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Chabad Gala Honours Premier Doug Ford

The unseasonal snow and cold snap did not hinder a crowd of some 600 guests to gathered at the impressive Venu Event Space in support of Chabad and pay tribute to the “Man of the Year,” Premier Doug Ford. Indeed, the august assembly was the results of the able leadership of Kenny Bodenstein, Freddie Waks, and Robert Bielak, dear friends of the Premier and longtime supporters of Chabad Lubavitch.

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R to L: Rabbi Z. Aron Grossbaum, Premier Doug Ford, David Bodenstein, Aliza Bodenstein, Karla Ford

History Repeats Itself

By Rabbi Z. Ahron Grossbaum

The observance of Jewish holidays has us reviewing biblical narratives which record divine intervention. This would include salvation from Egyptian slavery and Divine Revelation at Sinai. Year after year we study, explore and delve deeper into the text in order to find relevance in our daily life. The contrasting exception is the story of Purim. Historically, the narrative transpired after the destruction of the first Holy Temple, and Jews were driven out of the Promised Land. The heart wrenching decree of Haman was enacted and ratified by the ruling monarch in a conventional society. The miraculous salvation almost seems to play out by the right person being in the right place at the right time. Hence, there is no mention of G-d in the Megillah, and the Hallel is not recited, as the Talmud notes, “because the day after celebrating our deliverance we were still under the thumb of the Persian King.”

On the flip side, even today, we share a common “state of affairs,” and the Megillah talks to us, up close. Haman, when presenting his brief and singles out the Jewish people, he inadvertently puts the emphasis on the unique character traits that actually illustrates the virtue of the Jews. He proclaims, ‘Yeshno Am Echad, there is a nation that subscribes to Echad, the oneness of G-d. Indeed, how ironic, while his intention was to malign the Chosen People he actually underscored the indestructible character trait within every single Jew. While the strain and struggle of “wandering amongst the nations of the world” still, the very essence of the Jew remains intact. Furthermore, when pinned against the wall, we harness an inner strength, and our allegiance to the principles of faith find expression against all odds.

This year, in close proximity to Purim, a media pundit with a viewing audience of a few million dusted off a page from Haman’s playbook in an attempt to slander, and malign the world-wide outreach work of Chabad Lubavitch. His reckless conspiracy accusation reverberated throughout the world. Still, just like in the days of yore, the evil plot of Haman was turned on its head, so to, today, the baseless diatribe brought about a worldwide acknowledgement and appreciation for the work of Chabad Lubavitch.

Circling back to the biblical narrative of Pesach, when Pharaoh issued his evil decree, “Let us wise up to them (Jews),” the response from Above was proportionate, “Just as they suffered, “So they (Jews) will grow and multiply.” May all our efforts to promote traditional values be crowned with the ultimate blessing, the coming of Mashiach, with no further delay.

Best wishes for a Kosher and joyous Pesach.

Passover or Pass-over

During the Seder we tell the story of Passover: how G-d “passed over” the Jewish homes and spared the first-born Israelites from the fate that was in store for their Egyptian counterparts. While all the Egyptian first born were stricken at midnight of the fifteenth day of the month of Nissan in the year 2448, not one Jewish first-born was harmed.

This tenth and final plague got Pharaoh to finally agree to let the Jews go. This is why the festival is called Pesach, or Passover, because G-d “passed-over” the homes of the Jews.

One might ask: Are we to imagine that G-d physically traveled from house to house? We can just imagine the juvenile mind’s image of G-d reaching a Jewish home and then exclaiming, “Oops, wrong house!”

Obviously, G-d who is Omnipresent did not have to travel to reach the Egyptian first born and He did not have to jump over any home to spare its residents. Instantaneously, at the most precise moment, all those who were destined to die, died, and all those destined to live, lived.

There was no physical passing over. Why then, does the Torah describe it as such? And why do we highlight the “Passing-Over” phenomenon, by referring to the Holiday as “Passover”.

According to our sages (Onkelos and Rashi), the word Passover has another meaning too: ‘And He had compassion’. G-d had compassion and did not kill the Jews in Egypt.

The question can be raised: Why was it necessary for G-d to have compassion not to kill the Jews? Why did they deserve to be punished and needed G-d’s compassion to be spared?

Our Sages explain that compassion is an emotion that enables us to override our normal reactions to a situation. Compassion derives from an inner precinct of the



soul; it is an expression of a transcendent force that can override even one’s very correct sense of indignation.

When the Jewish people were ready to leave Egypt, they had so degenerated into the depths of Egyptian depravity, that G-d’s own attribute of justice - His very own law-and-order system demanded that the Jews be treated as harshly as their Egyptian counterparts.

And then a remarkable thing happened. G-d passed

over, not the homes of the Israelites, but, rather the very Divine institution of law-and-order, or as the Kabbalist’s put it, his own attribute of Gevurah - judgment. In spite of the law-and-order demand that the Israelites and the Egyptians be treated equally, G-d’s sense of compassion, i.e., a more sublime, transcendent G-dly force, suppressed and overrode the existing system. And the Jews were spared.

