, this leads me to assume that back then a prayer of thanksgiving was an informal spontaneous declaration of gratitude. It did not take on the form and structure of a prescribed written text. Rather it was a heartfelt expression of appreciation in acknowledgement of good health or fortune.

The story is told about the Baal Shem Tov, who once approached a scholar deeply engrossed in his study and inquired about his wellbeing. Not wanting to engage in small talk, the academic did not respond. Again the Baal Shem Tov inquired about his health only to be ignored a second time. Not getting any feedback, the Baal Shem Tov rhetorically asked him, “why are you taking away sustenance from G-d.” Now this piqued the interest of the venerable sage who now lifted his head. The Baal Shem Tov then explained, “the presence of G-d is not readily felt in the corporeal world. However when we utter words of praise, i.e. ”Thank G-d,” “Blessed be the Creator,” “G-d will help,” etc. we draw down G-d’s presence to permeate our surrounding. Indeed, the root meaning of the Hebrew word Baruch means to graft and merge.

The Covid 19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of society. The fear of infection and illness has us all isolated and sequestered in our personal space. Thank G-d, by, and large, we in Ontario have avoided the brunt of the raging virus. When so many people have been infected by merely being in the wrong place at the wrong time, it behoves us to express our gratitude. It doesn’t take much faith to recognize G-d’s benevolence towards us for being spared. While it may not be an overt miracle visible to the naked eye, our good fortune are amongst the hidden and concealed wonders of G-d, as the Psalmist notes: “His wonders are to Himself, for His kindness is forever.” Thank You, HaShem!

May we all be inscribed for a blessed new year of good health, happiness, and the imminent arrival of Mashiach.

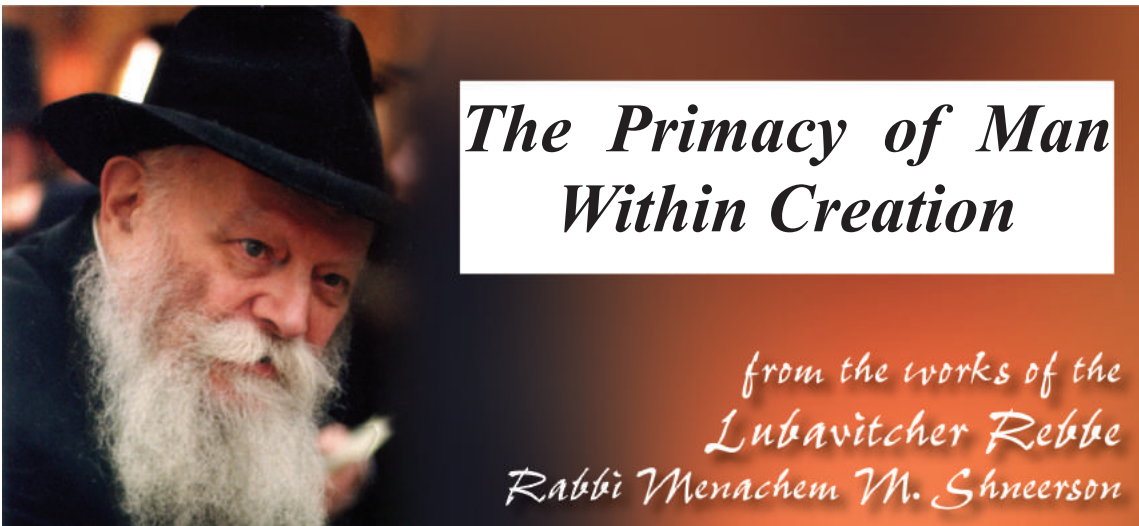
The Man in Man

By Yanky Tauber
This day is the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day.
From the Musaf prayer for Rosh Hashanah
Actually, Rosh Hashanah marks not the beginning of G-d's creation of the universe, but His creation of man. The anniversary of the first day of creation is the 25th of the Hebrew month of Elul; Tishrei 1, the date observed as Rosh Hashanah, is the sixth day of creation, the day on which the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were created.

Nevertheless, we say of Rosh Hashanah, "Zeh hayom techilat ma'asecha"--"This day is the beginning of Your works." This day, because though man is the last of the creations in terms of chronological order, he is first among them in terms of function and purpose. For man alone possesses the single quality that gives meaning and purpose to G-d's creation.

Free Agent
Without man, the universe is a mere machine. Every mineral, plant and animal behaves in accordance with an ironclad set of laws dictated by its in-born nature, and has neither the inclination nor the ability to behave otherwise. Only man reflects his Creator in that he possesses free choice: only man can will and act contrary to his nature; only man can make of himself something other than what he is, transcending the very parameters of the self into which he was born.

So only man's deeds have true significance. The industry of the ant or the faithfulness of the dove are no more "moral" than the cruelty of the cat or the deviousness of the snake. The majesty of a snow-capped Alp is no more virtuous than the stench of a putrefying swamp. For their "positive" or "negative" traits and characteristics are solely the result of the manner in which they have been formed and programmed by their Creator. But when man acts virtuously, rising above his instinctive selfishness to serve his Creator; or when he acts unvirtuously, corrupting his nature in a manner that no animal or object ever would or could, and then repents of his evil and even converts it into a force for good—something of true significance has occurred. Man has broken free of the "programmed" universe G-d created, and has expanded it in ways that its implicit potential could not have generated or anticipated. Man has, in the words of our sages, become "a



partner with G-d in creation."

The other, non-human elements of creation achieve fulfillment through man, when man involves them in the performance of a mitzvah—an act that fulfills a divine command. For example, the person who writes a check to charity has many participants in his deed: the paper and ink of his check; the natural resources and forces he has enlisted to earn the money he is giving; even the mountain out of which the marble in the facade of the bank which processes his check was quarried. These and innumerable other morally "neutral" elements have been elevated

to inclusion in a creative, transcendent, human act, thereby realizing the purpose of their creation.

This is why Rosh Hashanah is the "beginning of Your works." On this day, the first human being opened his eyes, beheld himself and his world, and chose to devote them both to the service of his Creator. His first act was to involve all of creation in his submission to G-d. In the words of the Zohar,

When Adam stood up on his feet, he saw that all creatures feared him and followed him as servants do their master. He then said to them: "You and I both, 'come, let us worship

and bow down, let us kneel before G-d our maker.'"

Every Rosh Hashanah, we repeat Adam's call. We intensify our awareness of our Creator, reiterate our acceptance of His kingship, and rally all our resources for the task of making Him a tangible presence in our lives. As we proclaim in a central passage of the Rosh Hashanah prayers:

Our G-d and G-d of our fathers: Reign over the entire world in Your glory.... May every object know that You made it, may every creature understand that You created it, and may every thing that has the breath of life in its nostrils de-

clare: G-d, the G-d of Israel, is King, and His kingship has dominion over all.

Thus the "Head of the Year" coincides not with the first day of creation, on which G-d brought time, space and matter into being; or with its third day, on which He created life; or with its fourth day, on which He created creatures of instinct and feeling; but with the day on which G-d made man "in His form, after His likeness," imparting to him the divine capacity to will, choose and create. For this is the day on which the purpose of every component of His creation—mineral, vegetable, animal and human—began its actualization in the deeds of the first man and woman.

This and Thus
The difference between these two "first days"—the beginning of the physical creation on Elul 25 and the beginning of man's implementation of its quintessential function on Rosh Hashanah—is expressed in the difference between two Hebrew words associated with these dates: zeh ("this") and ko ("thus").

Zeh implies a clear and direct association with its object. When the Torah tells us that our

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By Yanky Tauber
The story is told of a simple, unlettered Jew who kept a tavern on a distant crossroads many weeks' journey from the nearest Jewish community, who one year decided to make the trip to the Jewish town for Rosh Hashanah.

When he entered the shul on Rosh Hashanah morning, it was already packed with worshippers and the service was well underway. Scarcely knowing which way to hold the prayerbook, he draped his tallit over his head and took an inconspicuous place against the back wall.

Hours passed. Hunger was beginning to gnaw at his insides, but the impassioned sounds of prayer around him showed no signs of abating. Visions of the

sumptuous holiday meal awaiting him at his lodgings made his eyes water in pain. What was taking so long? Haven't we prayed enough? Still the service stretched on.

Suddenly, as the cantor reached a particularly stirring passage, the entire congregation burst into tears. Why is everyone weeping? wondered the tavernkeeper. Then it dawned on him. Of course! They, too, are hungry. They, too, are thinking of the elusive meal and endless service. With a new surge of self-pity he gave vent to his anguish; a new wail joined the others as he, too, bawled his heart out.

But after a while the weeping let up, finally quieting to a sprinkling of exceptionally pious worshippers. Our hungry tavernkeeper's hopes soared, but the prayers went on. And on. Why have they stopped crying? he wondered. Are they no longer hungry?

Then he remembered the cholent. What a cholent he had waiting for him! Everything else his wife had prepared for the holiday meal paled in comparison to that cholent. He distinctly remembered the juicy chunk of meat she had put into the cholent when she set it on the fire the previous afternoon. And our tavernkeeper knew one thing about

cholent: the longer it cooks, the more sumptuous your cholent. He'd looked under the lid on his way to shul this morning, when the cholent had already been going for some eighteen hours; good, he'd sniffed approvingly, but give it another few hours, and ahhhh... A few hours of aching feet and a hollow stomach are a small price to pay considering what was developing under that lid with

each passing minute. Obviously, that's what his fellow worshippers are thinking, as well. They, too, have a cholent simmering on their stovetop. No wonder they've stopped crying. Let the service go on, he consoled himself, the longer the better.

And on the service went. His stomach felt like raw leather, his knees grew weak with hunger, his head throbbed in pain, his throat burned with suppressed tears. But whenever

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ON OUR COVER



Dancing with the Torah at the Venice Synagogue

by artist Alex Levin

The vivid painting expresses the joy experienced by the congregation, young and old alike, at the Hakafot – dancing with the Torahs on Simchat Torah. The celebration marks the day when we complete the reading of the entire Torah – the five books of Moses – and begin the cycle from the beginning again.

This year much thought will have to go into the Hakafot celebration to be able to keep this tradition while staying safe at the same time.

To see more of Alex Levin's magnificent art please visit www.artlevin.com

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Annual Campaign Coined “Pure Stimulus 2020”

With Covid 19 regulations restricting large indoor social gatherings, Chabad Lubavitch has suspended the annual dinner which marks the culmination of the yearly fund raising campaign. Indeed, after some 40 years, this recurring event became a staple amongst the year-end community celebrations. In addition to paying tribute to an outstanding community leader, the gala offered a glimpse of the ongoing programs and highlighted new initiatives assumed by the Chabad Lubavitch Organization. The dinner held on the heels of a successful fund raising campaign, was good reason to gather and celebrate. The “can do” atmosphere was exhilarating and elevating.