Every Passover, we too

can “pass over” - we too are given the spiritual potential to override our own established norms and modes of behavior. We might define ourselves by our natural tendencies. We act in a certain way because this is the way we are and this is the way we were created. The festival of Passover tells us, that we have the ability to transcend our own G-d-given parameters. Even human nature, created by G-d, can be altered, by utilizing the G-d-given

capacity to “pass-over”.

Now is the time for us to search within and find the innermost and most profound core of our soul; reveal it, allow it to override the limits of our outer personality. For example, if we are not so charitable, we have the potential to override that natural inhibition. If we are lethargic or lazy, we can find the fountain of energy deep down, which, when elicited, will pass-over our ingrained tendencies. If we struggle with temptation, we should realize that we have the power to “pass-over” our own weaknesses.

When we observe Passover this year, we should stop and think about the composition of the name “Pass-over”. And by “passing-over” our own parameters, we can actually set into motion a cosmic “passing-over” by G-d of His system of exile, thereby ushering in the Final Redemption thru Mashiach. May we see the realization of all this Speedily in our days.



Why Does Moshiach Have To Be a King? Can't he just be a good teacher?

By Tzvi Freeman

Dear Rabbi,

Every time you people talk about the messianic era, and “the Moshiach” (which I assume equates with “messiah”), you insist on talking about him as a king. Well, we started guillotining kings over two hundred years ago, and they haven’t really been in fashion since. We have found liberal democracies much more adept at protecting the rights of the individuals, and working for the maximum benefit of the maximum number of

people. Kings were notoriously lousy at all that.

So how about we just call him (or her) an “enlightened spiritual leader”? The “king” title seems such an anachronism. —Looking forward to your response

Dear Looking Forward,

You raise an excellent point, but I’m not sure whether you really understand how sharp a point it really is.

The prophet Isaiah describes an individual upon whom “the spirit of G-d rests, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and heroism, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.”

What will this individual accomplish? Something quite different than what we are used to kings accomplishing. The prophet continues:

A wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid; and a calf and a lion cub and a fatling shall lie together, and a small child shall lead them. A cow and a bear shall graze, their children shall lie down together; and a lion, like cattle, shall eat straw.

An infant shall play over the hole of a viper snake, and over the eyeball of an adder, a

weaned child shall stretch forth his hand. They shall neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mount, for the earth shall be full of the knowing of G-d as water covers the seabed.

Basically, what that means is that the messianic times are not simply times of love, peace and hanging out together. They are times when “the earth shall be full of the knowing of G-d,”

so inundated with that knowing, that higher awareness, that state of enlightenment, that even the wild beasts of the field will behave.

If so, in such a state, who needs a king? Who needs any government at all? Let the people, so fully enlightened and aware of their Creator and their responsibility to His cre-

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ON OUR COVER

Divine Passage

Ben Ari Art Gallery



In this painting the artist depicts the miraculous event of the “Splitting of the Sea”. On the sixth day their way out of Egypt, the Jewish people saw the Egyptian army closing in on them from behind. On their two sides were cliffs, in front of them the Sea of Reeds. With nowhere to escape to they prayed to G-d for salvation. G-d instructed them to “travel forward”. Nachshon ben Aminadav was the first to enter the water and as he did G-d instructed Moses to lift up his staff over the sea and split it in two. Water to the right and water to the left and dry land down the middle for them to travel comfortably. When they were on the opposite side the Egyptians also entered the path to follow, but the water came rushing back to its normal flow, drowning them all.

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Purim at Chabad Round Up

Lubavitch Day Camp is an all-encompassing initiative which includes events, and experiences throughout the year. During Chanukah many out of town counselors returned

acquaintances. The tasteful presentation included a list of all participants and an acrylic magazine organizer with the Friendship Circle logo. Indeed, in a large and growing commu-

lah reading they were abruptly stopped and thoroughly examined by a uniformed guard with a beeping wand setting off cell phones, which he attempted to confiscate. The unexpected dark-skinned Indian inspector with a closely netted beard, turned out to be Rabbi Halperin, who once again surprised everyone with his creativity.

Going forward, the Megillah was read numerous times at the Chabad Lubavitch Community Centre, in various homes for the aged, and for shut-ins.

So too, it has become a tradition to host a down town Megillah reading at Toronto City Hall, providing an opportunity for anyone in the vicinity to hear the megillah. Notwithstanding the flurry of activity and concern that permeated the City Hall atmosphere that morning, because of the shooting at Temple Emmanuel, City Hall staff still managed to gather for the megillah reading.

The annual Purim feast at Chabad Lubavitch had its own moment of surprise, when Vaughan mayor Steve Del Duca appeared and graciously presented a generous monetary

nity it would be quite challenging to bring Mishloach Manot to all the individuals in your orbit. Still, the actual mitzvah, is a one to one food parcel delivered on the very day of Purim.

As usual, the first Megillah reading at Chabad Lubavitch is shrouded in mystery as everyone wondered what will be the outrageous theme, costume, and presentation of Rabbi Dan-



L to R: Vaughan Mayor Del Duca, Rabbi Grossbaum, Mrs Esther Grossbaum, and Vaughan City Councillor Gila Martow at Chabad Purim Festival.

to spend the week visiting homes and lighting the Menorah with the family of campers. Just last week we received a WhatsApp, advising us of a fellow approximately aged 50, who when asked by his host, the Shaliach in Munich, Germany, if he knows any Jewish songs started to sing, "HaShem is Here." Some 40 years later, he still remembered his days at LDC Toronto!

For Purim, Mrs. Esti Steinmetz, director of LDC, embarked on a heartwarming initiative, bringing joy to over 700 registered campers. A laden package of Mishloach Manot was delivered to their door in close proximity to Purim, thus giving them a heads up on the upcoming holiday. An attractive holiday guide explaining all four Purim mitzvot was also included, ensuring campers could embrace each mitzvah in a meaningful and practical way.

The goodies were beautifully presented in a reusable lunch bag, designed with two compartments—perfect for future school lunches. Inside, campers discovered items that would make Purim both meaningful and enjoyable. Each bag included a gragger to blot out the name of Haman, a bottle of grape juice for their Purim meal, and carefully selected treats, all adorned with LDC branding. To fulfill the mitzvah of giving charity, each camper also received coins to give to the needy.

The project was goal oriented; hence the campers were invited to submit a form confirming their observance of all four mitzvot. By doing so, they were entered into a raffle for an electronic children's go-kart. The drawing was held, and one thrilled camper was awarded their very own go-kart. This initiative not only enhanced the Purim holiday but also sparked anticipation and excitement for the incredible summer ahead at LDC.

Once again, the Friendship Circle accommodated the community with a Mishloach Manot exchange. Some 260 families welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the Friendship Circle and acknowledge numerous friends and

iel Halperin. Although, this tradition has been going on for many years, he doesn't fail to outdo himself year after year. This year, as people were rushing into the building for Megil-

lah reading they were abruptly stopped and thoroughly examined by a uniformed guard with a beeping wand setting off cell phones, which he attempted to confiscate. The unexpected dark-skinned Indian inspector with a closely netted beard, turned out to be Rabbi Halperin, who once again surprised everyone with his creativity.



Megillah reading at Toronto City Hall

Chabad Model Matzah Bakery Gets a Facelift

When Pesach comes around, thousands of school children become bakers. More importantly they become familiar with the intricate regulations pertaining to baking matzah. They come to realize and appreciate the close relationship between Chometz and Matzah. At the Latner Family Lubavitch Centre in Thornhill a warehouse style room takes on the appearance of a bakery with a large oven. During the course of two weeks prior to Pesach children from day schools, Talmud Torahs, and primary schools visited the makeshift bakery. They don a bakers cap and help prepare the dough (using only flour and water) and then proceed to roll and bake a matzah, all within the eighteen-minute time allotment. Should the process

take longer the product would be rendered Chometz. The hands-on (pun intended) ex-



perience heightens an awareness and adds immeasurably to the material taught in the classroom.

This experience was in-

Chabad Gala Honours Premier Doug Ford

After a sumptuous cocktail hour of meet and greet, the formal dinner began with a prayer for our brethren in Israel led by Rabbi Moshe Spalter. Evening chairman, Freddie Waks thanked the Premier for his steadfast support of Israel and the Jewish community throughout the Province. Shortly after, Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum presented the Premier a magnificent work of art by Toronto artist Yehuda Lang. The collage fused Queen's Park stately legislative building with a large Menorah in the foreground and the "Mode Ani" passage at the bottom, a one line prayer recited every morning upon arising. He related that 38 years ago, when Chabad representatives met with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney the Rebbe suggested presenting the Prime Minister with a prayer book which contains many universal prayers that are apropos for all of Mankind, beginning with the very first passage recited every morning upon arising, "I give thanks to the King of the universe for restoring and refreshing my soul."

In making the presentation, David and Katie Bodenstein, both personal friends of the Ford family offered congratulatory remarks and also presented Mrs. Karla Ford with the "Unsung Hero" award.

In acknowledgement of the honour bestowed on him, Premier Ford made crystal clear his solidarity and empathy with the Jewish community. He acknowledged the

difficult time Jews endured during the last two years. The Premier thundered, "I will not tolerate any form of anti-Semitism. You come to Canada you respect the law. And if you don't like the law, there's the door, see you later."

A short video had the assembly visually flying through the GTA and up to cottage country as a portrayal of some 36 locations where Chabad has a presence with the newest satellite centre recently established in Georgian Bay.

Vaughan Mayor Steven Del Duca, feted the Premier and then continued about his warm and cordial relationship with the ever growing Jewish community of Thornhill. He noted that having committed at the Sukkot celebration that he will return for Simchat Torah, he kept his word. "And after visiting six community Synagogues, he made his way to Chabad Gate."

The room was silent when the guest speaker, Rabbi YY Jacobson of New York, ascended to the mic. With humour and real life anecdotes he dazzled the audience with his brilliance and passion as the guests sat spellbound. Turning his attention to the horrendous atrocities we endured the last few years, he thundered, "Jews have the resilience to find a spec of light even in the darkest space and in the most challenging circumstances."