Unfortunately, for now social gathering of this nature are “on hold” until further notice. Indeed, every aspect of our lifestyle has changed in ways we never imagined. It has impacted the way we work, shop, study, and travel. Today, the well-worn attention grabbing metaphor, “We are living in historic times,”

is no longer a meaningless expression, for the time being the passage is for real and has hit home. Hopefully,



very soon, with the discovery of a potent vaccine life will return to the “old normal.”

We, at Chabad Lubavitch, remain dedicated to our mandate while we adhere and respect the impositions enacted for our safety and wellbeing. Every effort has been made

to maintain all programs and projects under our administration, albeit, under strict guidelines and the necessary adjustments. For almost five decades, Chabad Lubavitch has helped introduce our rich tradition to countless people and families. This has been accomplished by a plethora of Torah classes, publications, Holiday guides, etc. which all promote practical participation in Jewish life. So too, we have embraced a multitude of electronic platforms, to teach and inform. From the flagship centre in Thornhill, Chabad Lubavitch continues to service the entire Jewish community and strives to improve the landscape of Jewish life throughout the GTA and beyond.

As a result of prevailing circumstances our campaign is of a “no frill” nature and coined accordingly, “Pure Stimulus.” This is clearly illustrated on the campaign literature which features the iconic bottle of the Absolut vodka brand. The symbol is commonly used to portray undiluted contents and un-

compromised ingredients. It has become synonymous with clean, pure, and wholesomeness. And that’s the message we hope to portray. All monies raised will go directly to fund programs and projects under our admin-

istration. When launching the campaign Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum noted, “We are exceptionally grateful for the leadership role our stalwarts have taken in the past and we look forward to their continued support.” L’Chaim!

Chabad Launches “Shofar on the Corner”

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on Sunday, September 20, throughout the GTA. Since this year the first day of Rosh HaShana is on Shabbat the Shofar observance is suspended on the first day.

The designated spots are in close proximity to all major intersections along Bathurst and numerous other locations as well. Please visit www.Shofar2020.ca for the location and time closest to your home.

The website is the brainchild of Rabbi Shmueli Nachalas of Jewish Youth Network right here in To-

ronto and has been opened to users all around the world.

This service will be advertised on 680 News during the week before Rosh Hashana in order to reach as many people as possible. The ad campaign is graciously sponsored by Steeles Memorial Chapel.



Vaughan City Council Approves New Mikvah Building

Almost 40 years ago, Chabad Lubavitch made the bold move to the rural community of Vaughan. Save for the village square and some scattered housing, the town was dotted with farms and mead-

5,000 sq. ft. was added to the existing structure that enlarged the Shul, Beit Midrash, auditorium, and library. Still, the space available for the smorgasbord of services and programs provided by Chabad Lubavitch

Access to the upper levels will be from a separate and independent entrance on the opposite side. The eight large activity rooms above will provide much needed space for the citywide Lubavitch Day Camp and the Friendship Circle.

After some two years of planning, designing, and consultation, the site plan application was approved by the City of Vaughan. During the next few months the “working drawings,” specs, and interior design will hopefully be completed. All being well the site should be “shovel ready” early next year for construction.

The new standalone Women’s Mikvah will enable us redesign of the current women’s Mikvah, for use by the men, to be used on the eve of Shabbat and before daily prayers. With the ever growing increase of patrons, the area will be renovated to accommodate a spacious change room and include an ample bank of showers.

The Centrality of Mikvah in Jewish Life

Most Jews are familiar with religious observances such as Shabbat, Kashruth, Yom Kippur and Pesach. Conversely, Mikvah and Family Purity, being of a personal nature are vaguely known and remain shrouded in mystery and myth. Yet in reality, the observance of Family Purity is a biblical Mitzvah on-par with fasting on Yom Kippur and eating Matzah on Pesach.

Immersion in the Mikvah is the culmination of purification – Taharah. The ritually suitable rain water flow unobstructed to a holding tank or come up from

a ground spring below. The rain water cistern is adjacent and connected to the immersion pool by a connecting channel.

During the Temple era the Kohain as well as any Jew who wished entry into the Holy Temple had to first immerse in a Mikvah. On Yom Kippur, the high priest, during the course of his sacred service would immerse himself at five designated intervals. So too, conversion to Judaism culminates with Mikvah immersion. It is also the process in which new pots, dishes and utensils transition and become fit for use. And finally, at the conclusion of our sojourn on this corporeal world, before a person is laid to rest, the purification rite includes Mikvah immersion.

For the menstruant woman, immersion in a Mikvah is part of a larger regimented frame-

work best known as Taharat Hamishpacha. These laws of Family Purity are amongst the Divine ordinances which transcend our limited intellect, categorized as Chukim Supra-rational Mitzvot. They personify a Mitzvah at its best; a pure and pristine link To G-d.

A Mikvah is also used by men on various occasions. With the exception of conversion, they are all based on tradition and custom. The most widely practiced, are immersion by a groom on his wedding day and by men before the onset of Yom Kippur. Many men also use the Mikvah in preparation for Shabbat and Holidays. Chassidim and the pious, immerse in a Mikvah every day before morning prayers. The daily immersion adds an element of holiness to enable one to engage in prayer with a sense of renewal, rejuvenation, and purity.



Youth Centre (north side entry)

ows. With little regard for the skeptics, a 3 acre site was purchased on which a 25,000 sq. ft. multipurpose community centre was built. Almost immediately it became obvious that “the town above Toronto” held much promise and opportunity. In tandem with sprouting housing developments, land was allocated for Shuls, Yeshivot, and Day Schools. Jewish life began to blossom!

To facilitate the influx of growth and participants, some 30 years ago, an additional

was not enough, “We were bursting at the seams,” said Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum, “It was quite evident that there was a need to explore and entertain further expansion.”

The primary objective was to build a “state of the art” free standing Women’s Mikvah with spacious and ample prep suites for the growing number of users. Still, in order to maximize the designated “foot print,” the building, with frontage on the Lonny Court cul-de-sac, will include two additional floors.



Thornhill, Community Mikvah (south side entry)

Friendship Circle Zoom Helps Youngsters Present Hidden Talent

No, it was not simple, as life grew more complicated for people the world over. Needless to say, individuals with special needs perhaps felt the isolation and routine change more intensely and difficult to adjust. As Zoom became the way of societal communication, Friendship Circle took advantage of this now popular trend. “While we could not gather face to face, we made the best of the regretful situation,” said Goldy Grossbaum, coordinator of the Friendship Circle that caters to children with special needs.

The children were introduced to a novel form of visual and audio communication as they learned how to master Zoom conferencing. They were able to have the opportunity to converse with their assigned volunteers and peers. They enjoyed music, crafts, exercise, games and shmoozing. Show and Share became an integral part of this endeavour. Participants showed their rooms, favourite toys, animals etc. Some of the children who had previously been somewhat inhibited before, began to tell stories, impart experiences and express their feelings. “It was amazing to witness individuals who were on the shy side sharing and voicing their opinions,” said Esther Grossbaum, coordinator.

This past September, Friendship Circle initiated a Birthday Club where every celebrant felt special, loved, and feted. Each month the Friendship Circle celebrated the corresponding Hebrew birthdays with a communal party. While most individuals are invited to birthday parties and social events throughout the year, the special needs community remains limited in hosting or attending group affairs. In order to create excitement, the celebrations were hosted at a different venue each month. Whether the gathering took place at an indoor activity centre or at the Chabad Centre in Thornhill, all the participants enjoyed the refreshments, cupcakes and pizza. Volunteers, peers and family gathered to make the experience unforgettable.

Indeed, the Lubavitcher Rebbe obm, stressed the impor-

tance of a birthday celebration from a Torah perspective, as a mini personal Rosh Hashanah, the day G-d saw fit for one’s Soul to descend to this world.

The children who could not celebrate their special day with their peers due to the pandemic were surprised to find a birthday present gifted and delivered by Friendship Circle volunteers. “This made my daughter’s day,” said Amy’s mom, “we will never forget this.

As difficult as it is for the children, the family and especially the mothers, feels the pinch. The children and young adults with special needs have to be constantly engaged in activities. Occupying them is a difficult and sometimes frustrating task. Once again, Zoom came in handy. Numerous times, Friendship Circle offered their celebrated “Mom’s Night Out” featuring Leah Kalvari, MSW, RSW. As a clinical social worker, Leah spoke to the moms needs. Naturally, a give and take pursued and the discussion went on for a while. Mothers who registered received a refreshment package and a gift for their child.

Mrs. Brown sent an amusing email to the Friendship Circle coordinators stating, “thank you so much for your gesture and thinking of me. When I arrived home today I found a decorative box on my counter along with a few candy wrappers, empty pastry wrap, and a can of wine my daughter claimed was hers to drink on Shabbat, but your efforts do not go by unnoticed.”

During the most recent Zoom gathering, a video of the Lubavitcher Rebbe was presented. The video displayed the Rebbe’s foresight in the 1960’s prior to society’s knowledge and research regarding children with special needs. The Rebbe encouraged parents who requested his advice to make sure their child remains familiar with their Jewish identity. He also lovingly instructed the parents not to limit the child’s activities, as one never knows how far an individual can progress. Naturally, the mothers online were touched and encouraged by the Rebbe’s remarks.



Lubavitch Day Camp “Out Of The Box”

Lubavitch Day Camp has always been on the forefront of the constantly evolving world of camping. Up until this year it was sufficient to hire spirited counsellors, instructors of the newest trends, and order the latest toy fads, to keep LDC fun and with it.

Then came COVID.



While most camps were forced to close, or chose to close, Lubavitch Day Camp rose to the challenge in spite of the daily uncertainty that was our new reality. The first step was ordering face masks in child sizes, naturally with Lubavitch Day Camp logo. Just like face masks are not a one size fits all, we understood that there are different realities for different families and our summer plans had to reflect that on a daily basis.

In response to the situation, two options were offered, based on each family’s neighborhood or level of comfort. Those families that were still maintaining a small bubble were able to sign up to our online option, while those that were expanding their bubble joined one of the backyard pods. Regardless of the option they chose, each camper received a box full of their weekly activities. This included art supplies, baking supplies and of course a colorful detailed daily schedule for them to follow.