Closing remarks were presented by Robert Bielak, a long standing personal friend of the Premier and a community stalwart.

roduced some 40 years ago, and Rabbi Yossy Gansburg, who spearheads the program,

were added.

Upon arrival, as the children enter the atrium, a large screen features the famed Rabbi B, explaining the Seder plate. So too, they participate in an interactive Pesach themed game show. Before proceeding to kneading the matza dough, the youngsters also design and colour an apron. An entertaining video comic AI clip helps visualize the Ten Plagues.

In addition to numerous school classes that participate, the program also accommodates and welcomes visitors on Sundays. The program has proven very successful and many parents who visit as class chaperones, have expressed their fond memories from their own childhood visit many years ago.

decided it was time to upgrade and introduce new features. After consultation with other educators and parents, many new exciting components

From Converts to Campus Shluchim: The Unlikely Story of South African Chabad Reps

By Leibel Kahan

Growing up in a Christian home in Cape Town, South Africa, Chananyah Duthie never met a Jew until he stumbled, curious, into a synagogue in nearby Stellenbosch, where he was then studying at university.

Until that moment, the only thing Chananyah knew about Jews was that his grandfather was one—a fact he discovered a few years earlier while on a trip in Germany that left him with more questions than answers.

Intrigued by his encounter with the synagogue's gabbai, Chananyah attended services there through the remainder of the school year, growing close with the local community and learning what being Jewish is all about. After graduating, he moved to Germany where he continued his Jewish discovery. When his visa expired several years later, he moved back to South Africa.

Chananyah attended his first Passover Seder then—"a life-changing event." He engaged with Chabad Shluchim in Cape Town, attended services, studied Chabad philosophy—another turning point in his journey—and experienced Jewish living. In 2016, Chananyah began the

conversion process, ultimately becoming a Jew in June of 2018. He went on to study in the Mayanot Yeshiva in Jerusalem for two years and was eventually introduced to Eliana. Eliana grew up with a lot of questions and very few answers while attending Sunday school at a Baptist church in North Carolina. Drawn to Judaism, she underwent a non-Orthodox conversion. In 2016, with degrees in Political Science and German Language and Literature from East Carolina University, she moved to Germany. She continued to practice a basic level of Judaism, all the while feeling something missing, she says. On a visit to Antwerp, where she connected with Chabad shluchim Rabbi Yossi and Chomie Weiss, her spark caught fire. Eventually, Eliana moved to Brooklyn, where she completed her Orthodox conversion process in December of 2018.

Once they met, Chananyah and Eliana's connection grew quickly—even from across continents. When they finally met in person, it was clear they shared the same vision for life and outreach. After marrying, Chananyah completed his rabbinical studies in Crown Heights before the couple began exploring where they could make a difference.

Returning to his alma mater felt natural—Stellenbosch, also known as the City of Oaks—in the Western Cape province of South Africa, had a small but growing Jewish population, yet no permanent presence. Together, the Duthies decided to make it their mission to bring Chabad to the university town. At

sessions, providing kosher meals, and organizing social events like braais—South Africa's traditional grill gatherings. Beyond infusing the town with new Jewish energy, their presence helped bridge the gap between students and the older Stellenbosch Jewish community, as many of their programs are hosted in the old synagogue.

"They have me over for Shabbat lunch. You just feel at home," says Ethan Epstein-Kay, a student at university. "To keep kosher in Stellenbosch is quite difficult, so small things like that make a big difference in our lives."

The Duthies purchased their own Chabad House close to campus, and plans are underway for a new Mikvah and a kosher restaurant. "Stellenbosch is the beginning of South Africa's wine route," Chananyah ex-

plains, "so, when kosher tours come through, we want them to have somewhere to eat while they're here." With their energy and vision, the Duthies are not only revitalizing Jewish student life but also strengthening the broader Jewish presence in this historic South African town.

Student Zi Goldstuck says the Duthies remind her of "the story of Avraham and Sara having their tent open on all four sides, so that people can always enter and they're always welcome. It's just this very caring sort of atmosphere that they've created."

For the young couple, it's a journey come full circle. Deepening their own Jewish identity through Chabad, they are now drawing on those experiences to help others build their own Jewish connections. And who better than those who have traveled such a great distance on their spiritual quest to share the warmth and depth of Jewish life with other spiritual seekers?



Slain Chabad Rabbi Eli Schlanger's Book to be Published

HarperCollins will Publish "Conversation with My Rabbi," by Rabbi Eli Schlanger, Murdered in Bondi Terrorist Attack

By Tzemach Feller
HarperCollins Publishers

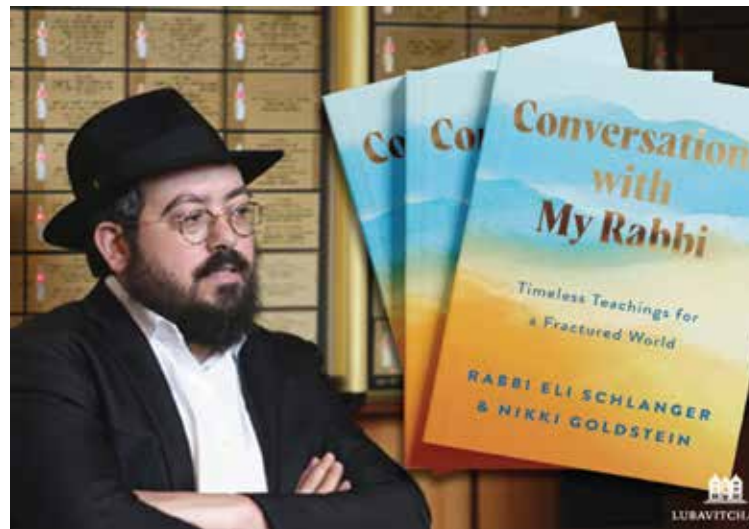
Rabbi Eli Schlanger in the hallway and asked him to come pray for her. Standing beside her bed, he blew the shofar and prayed for her. One day later, Goldstein began recovering from the life-threatening infection. The doctors called it a miracle. As she regained her health, Rabbi Schlanger and Goldstein grew closer.

In January 2025, they began recording their conversations for a book. Weeks before they finished the final chapter, Eli was tragically murdered. "I was devastated, shocked, and grieving. But I knew that Eli's legacy, his mission to bring light and love to the world, would not die with him," Nikki Goldstein said. "Eli saved my life years ago, and it's my honor and privilege to ensure that his voice, memory, and mission are not silenced by terror and continue to work miracles."

During his lifetime, Schlanger — a student of the Lubavitcher Rebbe — was passionate about sharing the universal moral principles known as the Seven Noahide Laws, as encouraged by the Rebbe. Schlanger founded Project Noah, an educational initiative that brings the timeless values of the Seven Noahide Laws to young people through engaging, interactive programs.

The book was prepared, reviewed and edited by Rabbi Ulman, with whom Rabbi Schlanger explored these topics, and Rabbi Zalman Shmotkin of Chabad.org in New York, to ensure that in his absence his words are published in the spirit in which they were spoken.

The book is available for presale at bookstores everywhere, and can be pre-ordered and purchased online.



The Duthie family

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When My Jewish Boyfriend Took Me to Chabad for Free Food

By Kylie Ora Lobell

On a Friday afternoon, when Danny and I were broke and didn't know where our next meal was going to come from, he said we should go to a place called Chabad for Friday night dinner.

"What's Chabad?" I asked.

"It's a Jewish organization and they provide free food for Jews. I'll just tell them you're a Jew."

"OK, let's go," I said, excited at the prospect of a home-cooked meal.

When we arrived that evening at the walk-up building on Bedford Avenue, in Brooklyn, the Orthodox rabbi, Rabbi Shmuly, a thin man in a black hat with a dark, scraggly beard and kind eyes, greeted Daniel with a Jewish joke and introduced himself to me.



Kylie and Danny

"It's nice to meet you, Kylie," he said, nodding his head and smiling. "Good Shabbos."

"It's nice to meet you, too," I said.

Danny and I sat at the dinner table, which was full of other non-religious Jews, like an eccentric artist wearing orange-rimmed glasses and a free-spirited 20-something woman with wildly curly locks and a flowing flower dress. They were nice and welcoming to me.

The rabbi said some prayers in Hebrew. I tried a piece of bread.

"This is delicious. What is it?" I whispered to Danny.

"It's challah," he said.

I ate four pieces of this doughy, sweet bread.

While the rabbi spoke during the main course, I didn't know what he was saying, even when he was speaking in English. He was saying something about the Torah, which I had never learned about.

I looked around at all the faces in the room. I felt a warmth inside of me that started in my

chest and washed over my entire body. I didn't know if it was the challah, the speech, or the sense of community, but I felt euphoric.

This was so different from how I'd grown up, where dinners were silent if we ate together at all.

Shabbat dinner was lively. People laughed loudly. The rabbi was nice to me, a stranger, even though he probably knew I wasn't a Jew. I was opening up to people. The conversation was so natural. I was always more comfortable around Jewish people; this affirmed it.

On the way home, I asked Danny if this dinner was happening again soon.

"Every week," he said. "Why?"

"I'd love to come back. It

was nice."

"Really? OK."

"I can't believe all that is free. It's incredible."

"Yeah, they get donors to make sure Jews have a Friday night dinner. It's very nice."

"How did you meet the rabbi, by the way?"

Danny then told me the story of how he came across Rabbi Shmuly.

He hadn't been religious for many years, and he eventually became fully non-observant—save for never eating bacon or shellfish. As he progressed in his comedy career, he started performing on Friday nights, which you weren't supposed to do if you were religious.

For ten years, he didn't care about being observant or spiritual, until one Yom Kippur. "I'd spent the day in synagogue, fasting and asking G-d for forgiveness," he told me. "As the sun was setting at the beach, I was so inspired that I said a prayer to G-d. I told Him I'd keep one Shabbat over the course of the next year. I didn't know why. I

just felt compelled in the moment."

A few months later, Danny was walking on Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg. He saw a rabbi approaching him.