Those children who were

attending camp at home, logged into their bunk every morning. Their counselor greeted each of them personally, and stayed online with them, on Zoom the whole day to give guidance and help them enjoy the activities prepared in their box. The daily schedule also included instructional tae-kwon-do,

we were given the “green light” from the health department that we may open the pool! This allowed our pod camps to go swimming in our beautiful outdoor pool. On a typical year our pool sees 500 swimmers daily, this year it was much less due to the restrictions, however each minute was enjoyed that much more by each camper!

magic trick workshops and weekly shows including ventriloquists, illusionists and magic shows.

For the children in the backyard pod camps, they enjoyed all the activities from their box, with their counselor, in the host backyard. Tents that were setup provided ample shade, daily temperature checks for each campers and separate supplies ensured everyone’s safety. The innovative schedule provided the campers with a fun summer, the way it’s meant to be!

Thankfully a few days before camp was to begin

When asked how the camp managed to function, Mrs. Esty Steinmetz camp director responded, “Was this year different than a regular year? Definitely! Was camp a tremendous success like in previous years? I think that all campers and counselors will agree that in certain ways it was even better!”



3rd Annual Global ShabbaTTogether Set for February 12, 2021

When people hear “inclusion,” it sounds like a big project, a monumental life changer. ShabbaTTogether seeks to shatter that notion.

An initiative of the Ruderman Chabad Inclusion Initiative (RCII), a project of Machne Israel, the third annual ShabbaTTogether is set for the second weekend in February, the designated Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month. ShabbaTTogether’s mission is to highlight mental health and disability inclusion. Last year over

had new avenues of conversation, as people discovered they shared common struggles they had previously never opened up about.

For **ShabbaTTogether 2021**, RCII will be creating more materials focused on Mental Health and Wellness. As we all know, Covid-19 has hit every community hard and for those who have a disability or history of a mental health condition, the struggle can be even more difficult. We plan to work with educators and psychologists to make



Global Weekend of Mental Wellness and Disability Inclusion

600 Chabad communities on six continents participated. This year, we are hoping to hit 1,000!

Mr. Jay Ruderman, president of the Ruderman Family Foundation, explains why he partners with Chabad. “One fifth of the Jewish community live with disabilities and, historically, we have not been great at welcoming them. To Chabad reaching out and welcoming people is natural.”

Rabbi Shmully Litvin of Chabad of Kentucky participated in ShabbaTTogether. “It was so simple. I used the media posts and templates to advertise, and printed the dvar Torah,” he says. But the response to the material was beyond what he had expected. “The discussions it brought up about inclusion continued for weeks afterward.” He noticed that even regular guests suddenly

sure ShabbaTTogether 2021 has updated and relevant educational materials and resources for all focusing on mental health. This material will target preschool, school age, college students and adults.

“This is the purpose of ShabbaTTogether: To bring awareness, acceptance, and support to our community members across the globe living with disabilities and mental health conditions. To educate our community leaders and members on how to truly support their friends, family and community members to let people know they are seen, heard, and welcome at Chabad,” says RCII director, Dr. Sarah Krantz-Ciment PT, DPT.

To learn more about ShabbaTTogether, call 701-404-RCII (7244), or go to ShabbaTTogether.com to get involved.

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”.

Plan for the Future

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.

Please call:
Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum at
905-731-7000.
All information will be kept strictly confidential.

Adopted at Age 91, A Holocaust Survivor Finds Love and Hope in Barrie

by Ashira Weiss

Patty Picarelli wasn’t very hopeful as she dialed the number for the Chabad Jewish Center of Barrie, Ontario, fifty miles north of Toronto. The single mom of three had already reached out to thirty-four welfare organizations, governmental and private, Jewish and non-Jewish, both in Barrie and Toronto. None of them had been able to help. When the last call to a Jewish agency in Toronto again resulted in a no, Patty began to cry; she wasn’t Jewish and was giving up so much for her Holocaust survivor friend, was there no one who would help her out? The tears seemed to affect the lady on the other end of the phone line, because she took a few more minutes to refer Patty to the Chabad Jewish Center.

In November 2019, Patty and her children had ‘adopted’ a 91-year-old woman named Madeline Jug. A child survivor of the Holocaust, Madeline was left with a life-long injury to her leg. The wound was inflicted by a Nazi who threw a knife at her when he saw her give a little bit of her water to a friend stricken with typhoid in Krakow, Poland. That injury saved her life as she and her friend were taken to the hospital where a German-British doctor arranged for them to be smuggled to a safehouse in the Austrian countryside.

Patty met Madeline, a friend of her father’s, in 2005 and the two stayed in touch even after his passing. In November, Patty heard that Madeline, no longer able to live on her own, had moved into a home where she was being mistreated, even being called “dirty Jew.” The younger woman was horrified. The disease and malnutrition that Madeline experienced as a child left her unable to have children. Her husband passed away years ago leaving Madeline alone in her old-age. “Our elderly gave up so much for the next generation. It is our duty to make sure they are surrounded by love and support in their later years,” Patty told Lubavitch.com.

So she rented a U-Haul and she and her children moved Madeline and her belongings to their modest home. No longer able to climb stairs with her injured leg, the family emptied their living room and dining room, and put up a door to provide Madeline with some personal space. “The bathroom was an issue,” Patty said. There is only a powder room on the main floor so Patty rigged a hose to the sink so she could help Madeline wash. But she wanted to make her more comfortable so she began to brainstorm ways to raise the funds for a renovation.

After selling her TV and anything she could get a little money for, Patty started a GoFundMe fundraiser. To date, the page shows a total of \$590 Canadian, raised from nine donors. Patty reached out to celebrities and friends asking that they share her page to no avail. Thus began the thirty-four-phone-call-marathon. “I wasn’t asking for a lot and I wasn’t asking for myself,” Patty says, but she was appalled by the indifference. “I

was shocked that this is how our generation respects our elders. They persevered through war to build our country and now, when they need it most, people act as if they are disposable,” Patty says.

It was Chanukah time when, with trepidation, Patty dialed the number for the Chabad Jewish Center. Chabad representative Muci Nakkar listened to Patty’s tale and immediately offered to help. She invited Patty to meet with the city’s mayor and a member of parliament who would be attending the public menorah lighting ceremony that she and her husband, Rabbi Mendel, were hosting. The politicians were polite and assured their assistance, but didn’t come

The bathroom renovation and a ramp to the front door were completed mid-February. Patty was overwhelmed by the generosity suddenly shown to her. “I can’t even put into words what it means that someone reached out. Thank you isn’t enough to describe the gratitude Madeline and my family feel. The Nakkars and their community really stepped up to the plate when absolutely nobody else would,” she says.

On February 26, Madeline suffered a heart attack and was sent to the hospital. Patty and her children visited every day until March 17 when the hospital closed its doors to visitors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They continued to communicate virtu-



Rabbi Mendel Nakkar affixes a Mezuzah for Madeline

through. “They looked at me, shook my hand and said, ‘we’re not going to let you down,’ but once the cameras had gone, they didn’t respond to any of my calls,” Patty says.

The Nakkars heard that Madeline’s plight was brought up at a Temple where she had once been a member. They decided it was out of their purview as Madeline was no longer a member. “At her age she won’t be able to enjoy the renovations for much longer so it’s not worth our investment,” this same organization had told Patty.

“We realized that we were the only ones willing to help, but we didn’t have the resources to pay for the renovations on our own,” Muci says. So they posted a request on the Chabad center’s Facebook page and asked their friends to pitch in. “The community responded quickly and generously,” says Rabbi Mendel. Within twenty-four hours they had raised \$2,500.

Sultana Mechali, a member of the Chabad Jewish Center, went to the local Home Depot. She explained her cause to the store’s assistant manager. “He said, ‘choose what you need,’” Sultana says. “He gave us about three quarters of the supplies needed, free of charge.” The owner of MRK Contractors and Renovations, another Chabad community member, pitched in too, offering to do the \$8,000 renovation for just \$2,500.

ally until Madeline was released back into Patty’s care a few days ago. With much in short supply these days, Patty had a hard time finding the medical supplies needed. She improvises, using a potato to clean a surface wound at the time of this interview in lieu of antibiotic cream. “It’s been a challenge because we have to be extra careful and the kids have to remain socially distant and are no longer able to help me with her care,” she says.

Like Patty, Madeline has a fighting spirit. She keeps promising her caregiver that she will be feeling healthy for Patty’s birthday in September so she can make her a special dinner. Patty is hoping to raise some more money by then so she can have the kitchen made accessible to Madeline and add a ramp to the backyard so that Madeline can enjoy the outdoors. She is also seeking government assistance to hire a nurse to assist in the older woman’s care. “Madeline is funny, she has a heart of gold and is so accepting of everyone, but the most incredible thing is her positive outlook on life, even with all she’s been through,” Patty says. “I think she’ll live beyond 100 and I’ll do all I can to make these years comfortable and full of love and joy.”

To support Patty and Madeline visit www.JewishBarrie.ca/ donate and write ‘Madeline Jug’ in the notes.



Emirate Prince and Russia’s Chief Rabbi Bring a Yemenite Couple to Safety

An elderly couple that heads one of the oldest Yemenite Jewish families has arrived safely in Abu Dhabi, where they were reunited with their relatives. The rescue came about as a result of the joint efforts of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Rabbi Berel Lazar, the Chief Rabbi of Russia.

While there have been many efforts over the decades, including Operation Esther, to rescue oppressed Jews in Yemen, there are still a handful of families who have refused to leave the ancient Jewish community, which according to some accounts dates back 3,000 years to the time of the First Temple.

But the situation became more unbearable than ever in recent months after extremist groups fighting in the nation’s longstanding civil war took over many areas of the country, and an international campaign was launched to bring the remaining families to safety. Among the things needed for exit visas during the civil war was a country allied with Yemen to sponsor emigrants and grant entry visas.

Lazar was enlisted into the campaign, and he reached out

Jews and their families, we are privileged to thank His Royal Honor for the humanitarian gesture and the assistance that the Prince provided in granting entry visas to the families of the



Rabbi Berel Lazar, the Chief Rabbi of Russia

Yemenite Jews, so that they can be rescued from Yemen to Abu Dhabi, thus saving their lives from danger.

“The United Arab Emirates is one of the most unique countries on earth” continued the chief rabbi. “A country with values, a country with tolerance, a country with generosity, a country that is very giving. Therefore, it receives G-d’s blessings to such an extent. This noble act of saving lives, will, with the help of G-d, further raise the United Arab Emirates, bless the country, bless its leaders, bless its inhabitants, and they will see G-d’s blessings in all their deeds, every step of the way.”