"Are you Jewish?" the rabbi asked.

"Yes," Danny said.

"Then come for Shabbat sometime. Friday night. We start at seven."

"Well, I actually promised G-d that I would keep one Shabbat this year. But not this week. I have a show."

"OK, when you can come, come. We're here every Friday night."

But Danny forgot all about it.

A few months after that, he was walking on Bedford Avenue again when the rabbi approached him.

"I never saw you at Shabbat dinner!" the rabbi said.

"Oh, I'm sorry, rabbi," Danny said.

"Don't worry, you can still come. See you this Friday."

Danny went and loved the experience. Not only did he get that delicious food, but also, he loved joking around with Rabbi Shmuly, who was incredibly nice, and he felt the magic of Shabbat he enjoyed when he was a kid.

"Wait. I thought you don't believe in religion," I said.

"Yes. But I still believe in G-d. I still pray in my own way."

"I haven't prayed since I was a kid. I thought it was nonsense."

"No, I think there's something to it," he said, smiling.

Maybe Danny was right, I thought. He was right about so many other things. Could I have been wrong about G-d?

I thought about it. One thing was certain: I couldn't wait to go back to Chabad. I was hungry for something, but it wasn't the food.

One Shabbat meal led to another, and Kylie discovered the beauty of Judaism. She encouraged Danny to dig deeper into his heritage as she learned more about it as well. Today, they live a full Jewish life.

Excerpted and adapted from "Choosing to be Chosen: From Being an Atheist Non-Jew to Becoming an Orthodox Jew," in which Kylie Ora Lobell tells how she embraced Judaism.



Why Does Mashiach Have To Be a King?

Continued from page 2

ation, self-organize and work things out between one another. I mean, do you really expect enlightened beings to hurt, steal, extort, or otherwise cause bodily or monetary harm to one another? So who needs government in such a world, never mind a king?

Okay, to get to that point, we may well need an outstanding individual, a great leader who could deal with the oppressors and dictators and other powerful shmendriks of the world. As Maimonides puts it, someone who will strengthen the Torah and "fight the wars of G-d", not necessarily military wars, but actions that have very powerful political and social ramifications.

But once that mission is complete and the world is at peace, buzzing with wisdom until even the leopards and wolves are behaving and the very earth itself is full of knowledge, then everything changes. What would be crucial at such a point would be not a king, but a teacher. Yes, the world is enlightened, but it is still a world emerging into enlightenment. The Moshiach, as a teacher, would guide people to see and to understand this new world into which they had entered.

And yet, the very word moshiach means "anointed." Anointed for what? Anointed to be a king. But who will need a king?

What really is a king? Yes, a king governs, but is that really what a king is?

The question was asked by several of the Rebbes of Chabad. Here's how they answered:

A king—an authentic, genuine-to-the-core king—is an individual who stands head and shoulders above the people around him. That's why a king who must force the people to accept him as king is not a real king. A real king is someone like King Saul, who, when chosen by the prophet Samuel and the people, could not be found, be-

cause he had hid himself, hoping that he would not be chosen.

About King Saul, the prophet says that he was "from his shoulders up taller than all the people." That's not just a vertical measurement. "Shoulders" refers to emotions. Saul's emotions were at the level of another person's intellect. His mind, then, was completely beyond, in a higher realm altogether.

This will also be the character of the Moshiach. Yes, he will be a teacher—because that's what those times will be all about: learning, knowing, gaining divine wisdom. But a teacher—a good teacher—limits his lesson to that for which the student is ready and can handle. The Moshiach will be a teacher, but one with a kingly character: as enlightened as they may be, he will see far beyond. And yet, as a teacher-king, he will be capable of transmitting that transcendental knowledge to all of us as well. Perhaps not cognitively, but in some form in which it can be shared.

An interesting idea, because it fits so well into the idea of what the messianic era is all about and how it fulfills the purpose of creation—as Rabbi Schneur Zalman writes, "everything depends on our work throughout the time of exile."

Meaning that through the toil of our hard work, our struggle and persistence in the most trying times right up until that glorious era, we will draw into the world a deep light, an essence-light, such as could never have been revealed without that labor. It is that essence-light that the Moshiach will have the job of revealing to us. Something entirely transcendental, and yet, something that each of us touches; something from which each of us draws strength every time we defy the confusion and darkness of our present world to do what we know is right and beautiful.

This teacher, then, is the ultimate of teachers. A king-teacher. For he will show us the very core essence of our souls, and how they are rooted in the Core Essence of All Being. He will reveal to us how we are all kings.



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Dear Rebbby

By Rabbi Aron Moss



Can You Detect Artificial Intelligence?

With Artificial Intelligence popping up everywhere, how am I supposed to know whether the answer I'm getting is from an actual human being or a very polite robot? Does it even matter anymore? And is there any reliable way to tell the difference? Especially when asking rabbis...

Answer

It used to be simple. If someone gave you a strange, roundabout, and slightly confusing answer, you knew it was a human rabbi.

Now you're not so sure.

AI can answer faster than any human, with better grammar and no typos. It never needs coffee, never loses patience, and never says, "Good question, I'll get back to you." In other words, it's suspiciously un-rabbinic.

But here's the thing: AI can think, but it can't care.

A human being, with all our flaws and feelings, can listen, empathize, and cry with you. A machine can predict what words should come next, but it doesn't have a heart that aches for yours.

You can ask AI, "Why did this happen to me?" and it might give you a logical, even poetic answer. But when you ask a person the same question, they might just sigh, hold your hand, and say, "I don't know, but I'm here with you."

That's something no algorithm can imitate.

Does it matter if you can tell the difference? Maybe not for technical questions. If you're asking for the temperature to bake challah, AI's your friend. But if you're asking how to find meaning, heal a heart, or connect to G-d, well, that's holy territory. You'll need a soul for that.

So yes, AI can write sermons, compose songs, and even answer some religious questions. But only a human being can say a blessing with tears in their eyes, or hear your story and see the divine spark flickering within you.

The difference between AI and a human?

AI can process information.

A human can feel inspiration.

And that, thank G-d, will never change.

Source:
Chatgpt.

The answer above was entirely written by A.I. "in the style of Rabbi Moss". I thought it was pretty smooth and lifeless. What did you think? Could you tell? I hope so....

Ready to Take the Plunge?

Why does a groom get called up to the Torah before getting married? And what about the bride? Does she have an equivalent?

Answer

Marriage is the biggest step of your life. Before taking the plunge, you need to plug into your source to gain strength and clarity.

The groom is called up to the Torah. He stands before the community and connects himself to G-d's wisdom. He looks into the eternal story of the Jewish people that he is about to continue, and steps into it, becoming part of it. The Torah reminds him what makes a Jewish home stand strong: values, community, soul and purpose.

The bride does the same, but in a different language. Before the wedding, she also takes a plunge of her own. She immerses in the mikvah.

Water is the first creation, the womb of the world, the place where life begins. Like Torah, water allows all life to grow and flourish. In the quiet waters of the mikvah, the bride returns to her own source, to the purity and strength that Jewish women have passed down for generations. She enters those life-giving waters as she embarks on her journey to become a life-giver herself.

Both bride and groom are preparing themselves for the next big step. He connects with the words of Torah, the world of mind and meaning. She enters mikvah, the world of creation and life. Two ways of plugging in, each a different expression of the same truth. One through the wisdom of life, one through the water of life.

The masculine way is more conceptual. The femi-

nine way is more actual. He enters the sea of Torah figuratively. She enters the waters of the mikvah literally.

And when they come together under the chuppah, wisdom and water meet. Theory and practice come together. Masculine and feminine unite. A new world can begin. They take the plunge together.

Is It Time to Make Aliyah?

With everything happening lately, is it time for diaspora Jews to pack up and leave? Maybe G-d is telling us that the time has come to go to Israel. After all, we left Egypt in such haste that the bread didn't have time to rise. Perhaps we should be rushing out of Australia and making Aliyah right now.

Answer

Yes, it is time for all of us to make aliyah. But that doesn't mean you have to leave.

Aliyah means to rise, to elevate, to step up.

For some, moving to Israel is the next step. For others, the aliyah they need to make is right where they are. Either way, it needs to be thoughtful and deliberate.

We do not let terrorists decide where Jews live. And we do not allow panic to direct our destiny. Unlike Egypt, this is not a moment for running.

When we left Egypt, it happened in a rush. We were unready, helpless and spiritually enslaved. The Exodus was a gift from above, not something we earned. We ran without a plan. There was no time for the dough to rise.

But the future redemption is different.

The prophet Isaiah says, "You shall not leave in haste, nor shall you go in flight" (Isaiah 52:12). When Moshiach comes, we will leave calmly, deliberately, and with strength. Not fleeing something bad, but moving toward something good.

The final redemption will not be driven by fear. It will be earned through our choices, our growth, and generations of good deeds. Every mitzvah brings us closer. Every positive act prepares us more.

When the time comes, we will go because we want to go, not because we have no option.

That is why now is not the time for dramatic moves made on adrenaline. Terror is meant to shake us, to make us feel unsafe and reactive. We must not give it that power.

If you were already planning to make aliyah, now may indeed be the time. But we all need to make aliyah in the deeper sense. Not to run, but to rise.

Rise in Jewish pride. Rise in unity. Rise in commitment to Jewish life, to Torah and mitzvos.

One day, we will all return home. And when that day comes, it will not look like Egypt. There will be no rushed exits and half-baked plans.

Back then, the bread didn't rise. This time, we will.

How Do You Know If a Cause Is Actually Good?

At university, I keep seeing movements and "causes" that claim to be for the greater good, but my gut is giving me a major vibe check fail. They sound righteous, but they feel... toxic. How do I tell if a cause is actually holy, or if it's just a wolf in organic, fair-trade sheep's clothing?

Answer

There's a simple litmus test to see whether a cause is holy or not. Ignore the slogans on the T-shirts and the hashtags on social media. Look at the toolbox.

Holiness shows up at the job site with a hammer, some nails and a blueprint. It wants to build something. Unholiness shows up with a sledgehammer. It wants to smash something.