Lazar also referred to the peace agreement reached last week between the UAE and Israel: “These days the entire world sees the hand of the UAE extended in peace, desiring to bring about unity between peoples. The move made by the UAE is a big step towards peace and unity. Others may follow suit, but she will forever remain the first” said the chief rabbi.

Meanwhile, some of the handful of Yemenite Jews who still remain, are also seeking to emigrate to the United Arab Emirates.

“There is no doubt that this noble deed of rescuing lives will, please G-d, bring even more blessing to the Arab Emirates and its leaders,” concluded Lazar.

Rabbi Levi Duchman, who serves as the only rabbi in the UAE and has been visiting the family regularly since their arrival in the country, said “our community is grateful to our leader Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and we are glad that the family is now reunited. Our community is seeing to it that the family receives kosher food and their other needs during their stay in the UAE are met.”



Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan

to Prince al Nahyan to assist in the humanitarian operation, and authorities in Abu Dhabi granted citizenship to the elderly couple, and even took part in the rescue itself. Additionally, in an unusual move, citizenship was also granted to the other family members currently living in London, so that they could come to Abu Dhabi and reunite with their parents whom they haven’t seen for the past fifteen years.

The reunion was exciting and emotional as family members thanked G-d for saving their parents. They also expressed their appreciation to the Crown Prince and the Chief Rabbi, and to all those who worked to make this operation successful.

A Special Letter of Thanks

Lazar sent the prince a special letter of thanks, which noted that “On behalf of the Yemenite

A Jewish School Beyond Borders

By Ashira Weiss

As classrooms have turned to Zoom, schools all over the world are struggling to adapt. But for one Jewish school, distance learning is a way of life.

Sixth-grader Hadasa Perez has never met her teacher. Or her classmates.

Yet, while parents, teachers, and children around the world are flailing like fish out of water, struggling to maintain some kind of normal schedule in the midst of a pandemic, Hadasa and her class have serenely continued with life as usual. For the three hundred students of the Nigri International Jewish Online School, remote learning is nothing new.

As principal Mushka Paltiel said, “Our charter is to offer Jewish education to Jewish children no matter their location, affiliation, background, or socioeconomic situation.”

One School, Many Tracks

Nigri operates on five tracks: Hebrew School, Day School, Cheder, Bar Mitzvah, and Tutoring. The curricula for each were designed with help from education professionals and leaders in comparable brick-and-mortar institutions. There are multiple levels in each track, and classes are scheduled in the morning and evening hours. The plethora of options allows for a parent body that spans the spectrum of Jewish observance. “At the Online School every family has their own story, which makes for a diverse and inspiring community,” says Leah Shemtov, administrator and outreach coordinator.

Self-described “traditional Jew” Jaime Connor wanted her daughter Bethany, 7, to have a Jewish education. But in Yulee, Florida, a small town that shares a border with Georgia, there wasn’t a Hebrew School in sight.

A fifth-grade social studies teacher for the Georgia Cyber Academy, Jaime was familiar with online learning. She turned to Google and was pleasantly surprised to find Nigri. “The teachers pack so much into the two hours of Hebrew School. It’s hyper-focused and very interactive,” she said. Jaime also loves the flexibility online school offers. “Bethany has attended Hebrew School from a hotel room, or while staying at friends’. She has only missed one class in two years and the teacher recorded it for her so she caught up another time.”

Challenges, Triumphs

“The complex technological set-up required to run a school online was mastered long ago—the school’s current platform functions as an interactive smart board, where teachers control permissions for the mic, webcam, and chat functions,” said Director of Technical Development **Yossi Goodman**. “There are also security features, and teachers can view students’ screens, ensuring students aren’t busy with something else during class.”

The more daunting problem is coordinating schedules across multiple time zones—one teacher starts the school day at 6 a.m. in New York to accommodate her students in Dubai.

In Sacramento, the Perez girls, who attend the Day School track, start class at 1:30 p.m., but for their teacher, Aviana Dahan in Montreal, it’s 4:30.

After Morah Aviana’s Level 8 class, concluded their “Jewish Women in Tanach” course, each student chose a medium and compiled a presentation on the women they have studied. The women included the matriarchs, Spanish heroine Donna Gracia, and their mothers. Hadasa Perez has chosen to present her heroines in short, hand-illustrated movie clips.

“In some ways, Nigri students get a more authentic experience than if they were in a regular classroom,” said Mushkie Lipskier, head of curriculum and teacher engagement. “When they learn the laws of cooking on Shabbat, the teacher is standing in her kitchen and showing them how things work. When they learn about mezuzah, they can show their friends the mezuzah on their very own door.”

“There is no precedent for online learning of this type,” Mushkie added. “Our teachers are trained to make lessons as experiential as possible to keep the kids engaged and make learning come alive.”

Together, Apart

As parents and children have discovered during these past months, school is more than a lesson plan and assignments. Nigri staff know this, and constantly look for ways to mimic the social environment of a school. Teachers encourage students to collaborate on projects in class and on homework, and both Perez girls have made friends with their classmates.

The school is also intentional about fostering a sense of community. For Purim, families are encouraged to participate in a mishloach manot exchange, where they send kosher treats to a classmate. When Bethany was assigned a classmate in New Mexico, Jaime and the kid’s mom connected and have remained friends. “It’s very cool and special that the school has brought us together,” Jaime said.

Back in Sacramento, Hadasa leaves school for the day, energized and happy, her mother said. “The Jewish Online School has given my girls a positive platform and a community that, though it is scattered, is connected in its own unique way.”



AS. What prompted the decision to establish a Chabad House in Newmarket, far from a thriving Jewish community? The city of Newmarket is poised to become the next Jewish enclave as a result of its proximity to Toronto and the high cost of home ownership throughout the GTA. There are quite a few subdivisions under development that offer a great opportunity to become a homeowner. Naturally, with the presence of Chabad we hope to make a warm, vibrant community accessible to every Jewish resident.

AS. You've been raised in a family dedicated to the shaluchis of the Rebbe. Did you ever consider a different profession? My wife Libby who hails from Weston, Florida and I were brought up in homes where the common table talk was about Shlichus. We were both brought up in an environment where the needs of others were 'centre stage' and sometimes took precedence to ours. Being devoted and committed to the Rebbe's vision and objectives, our parents forged ahead with passion and enthusiasm. Naturally this made an indelible impression on us and consequently, we feel blessed and humbled that we have been granted the opportunity to represent Chabad Lubavitch and serve as the Rebbe's Shluchim in a new frontier.

AS. How long have you been in Newmarket and when did you move there? We joined the rank of Chabad rabbis and established the Chabad presence here three years ago. Since we've started, we met with many Jewish families, our programs bring together a nice amount of participants and we're off to a great start. We moved around Rosh Hashana time and our first objective was to put together a Minyan for the high holidays. It



In this issue we interview Rabbi Mendel Grossbaum of the newly established Chabad of Newmarket

By: Ahava Spilman

wasn't that easy, and we struggled but thank G-d the past years we haven't had a problem obtaining a Minyan for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

AS. Tell us about some of the differences between Thornhill and Newmarket? Well, Thornhill is very special, lots of Kosher food and other Jewish establishments; nevertheless, believe it or not, today you can find Chalav Yisrael milk at our Metro located at Yonge & Mulock in the heart of Newmarket. For us that's just the beginning.

AS. Tell us about your family? As I'm sure you're well aware family plays an integral part of Shlichus life. Even though my kids are still young I try to bring them along whenever I can when visiting people in the community. I have a feeling that when my children make kiddush for them Friday night, it leaves a bigger impression than any speech I can give about the importance of tradition.

AS. Are you the only shomer shabbat Rabbi living in Newmarket? So far I am the only Rabbi here but we are not the only observant family. I suppose I look a little different from most of the neighbourhood because the other day a fellow shopper questioned me about my attire and the strings hanging over my pants. He was fascinated by my answer of remembering G-d is in control at all times.

AS. Have you discovered any young Jewish families moving north to find affordable housing and searching for a community? Absolutely. Most of our participants are families that have moved here because there is more "bang for your buck" north of Aurora. The GTA has become simply prohibitive

for young, growing, hard-working Jewish families.

AS. What are your expectations about Newmarket? Mostly we want to make the Rebbe proud. It's our job to reach every Yid and connect him or her to Torah and Mitzvos each on their level. Whenever I can, I learn a bit of Torah with each individual I meet. Learning creates a real connection face to face, neshama to neshama.

AS. What surprised you most about opening a Chabad house? There were so many people willing to help especially at the beginning. Some brought us kosher snacks, others helped us unload the truck and another brought over their children to keep ours occupied. Newmarket families want to get involved with good causes. Even the local newspapers help out. One Chanukah I emailed the newspaper to place an ad for our public Menorah lighting. They said if they had extra space, they would also put the ad in the Thornhill edition. I met a new family at the Menorah lighting and asked how they heard about us. They said parents in Thornhill saw an ad for the Menorah lighting in Newmarket. Nothing is by chance Hashgacha Protis.

AS. Tell us about your Hebrew school? How many are enrolled?

We started the Chabad Hebrew school last school year, it worked out beyond our expectations. We had 13 children enrolled, returning students are great but when their siblings join them that's even better proof that the school is succeeding. Last year a student joined us who had just moved from another Ontario city. We were discussing which level their daughter should enter when the parents realised, she had been at a Chabad Hebrew school in

pandemic.

Before Corona, we had regular classes, the most popular was Sunday morning tefillin club and parsha class. When we switched to Zoom, I was pleased and surprised to see more participants and some faces I didn't know started to join us regularly. Also, I visit Jewish professionals who work in Newmarket but live in Thornhill or Toronto. I realized that they too were joining the Zoom classes while being isolated at home. This is certainly one of the hidden blessings of the pandemic.

AS. Describe an achievement that made you smile?

A short while ago, an older gentleman called asking if I could translate his parents' tombstone. He had tried for many years to decipher the words but so far had been unsuccessful. The words were all in Hebrew. They were Iraqi Jews who were buried in India where this man was born. At three years old, he emigrated to Canada with his father and never realized that he was born Jewish. He had a large binder with many formal documents in it and it was clear that both parents were Jewish. He put on tefillin with me for the first time, joined us for Shabbat dinner and the next Shabbat he returned again to show pictures and tell his story to the congregation. I believe his newfound Neshama will stay connected to Yiddishkeit.

AS. It is so commendable that you have decided to devote your time and energy to spreading Yiddishkeit. Kol Hakavod! If any of our readers would like to send you a well-deserved donation, where should they send it?

Thanks, chabadNewmarket.com/donate

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Have a Sweet New Year!

Dear Rebby

By Rabbi Aron Moss



Are You In This Relationship Or Not?

Here is something I always wondered: Why is Rosh Hashana before Yom Kippur? If Rosh Hashana is the day of judgement, and Yom Kippur is the day of forgiveness, then it would make more sense to do it the other way around: First give us a chance to fix our mistakes, then judge us for the year to come. No?

Answer:

I was once asked to counsel a couple having marriage issues. They sat in front of me, and within five seconds each one let loose with a barrage of accusations against the other.

"He never listens to a thing I say."

"Well if she wouldn't scream at me maybe I would."

"Well if you would listen the first time maybe I wouldn't need to scream!"

"What if you would stop criticising everything I do?"

"If you would think about anyone apart from yourself I could."

"That's the thanks you give me?"

After a few rallies of this marital tennis match, I had to interrupt. "Can I just ask you both, what did you come here for? What are you expecting to gain from this meeting?"

The woman said, "We want to know if this marriage is beyond repair."

"I can't know that. Only you can. But you'll need to look inside yourself and answer one simple question: Am I in?"

"If you are in, it means you believe in 'us', you believe that the connection between you runs deeper than all the issues getting in the way. If you are in, it means that even if you can't see how to get there, you deeply want to reach a place of forgiveness, and you will do whatever it takes to make it happen."

"If you are both in, then we can start taking steps to fix things. If you're not, there's nothing to talk about."

"So are you in?"

They looked at each other for a long time. Their angry faces started to soften. Finally he said "I'm in." And with a shy smile, she said, "I'm in too."

"Ok great" I said, "Now you can go back to screaming at each other."

But they didn't. It seemed

silly to be throwing accusations once they both knew that they are in this for keeps. Their hearts were reconnected. They were plugged in again. Now the forgiveness can start.

Rosh Hashana is about saying "I'm in." During the year our relationship with G-d may have its ups and downs. We sometimes stray from our Jewishness, and we don't always do what we are in this world to do. By the same token, we may have issues and complaints and accusations against G-d too. That's all a part of life.

But the question is, are you in or not? Whatever happened in the past year, is G-d still your G-d? Are you in this relationship or not? Are you into being Jewish or are you giving up? When we blow the Shofar, we are calling out with a resounding YES! You are my G-d. I am yours. I am Jewish. I am in.

So the judgment of Rosh Hashana is not just G-d judging us, but also about us pronouncing a verdict on our relationship with Him. Because if we're not in, there's nothing to talk about. But if we are in, now we can start dealing with our stuff and cleaning out the dirty laundry to open a fresh start. After reaffirming our Jewishness on Rosh Hashana, it will be easy to forgive and be forgiven on Yom Kippur.

That couple is doing great now. They don't play marital tennis any more. They still have their tense moments like all couples, but they know that the relationship is deep enough to handle it. They had their Rosh Hashana to reconnect, and then they did Yom Kippur to clean out the negative past. We can all do the same.

So, are you in?

Good Shabbos and Good Yomtov, may you be written and sealed for a good and sweet year!

Don't Go Back to Shul Ever

I need to be honest. I am not excited about going back to life after this coronavirus thing. I've enjoyed working at home at a slower pace, my family is getting on better than ever, I don't mind shopping online. And I hope you don't get offended by this, but I'm not sure I want to come back to shul. I have

learned to enjoy praying at home. I actually concentrate more on the prayers and have more focus than I ever did in shul. So what should I really be doing: staying home and praying better or coming back to shul?

Answer:

My suggestion: don't go back to shul. Ever. That's just not what Jews do.

I'll prove it to you from an unlikely source.

I'm sure you know that Israel's national airline is called El Al. Do you know what the name El Al actually means? It means Onwards and Upwards. Cute name for an airline, isn't it?

But just stop and think about it for a minute. The names of every other airline are pretty matter of fact - British Airways, American Airlines, Egypt Air. But not the Jewish one. In typical Jewish style, our airline doesn't just have a simple name stating what it is, it has a name that requires philosophical analysis.

Onwards and Upwards could be the motto of Jewish faith. We never go back, and we never go down. Every life experience is a step forward, every hurdle in our path is an invitation to jump higher. There are no detours, it's all a part of the ride. There are no set-backs, only set-forwards. We don't live in the past, trying to regain some glorious moment that was. We march on into the future, trying to make a better moment that will be. Onwards and Upwards.

After the experiences of the last few months, we have been forced to rethink our view of the world and ourselves. We have adopted novel means to connect with family, friends and even G-d. We should never go back. We should go forward, and apply these new skills to a non-crisis reality.

You've learnt to work more efficiently. So don't go back to work as it was, only better. Your family has learnt to appreciate each other more, you should never go back to the family you used to be, you are closer now. And you've learnt to pray better. So please, don't just go back to shul. Go to shul like you never went before. Take your newfound connections and bring them forward, never backward.

El Al, onwards and upwards. Welcome aboard.

What If You Found Out They're Not Your Children?

I have a dark secret. I have an anger problem. And I never knew it until I became a parent. Because the only people I take my anger out on are my own kids. I never had a temper before, but sometimes when my children misbehave and I am at my limit I just explode and lose control. I don't like myself at those moments and know it is wrong. And yet I haven't been able to control it. Any pointers on how to not lose it with my kids?

Answer:

Your dark secret is the dark secret of every parent. We all have our weak moments, when a combination of lack of sleep, pressures of life and our imperfect hearts conspire to make us lose it. And who are the poor victims of our fury? Those we love the most, our children.

If it is happening frequently or if you are really harming your kids, you need urgent professional help. But if you are overall loving and good to your kids, just now and then you snap, then you are human. That doesn't excuse your behaviour, it just means you need to work on yourself like everybody does.

Here are some wise words the Rebbe offered to a father who held the same dark secret.

The Rebbe asked, "If your neighbour dropped off their kids to your house to look after while they went out, and during that time the neighbour's kids misbehaved, would you lose your temper with them?"

The father had to admit that no, when it is someone else's kids misbehaving, we don't allow ourselves to lose control, because they are not our kids. How could we face our neighbour when they return to pick up their kids, only to find them crying and hurt? We don't feel free to lose ourselves when the kids aren't ours.

"Well," continued the Rebbe, "your children are not yours either. They are G-d's children. He has entrusted them with you for a while to take care of. And you are answerable to G-d for how you treat them."

This simple but profound insight redefines the parents' role. Children are not our

property, they do not belong to us. They belong to G-d, and we have been honoured with the heavy responsibility of caring for them in their young years and guiding them for their future. If we'd be embarrassed to return our neighbours children having hurt them, then how much more should we recoil from the thought of hurting G-d's children.

Parents need to discipline their kids, that is an essential part of our role. But that must come from a place of love, not anger. It must be deliberate and thought out, not impulsive and reactive.

This is all easy to say when we are calm and well rested. But what do you do when after a few weeks of sleepless nights, and you haven't had three minutes to yourself since your five year old was born, and there's pressure at work and your sister-in-law has been driving you crazy about her silly issues, everyone is hungry and dinner is late, and just then your little boy kicks his soccer ball (which he knows he isn't allowed to do indoors) and it knocks the platter of chicken onto the floor that was just mopped by the over-priced cleaning lady who told you she's not coming back as she got a permanent job, and as it smashes into a thousand pieces your daughter says, "Good, I don't like chicken," and your other son says "Can we go out for dinner now?" What do you do then?

You say to yourself two words: G-d's kids.

Why don't we Exchange Rings?

I am getting married in two months from now, and last night we had a meeting with the rabbi who will be conducting the ceremony. Something came up which I am quite uncomfortable with: the issue of only the groom giving the bride a ring, and not vice versa. This essentially represents to me that I am being purchased. The idea that there is a problem with the bride also giving the groom a ring seems absurd to me. Surely I have as much say in the agreement to be married as my husband-to-be?

I know I am allowed to give the ring after the ceremony. However, I want to exchange rings during the

Dear Rebby



ceremony. Gender equality is a very important issue to me. I am a highly educated woman, and I also value my Jewish identity, but I am quite upset about this. I would like to hear your opinion...

Answer:

I fully understand your concern. Many couples have asked me the same question. Coming from a modern perspective, it does seem a little lopsided for the man to give the ring exclusively. But I believe when you know the meaning you may feel differently.

The chuppah is an exact spiritual operation to join your souls together. It is not just a ceremony representing your existing relationship, it is a life-changing event that creates a new relationship. Before the chuppah you are two souls, after you are one. Still two individuals, with two minds and two hearts, but a united soul.

We can understand how two souls can become one by observing how two bodies can become one. The act of reproduction is the physical union of man and woman. In this bodily union, the man gives and the woman receives. Only this way can new life be created, a child, in which man and woman have become one flesh.

The physical world is a mirror image of the spiritual world, and the workings of the soul are reflected by the workings of the body. Just as physical intimacy is the union of bodies, the wedding ceremony is an act of spiritual intimacy, uniting souls. And so in this act of spiritual union the man, expressing the male power of being a bestower, gives the ring to the woman, the feminine receiver.

An exchange of rings doesn't create unity, just as an exchange of seed for egg would not produce a child. Only when the groom gives the ring and the bride receives it, then this singular act of his giving and her receiving produces oneness. Any attempt to alter that process would be, quite literally, counterproductive.

We can't play around with the facts of life. The spiritual life has facts too. May you and your partner be blessed with true oneness, and from that oneness may many little ones come.

I was scammed. Now What?

I feel like an absolute idiot. I wanted to give some charity, as I have been a bad boy recently. And I fell for a scam. This guy was supposedly helping orphans who live on the street and I felt so bad for them. But turns out this fellow is living it up off other people's stupidity. People like me. So it seems even when I try to do a good deed it turns out bad. What does that say about me?

Answer:

This is the best news you could possibly hear right now. You see, it is important to make sure that your charity goes to worthy recipients. But if by mistake it didn't, then you are the recipient of Jeremiah's curse. Which is a great blessing.

Let me explain.

The prophet Jeremiah was persecuted by the people of his home town, Anatot. So he cursed them, but in a rather strange way: "When you give charity, it should be to unworthy recipients!"

Seems an unusual choice of curse. I could think of some worse evils to wish upon your enemies. There are some great old Yiddish curses, like: "You should lose all your teeth except one. And then you should get a toothache." That's what I call a curse. What's the big deal if they give charity to people who don't deserve it?

But Jeremiah was a holy man. With this cryptic curse he was in fact offering his enemies a blessing.

There is a spiritual law of reciprocity. G-d mirrors our actions. When we give charity to the needy, G-d reciprocates and gives us our needs. Fill the lack in the lives of others, and G-d will fill your lack.

If we are careful to only give to those who truly deserve, G-d does the same and only gives us according to our worthiness. However, when we carelessly give to an unworthy recipient, G-d is a little careless too, and He gives us even if we are not deserving.

Jeremiah understood this. He looked at these men who had treated him so badly, and knew they were not deserving of any goodness from above. But being a true leader, Jeremiah loved his people, even those that hurt him. So he prayed that they give charity

to unworthy recipients. This way, unworthy as they may be, they too will be looked after by G-d.

Who knows? Maybe being scammed just before Rosh Hashana means you'll be blessed beyond what you deserve. Next time be careful who you give to. But let misplaced generosity be your biggest sin. So you were scammed. May that be your proverbial toothache.

Did You Get The Hint?

A friend lost his mother and is sitting shiva. I'm not the closest to him so wasn't sure if I should go visit or just wait a bit and give him a call. What is the etiquette around visiting a mourner?

Answer:

The two most important things you need to know about visiting a mourner are: when to come and when to leave. Jewish tradition gives us very clear instructions on both.

It is customary for mourners to leave the door of their home unlocked during the week of mourning. Visitors just walk in unannounced. What would be considered rude in other circumstances is quite acceptable in this case. And there is good reason.

Many of us have a natural aversion to visiting someone in pain. We don't know what to say, and we aren't sure if they really want us there. But at the core of it, we are just scared. Scared to face intense emotion, uncomfortable at the thought of seeing someone grieve. This fear is misplaced, and we need to overcome it.

So the door is left unlocked. It is up to the friends and family of the mourner to take the initiative and just show up. Don't wait for an invitation to visit someone in pain. Don't ask if they want you to be there. Just go.

Once you're inside, take your cues from the mourner. Let them lead the conversation. If they want to talk about their loss, listen and empathize. If they want to change the subject and talk about the weather, follow their lead.

But most importantly, take the hint when they want you to leave. Whether you've been there for an hour or you only just walked in, when the mourner indicates it's time to go, it's time to go. Watch their body language. If they do something like hitting their

two hands on their knees, sigh and say "ok", that's your cue to get up and leave. Or listen to what they are saying. If you hear, "You must be busy, thanks so much for coming," that's a nice way of saying the visit has ended.

You arrive uninvited, to show that you care. You leave as soon as you get the hint, which also shows that you care. You showed up at the door, and that is the greatest comfort you can give.

Why Do We Cover Mirrors?

Can you shed some light on the custom to cover the mirrors in a house of mourning? I was told that after the funeral of an immediate relative we cover all mirrors in the home for the seven days of mourning. One explanation offered is that we are not supposed to adorn ourselves while mourning. But I am looking for any deeper explanation you may have...

Answer:

There is a more spooky reason for covering mirrors in a house of mourning. This may sound a bit way out, but on reflection it actually makes a lot of sense.

The Kabbalists write that all types of evil spirits and demons come to visit a family in mourning. When a soul leaves this world, they leave a void, an emptiness that is prone to be filled by darker forces. Wherever there is a vacuum, negativity can creep in. And so the house of mourning, where the loss is felt the most, is a magnet for evil spirits.

These demons cannot be seen by the naked eye. But when looking in a mirror, you may catch a glimpse of their reflection in the background. And so we cover the mirrors in

a house of mourning, because we don't want to be alarmed by seeing those demonic visitors.

As strange as it sounds, we should not be too quick to dismiss the above idea as mythical nonsense. Perhaps it can be understood in terms that are very practical and very real. The evil spirits could be interpreted on a psychological level as inner demons that particularly plague one who suffered a loss.

The ghosts that visit a mourner are regret, guilt and anger. When a grieving person takes a hard look at themselves in the mirror, they may feel that they didn't do enough for the departed, or they didn't say all they wanted to say, or they left some loose ends unsettled. Even if this is not really the case, even if they were an exemplary son or daughter, parent or spouse or sibling, human nature plays a game with our mind, making us agonize over what could have been. These thoughts, though usually unwarranted, are the evil spirits in the background that haunt us and give us no rest.

So we cover the mirrors. We don't want to look at those dark figures lurking behind the man in the mirror. A time of such raw emotion, when the loss is fresh and the heart is volatile, is not the time for harsh self-judgment. If indeed there are real unresolved issues, there will be time to deal with them later. But in the week immediately following the loss, we focus on the loss itself, and don't allow those malevolent forces to take over.

The grieving process takes us on a bumpy journey of many mixed emotions. Each one needs to have its time. In the early stages of that bumpy ride, we are not in a position to judge ourselves fairly. Usually it's a good thing to take a long hard look at yourself in the mirror. But without the ghosts of regret in the background.

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Hippy In the Mikvah

By Dr. Chana Silberstein
July 22, 2020

Hasidism Beyond Modernity: Essays in Habad Thought and History

Naftali Loewenthal

London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2020

A Dynamic Tension

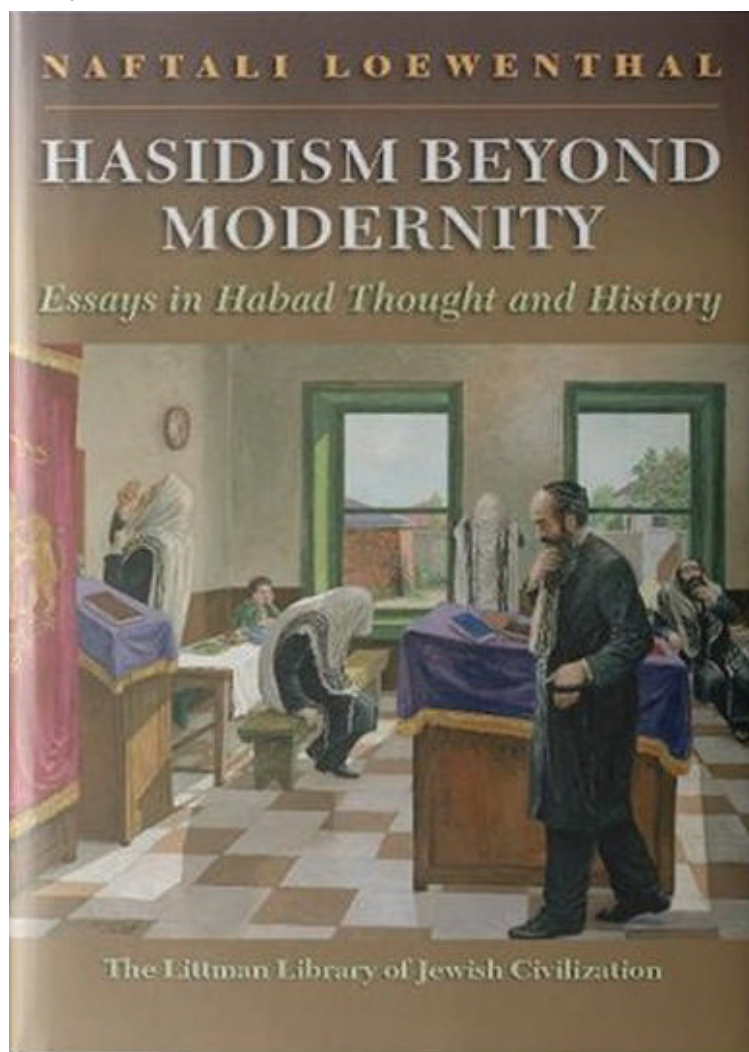
If everyone has a story, an academic is someone who can spend a lifetime refining and retelling the same story, honing its details, sharpening its message. In this groundbreaking book, Professor Naftali Loewenthal, a lecturer in Jewish studies at University College London, asks us to consider Chabad through the lens of postmodernism, thereby gaining a fresh perspective on its development as a movement.

At this point, it would be fair to ask what Loewenthal means by postmodernism. If classical thinking consists of constructing meaningful, distinct categories as a means of describing life and modern thinking consists of deconstructing those categories as false and inadequate, postmodern thinking rejects the either-or forced choice of traditional vs. modern, replacing it with an “and-also” frame. Loewenthal describes this as a feminine mode of thinking, an ability to synthesize and reconcile opposites rather than being forced to choose between them.

In the book’s introduction, Loewenthal describes his own journey with postmodernism. His maternal grandparents were of Polish Chasidic background, while his father’s family was from Frankfurt; as he puts it—the tug between the Yiddish and German Jewish cultures. Over time, while exploring the varied and rich perspectives of Jewish thinking, he came to embrace traditional Jewish observance. But that presented a conflict for him: as an academic, he was free to think critically about Jewish studies, while as an observant and believing Jew, he might feel constrained as to what he could write in good conscience. He considered leaving the field entirely. In a private audience with the Rebbe, he presented his quandary: should he continue working on a degree in Jewish studies or pursue another career pathway?

“The Rebbe encouraged me to continue with the doctorate. I blurted out, ‘But what about the heresy?’ The Rebbe answered: ‘You should write all the footnotes you need to write. And then—with a broad smile—’you should do teshuvah’” (p. 15).

Here, the Rebbe affirmed the value of his honest academic exploration—a critical analysis with no foregone conclusions—while also asserting that it was possible for him to remain faithful to his principles and loyal to his beliefs and his community. Similarly, Loewenthal’s wife, Kate, was encouraged to continue with her academic career as a lecturer in psychology while raising a Chasidic family.



Loewenthal’s ability to navigate contradiction perhaps makes him uniquely suited to see how seemingly conflicting values within Jewish and Chasidic life can co-exist in dynamic tension and even flourish as a result.

Hippy in the Mikvah

Loewenthal begins building the case for considering Chabad as a postmodern, rather than a traditional, community by looking at Chabad’s embrace of the non-observant. On the one hand, as in all Chasidic groups, there is a great emphasis on traditional adherence to Jewish practice. At the same time, in stark contrast to other communities, Chabad Chasidim did not try to maintain their authenticity by cutting themselves off from those who do not think of themselves as “orthodox.” On the contrary, Chabad leaders emphasize that every Jew is holy and that even one mitzvah, on the part of any Jew, could tip the balance of the world toward redemption.

Loewenthal highlights the

tension this attitude creates by sharing an anecdote about a Chabadnik who befriended a young Jewish spiritual seeker, inviting him to immerse in the local mikvah. A Vizhnitz Chasid, who was a member of the Stamford Hill community, expressed discomfort at the thought that his son might encounter someone with a ponytail and tattoos in the mikvah, particularly since this young man might frame the experience in terms of similar practices he had experimented with in India. Was not a mikvah meant to be a sequestered bastion for Jews seeking a higher measure of holiness and spirituality? Yet, to the Chabadnik, the hippy-in-the-mikvah was the ultimate expression of Judaism’s accessibility—every Jew could immerse themselves in the experience of spiritual purification. Over time, this thinking

Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, and his successor, the Rebbe, promoted women’s overt participation in Torah study and their activism within the Jewish community. Strikingly, this included the study of Chassidic texts—and even the Talmud, both long considered exclusively male bastions. In other words, Chabad women were educated to be, not only supportive wives and devoted mothers who would uphold the traditional home, but full participants, actively engaging and encouraging their family in every aspect of Chasidic life, bolstered by their personal relationship with the Rebbe and their own knowledge of Torah.

Indeed, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak stated in the name of his grandfather (who lived 1833-1882), that in the study of authentic Chabad Chasidism, “there is no difference between a son and a daughter.” Loewenthal provides a fascinating account of a young women’s study group founded in 1937, in Riga, called “Ahot Hatemimim.” In many ways, its curriculum paralleled that of Tomchei Temimim, the Chabad yeshiva, founded by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak’s father. The rigor of the demands upon the young women—both in terms of intellectual sophistication as well as communal leadership and responsibility—were astounding for its time:

“The members of the Riga Ahot Hatemimim group were expected not only to study but to spread Hasidic ideals and other observance of practical commandments. They were given the task of organizing the translation of discourses into Yiddish and their dissemination, as well as of campaigning for the observance of the laws of family purity. Thus spiritual study was combined with practical activism” (p. 290). The Rebbe, on at least one occasion, listened to the students recite a discourse by heart and instructed a young member of the group on a method of spiritual meditation (p. 291).

Unfortunately, most of these students died in the war, and the ambitious Ahot Hatemimim study regimen never took root in the same way in America. Still, we see that women’s familiarity with Chassidic texts continued to grow over time, and their role in shlichut—Chabad’s outreach work—evolved, so that they were not simply serving in a role that supported the work of their husbands, but, with the encouragement of the Rebbe, came to view themselves as activists in their own right.

The Postmodern Faces the Future

Perhaps most boldly, Loewenthal addresses the issue of Chabad messianism head-on: its evolution, the ensuing confusion, and a suggested resolution. The last years of the Rebbe’s life were marked with an ever more overt effort to prepare the world for the ultimate redemption. Many came to believe that the Rebbe would

usher in this era, leading them through this experience as he had led their spiritual growth for more than forty years. There was little consideration of how Chabad might continue without the physical presence of the Rebbe. The thought was simply unthinkable.

Yet the unthinkable happened, creating a conflict that touched the essence of Chasidism itself: the relationship between Rebbe and Chasid. The relationship might continue spiritually, but on a physical, practical level, Chabad Chasidim were forced to become their own leaders. Loewenthal talks movingly and honestly about how Chabad has managed to continue, even grow, since the Rebbe’s passing, despite the fact that no successor has been appointed, noting that the majority of the emissaries today embarked on their mission after the Rebbe’s passing. He ends his discussion with this anecdote:

“In 1994, a few weeks after the passing of Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the chairman of Agudas Chassidei Chabad, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov, visited London. While there he gave an inspiring talk about the future of Chabad and its view of the Jewish people, the world, and the messiah to a school assembly in the Lubavitch Senior Girls School. After the talk, two 15-year-old girls were talking. One said; ‘I understand: Moshe Rabenu [Moses our Teacher] died, and the Jews still went into the Land of Israel.’ The other responded, ‘Yes, but they had Yehoshua [Joshua]. We need a Yehoshua.’ The first girl answered: ‘Don’t you understand? We are Yehoshua’” (p. 382).

Make no mistake, this book is not an easy read. As noted in the beginning, this is the synthesis of a lifelong academic program of research with “all the footnotes.” Loewenthal has dug deep into the heart of Chabad’s philosophy (and some discussions were too complex to be referenced in this review). Yet, his work is destined to be more than another dusty tome read only by a select cohort of colleagues in his field. Throughout the book, he maintains his humanity, a personal voice that compromises neither his objectivity nor his convictions. The observations of the scholar are considered side-by-side with the insights of school girls. There is no more moving testament to the challenge and the resilience of a postmodern movement; the prior categories exploded, the either/or thinking rejected, while the nucleus—present since the inception—is retained.



The Man in Man

Continued from page 2

forefathers, upon their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, proclaimed “Zeh Keili,” “This is my G-d...”, our sages interpret this to imply that it was “like one who points with his finger and says ‘This!’”

In contrast, the word *ko*, which means “thus” or “like this,” implies a more ambiguous reference. The Midrash points out that since, as a rule, a prophet receives his communication from the Almighty by way of allusion and metaphor, “all prophets prophesied with *ko*,” beginning their prophecies with the proclamation, “*Ko amar Hashem*,” “Thus said G-d...” (Only Moses, to whom G-d spoke “mouth to mouth, manifestly, and not in riddles,” was able to say “Zeh hadavar asher tzivah Hashem,” “This is the thing which G-d has commanded.”)

“*Ko*” is also the date of the beginning of creation. In the Holy Tongue, the letters of the alef-bet also serve as numbers; as a result, every word has a numerical value, and many numbers also form a word. The number 25 (*kaf-hei*) spells the word *ko*.

The world created on the 25th of Elul is a manifestation of G-dliness. As the psalmist proclaims, “When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have ordained...” G-d chose to express Himself in His creation, much as the mind and character of an artist can be discerned in his work. But if the pre-Adam world bespeaks its Creator, it does so via a screen of evocation and insinuation. It is a “*ko*” expression of the divine, an intimation which obscures even as it reveals.

Only in the consciousness and achievements of man can there be a *zeh* revelation of G-dliness. Only in a mind enabled to look beyond the veil of nature and self, only in a will not incorrigibly shackled to instinct and ego, can the divine reality unequivocally reside. Only in our choices and actions can G-d be made real in our world.

With the creation of man on the first of Tishrei, the world became more than a *ko* entity, more than an allusion to its Creator. By choosing to subordinate himself to the Almighty, by devoting his mind to seek

His truth, his heart to love and fear Him, and his life to implement His will, man made his soul and world a “dwelling for G-d.”

So Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of man and the day of his annual affirmation of his role, is the day of which we say, *zeh*, “this,” is the day that marks “the beginning of Your works.”

Life as a Mineral

Man, say our sages, is a universe in miniature. So just as creation as a whole is comprised of *ko* and *zeh* factors—of the pre-human world created on Elul 25 and the human element introduced on Tishrei 1—so it is within the human being. And just as all elements of the macro-universe fulfill their purpose in creation via the deeds of man, so do all strata of the human “universe” attain fulfillment and realization through its distinctly human element, through the man in man.

Our sages categorize the entirety of creation as consisting of four “worlds” or “kingdoms”: the “inanimate” or mineral kingdom; the vegetable kingdom; the animal kingdom; and “the speaker” kingdom—the human being.

Man, too, incorporates these four “kingdoms” within himself. There are occasions and pursuits in our life in which we resemble the inert mineral. We might be asleep, on vacation, at play, or engaged in any of the other forms of repose and recreation to which we devote a significant portion of our time. Obviously, we are physically alive at these times; we might even be greatly exerting ourselves and employing our keenest faculties. But spiritually, we are an inanimate stone. “*Life*,” in its ultimate sense, is the endeavor to transcend one’s present state—to grow and achieve beyond what one is—while the function of our “mineral” pursuits is to sustain rather than produce, to conserve rather than create.

There are also times when a we are in our “vegetable” mode—when our focus is on self-growth and self-development. With these activities, we exhibit signs of spiritual life, as opposed to the inertia of our “mineral” hours. Nevertheless, because they are confined to the betterment of self, these represent a limited, “botanical” vitality: we are growing upwards, blossoming and bearing fruit; but we remain rooted to the “spot” where nature has planted us.

A more dynamic vitality is exhibited by the “animal” in us—the instincts, passions and sensitivities by which we relate to others. With our faculties for love, awe and other emotions, we roam the terrain beyond the narrow spectrum of self, transcending the merely vertical growth of our vegetable element.

But we are more than the sum of our mineral, vegetable and animal lives; more than repose, growth and feeling. The man in man, our quintessentially human qualities, are our intellect and our spirituality.

With our unique capacity for independent thought and

discriminating intelligence, we transcend the self-defined world of instinct and feeling to view ourselves from the outside, and change ourselves accordingly. Thus the intellectual self is truly “alive”—constantly reassessing and redefining its perceptions and sensitivities.

Even more transcendent than the intellect is our spiritual self, the “spark of G-dliness” within us that makes us the apex of G-d’s creation. The intellect is “free” and “objective,” but only in relation to the subjective emotions; ultimately the intellect is defined and confined by the nature and laws of reason. The divine in ourselves, however, knows no bounds, surmounting all constraints and limitations that might inhibit our relationship with our Creator.

It is when we engage our intellectual and spiritual faculties that we are truly our human self. It is in these moments—when we employ our mind to literally recreate ourselves through self-critique and the refinement of our character and behavior, and when we transcend all inhibitions of ego, feeling and even intellect to serve G-d without restraint or equivocation—that we rise to our role as G-d’s partner in creation, as the only one of His creations who possesses the freedom to originate and create.

The Primacy of Man

Therein lies the double lesson of Rosh Hashanah, the day that emphasizes the centrality of man in creation.

On the macrocosmic level, Rosh Hashanah teaches us that “Every man is obligated to say: ‘The entire world was created to serve me, and I was created to serve my Creator.’” That our “privilege” to exploit nature’s resources to serve our own needs is also a duty and a responsibility, since it is through their contribution to our lives that all elements of creation can rise from the limitations of their “robotic” existence to share in the spiritually and transcendence of a human deed. When we prove equal to this task, we not only rise above our created state but also raise the entire universe with us; when we fail to do so, G-d forbid, we not only debase our own humanity but also drag down with us everything that is partner to our existence.

The same applies to the microcosmic universe—the four-tiered life of man. Our “mineral,” “vegetable” and “animal” endeavors are important—indeed, indispensable—components of our lives; but we must remember that also in this inner world, everything was created “for my sake”—to serve the human in me.

When the goal of our recreational, growth-oriented and experiential activities is to enable our intellectual and spiritual lives, they, too, become partners to our transcendental endeavor to remake ourselves, and the world we inhabit, in the divine image imprinted within us; they, too, become human endeavors, participants in the realization of the divine potential invested in man.

The Cholent

Continued from page 2

he felt that he simply could not hold out a moment longer, he thought of his cholent, envisioning what was happening to that piece of meat at that very moment: the steady crisping on the outside, the softening on the inside, the blending of flavors with the potatoes, beans, kishke and spices in the pot. Every minute longer, he kept telling himself, is another minute on the fire for my cholent.

An hour later, the cantor launched into another exceptionally moving piece. As his tremulous voice painted the awesome scene of divine judgment unfolding in the heavens, the entire shul broke down weeping once again. At this point, the dam burst in this simple Jew’s heart, for he well understood what was on his fellow worshippers’ minds. “Enough is enough!” he sobbed. “Never mind the cholent! It’s been cooking long enough! I’m hungry! I want to go home . . . !”

Jewish history is a cholent.

The Talmud states that “the people of Israel were exiled amongst the nations only so that converts may be added to them.” On the most basic level, this is a reference to those non-Jews who, in the centuries of our dispersion, have come in contact with the Jewish people and decided to convert to Judaism. But chasidic teaching explains that the Talmud is also referring to the many other “souls” which we have transformed and elevated in the course of our exile—the “sparks of holiness” contained within the physical creation.

The great Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria (the “Ari”) taught that every created entity has a spark of G-dliness within it, a pinpoint of divinity that constitutes its soul—i.e., its spiritual function and design. And when we utilize something to serve the Creator, we penetrate its shell of mundanity, revealing and realizing its divine essence.

It is to this end that we have been scattered across the six continents—so that we may come in contact with the sparks of holiness which await redemption in every corner of the globe. So that a printing

press in Boston should print a work of Torah learning on paper manufactured by a Pennsylvania mill from a tree which grew in Oregon. So that a forest clearing in Poland should serve as the site for a traveling Jew’s prayers, and that a scientific theory developed in a British university should aid a Jew in his appreciation of the divine wisdom inherent in the natural world.

And the holier the spark, the deeper it lies buried. The Kabbalistic masters employ the analogy of a collapsed wall—the highest stones are the ones which fall the farthest. By the same token, when G-d invested His will in His creation, He caused its loftiest elements to descend to the most distant and spiritually desolate corners of the earth. Hence our *Galut*—our exile from the Holy Land, our subjugation to alien governments and cultures, the cessation of G-d’s open and direct involvement in our lives, and our seeming abandonment to chance and fate. All this is a “descent for the sake of ascent,” a mission to the most forsaken points of earth—spiritually as well as geographically—to extract the exceptionally lofty sparks they contain.

Thus, the more painful the *galut*, the more challenging its trials, the lowlier the elements it confronts us with—the greater its rewards. Every additional minute of *galut* represents more sparks of holiness redeemed, and its every further descent brings a deeper dimension of the divine purpose to fruition.

But there comes a point at which every Jew must cry out from the very depths of his being: “Enough already! The cholent has been cooking long enough! We want to come home!”



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Wine, Torah, and Song

By Tzipora Reitman

The sign on his dressing room door at the Los Angeles Opera read, “David Babinet, Principal Artist.” Babinet’s personal dresser brought him his costume and dressed him from head to toe.

An imposing presence at six feet, four inches tall, with deep-set eyes beneath bushy eyebrows, Babinet stepped onto the stage in the role of Prince Yusupov in Nicholas and Alexandra and killed off the villain, Rasputin, played by the legendary tenor Placi-

College Conservatory of Music (CCM) at the University of Cincinnati, where he earned a master’s degree in vocal performance in 2000.

For the next five years, the up-and-coming baritone performed at noteworthy venues throughout the United States and Europe. He won numerous competitions, including those run by the Metropolitan Opera, Palm Springs Opera, Nunzio Crisci Opera, and the Dante Alighieri Society.

It was a heady life but also one of extreme discipline,

he would say he wasn’t Jewish. But, his Jewish first name tripped him up. He was detained and strip-searched. Although he was eventually released, he missed his flight.

The experience of being in Israel and having to define his Jewish identity was a revelation. During a conversation with a fellow Jewish singer, he mused, “If I married a non-Jew, would that make me non-Jewish?”

“His response still echoes with me,” said Babinet. “He said, ‘Jewishness is dwindling. You’re Jewish, you’re responsible.’ Those words stabbed me. They fueled my journey to find a Jewish woman to carry on the tradition.”

Back in California, after a synagogue hopping spree, Babinet opened the Yellow Pages and saw an unfamiliar name. He called Chabad of Glendale and asked the rabbi, “What are you? Reform? Conservative?”

“We’re FRIENDLY! Come for cholent!” bellowed the voice on the other end of the line. It was the right answer at the right time. “Rabbi Simcha Backman was irresistible,” said Babinet.

“New York, New York”

Babinet bonded with Rabbi Backman and his family and spent every Shabbat at one Chabad House or another. Still performing opera, but committed to keeping Shabbat, he often walked from the Chabad House to rehearsals or gigs, sometimes as far as seven miles.

In 2005, when Babinet had occasion to go to New York for auditions, Rabbi Backman encouraged him to spend Purim in Crown Heights.

“I wasn’t looking for something easy,” said Babinet. “I wanted something to change me for the better.” This led him to Yeshiva Tiferes Menachem in Seagate, where he spent the next three years immersed in Torah study. “The militaristic discipline I followed as an opera singer translated well into life as an observant Jew,” he said.

He pressed the pause button on opera.

Babinet emerged from the yeshiva ready to start a Jewish family. He married Yarkov CRAFTON and they settled in Crown Heights where they now live with their children,



Rivka Alta and Menachem Mendel.

He “Heard it Through the Grapevine”

Now a family man, Babinet decided to turn his expertise in wine into a livelihood. As the child of a Frenchman, his appreciation for wine began early. He had spent years at the family estate in Normandy and Tuscany developing his knowledge of fine wine and he made his own wine and beer during his days in Los Angeles.

Learning that making one’s own wine for Pesach was meritorious prompted Babinet to become a winemaker and sommelier, selling his product and conducting wine tastings. Eventually, he went to work for Royal Wine, where he and his staff of sommeliers serve wine and educate consumers at special events and liquor stores.

He also tends bar and sells homemade cocktails. On a recent afternoon, during the coronavirus pandemic, Babinet’s kitchen was bubbling over with enticing concoctions. It was Cocktail Tutorial time on WhatsApp! Strawberries and limes simmered in a pot while he stirred up a brew of honey and lemon.

Not “The Same Old Song”

Babinet’s life was good, but ten years without serious singing had passed, and he wanted to reconnect with music. He contacted his voice teacher and took on voice

students of his own. He got involved in Chazanut and served as a cantor for High Holiday services around the country.

Babinet also began to share his journey, music, and wine with Chabad House audiences. His crowd-pleasing presentations are billed, “An Evening of Opera, Broadway, Great Jewish Classics...and Wine.”

“I tell the audience that I returned in two ways—to Judaism, and also to music,” he said. “I reclaimed who I am, what my passion is, and how I can best contribute to the world. And that involves singing the music I love to sing.” He looks forward to performing again in larger venues.

His recent presentation for a California Chabad House included “El Toreador,” “O Sole Mio,” “La Vie en Rose,” “Mamale,” “Rumania, Rumania,” and selections from Fiddler on the Roof, interspersed with anecdotes about his journey.

Fittingly, Babinet ended his performance with “My Way,” the iconic song written for Frank Sinatra. As the lyrics say:

“Yes, there were times, I’m sure you knew

When I bit off more than I could chew

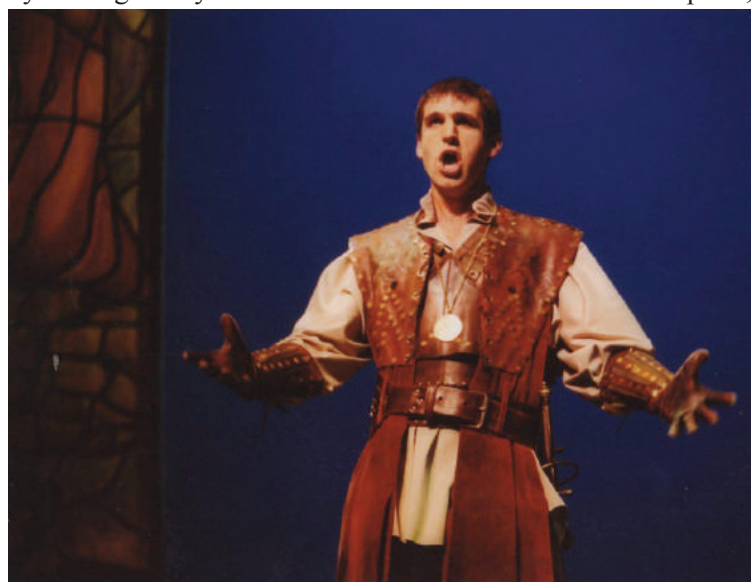
But through it all, when there was doubt

I ate it up and spit it out

I faced it all and I stood tall

And did it my way.”

BRAVO!



David Sings the Role of Valentin at Pacific Repertory Opera

do Domingo.

Performing alongside Domingo and other stars was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream for Babinet, who had spent years in intensive training before taking his place in the prestigious and competitive world of opera.

He began by majoring in music at the University of Colorado, which meant four years of total immersion, leaving no time for socializing or other pursuits. “I was determined to get to the major leagues,” he said. “My entire life was dedicated to this goal.”

Next, Babinet entered one of the country’s most prestigious opera programs, the

grueling hours, and constant separation from friends and family. “Opera was my entire world, my religion, my source of spirituality. It felt like a higher purpose,” said Babinet.

“If You’re Jewish, Why Don’t You Know Hebrew?”

David grew up in Boulder, Colorado, with a Jewish mother and a French father who ran a holistic health clinic. The prevailing culture, including at home, was “New Age spirituality.” Aside from the occasional Seder or Chanukah menorah, there was little Judaism in the Babinet home. (David only later discovered that his grandmother had sung in the Yiddish theater in Newark, New Jersey.)

It was an overzealous Israeli border police officer who first made Babinet think seriously about what it means to be Jewish.

In 2002, a trip to Israel to perform Falstaff in Tel Aviv with the International Vocal Arts Institute became a turning point for Babinet. At 26, it was his first exposure to a Jewish environment, and he was intrigued.

During the trip, Babinet crossed the border into Egypt to scuba dive in the Red Sea. When he told the border police that he was Jewish they gave him a hard time. Why didn’t he know any Hebrew, they asked him. So, Babinet figured that on the way back,



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