The defining trait of holiness is that it creates.

The Torah itself begins with creation. The very first thing G-d does is build a world. And the final words of our daily prayers ask G-d to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Judaism begins with creation and ends with construction.

Unholiness is the opposite. It seeks to destroy. A movement whose only plan is to "dismantle," "tear down,"

or "cancel," isn't righteous. It's immorality in a "Save the World" hoodie.

Unholiness has a marketing problem. It can't admit what it is. It doesn't walk around with a "Bad Guy" nametag. Instead it hijacks good causes. It starts with a genuine concern for fairness, justice or peace. But slowly the focus shifts. Love for the victim is replaced by hostility for anyone who disagrees. What poses as "pro" something is really just "anti" something else.

Holy work leaves people feeling empowered, connected, and responsible. It heals relationships and builds bridges. Unholy work does the opposite. It leaves people suspicious of each other and quick to pick sides. It divides communities and turns friends into enemies.

Sometimes holiness does need to fight against harmful forces. The Torah itself recognizes that evil must be stopped. But holy struggle removes only what is rotten, so something better can be built in its place. Destructive movements don't repair structures. They just swing the wrecking ball.

So next time you encounter a "righteous" cause, ask one simple question: if these people get exactly what they want, will the world have more life in it? Will relationships be stronger? Will people feel more connected? Will something beautiful actually be built?

Don't be fooled. Holiness leaves a better structure. Unholiness leaves rubble. If it doesn't build, it's not G-d's work. No matter what hoodie it wears.

Is "Crisis Judaism" Real?

It is all very nice that people are getting closer to Judaism after the Bondi attack. The same thing happened after October 7, and the same thing happens after every tragedy. But how real is it? If a Jew is suddenly very Jewish when things are bad, what does that say about their Judaism?

Answer

Your question was answered by a beached seal.

Dear Rebbby



Last week my brother was going for a morning run in an urban park, and he saw the strangest sight. There, lying by the side of a river, was a seal. Not your usual visitor in the middle of the city.

This encounter reminded me of a Talmudic discussion about seals. The rabbis debated: Is the seal a water creature or a land creature?

The Hebrew word for seal is Kelev Yam - sea dog. They spend most of their lives in the water. So does that define them as marine life? Do we go by where they spend the majority of their time?

No. That doesn't define a seal. We may call it a sea dog, but it is not a sea creature. Why? Because if you want to define a creature, you have to ask one question: where does it go when it's in danger? Where is its refuge?

For a seal, the answer is: it runs to dry land.

Under threat, your instincts lead you to where you really belong. Your refuge is your true home. No matter how much time you spend in the sea, if you flee to dry land when your life is endangered, that shows who you really are. You are a land creature.

This is not just a biological fun fact. It's a spiritual truth. Our soul has a homing signal that brings us back to where we truly belong. That's why when Jews are in danger, we run to Judaism. Because that's who we are.

A Jew can spend his whole life distant from his Jewish roots. He can adopt other identities and blend into the surrounding culture. But that is just where he happens to be swimming. A little shake up, and the inner self is revealed. He comes right back to where he belongs. A Jew's home is in Judaism.

We have seen this throughout our history. The very same dynamic played out in the Purim story. Jews try to assimilate into Persian culture by attending the king's party. A wicked prime minister poses a mortal threat to Jewish life. This leads to a massive return to Judaism. They prayed. They fasted. They refused to bow to their enemies. And that led to victory. The threat didn't create their Judaism. It revealed it.

What my brother saw in the park was a creature finding safety in its true habitat. And

what we are seeing today is the same. Torah is our natural home. Jewish life is our life. And if a formerly estranged Jew feels the pull to return to Judaism, he should be welcomed back home. He needs no one's seal of approval.

"Dad, I Don't Want to Be Jewish"

My seven-year-old son doesn't go to a Jewish school. Since hearing from friends some pretty graphic details of the Bondi attack, he says, "Dad, I don't want to be Jewish anymore." He's had counselling and is otherwise doing fine, but he still refuses to attend Jewish events or go to Jewish venues. How do I deal with this?

Answer

Your son is not rejecting Judaism. He is rejecting fear.

In his young mind, being Jewish and being a target became linked. The brain connects identity with danger and says, "If I drop the identity, maybe I drop the danger."

You can't argue him out of that because, in a way, he is right. Jews are sometimes targeted. But we are not targeted because we are weak. We are targeted because we carry something precious.

A child who inherits great wealth may attract envy. There may even be people who want to take that wealth from him. But no child gives up his inheritance just because someone else wants it. He learns to value it more.

Our Jewish identity is that inheritance.

Right now, for your son, "Jewish" equals "scary." You need to gently widen that picture until "Jewish" also means "joy," "music," "friends," "belonging," and "fun." He is rich. He just doesn't know it yet.

Take it slowly. No lectures about pride or heavy speeches about history. He is seven. He needs tangible experiences. What he heard was vivid and real. The positive experiences must be just as real.

Take him to a happy, joyful Jewish event where he will discover a happy side of being Jewish. But this cannot be a one-off event. Over time, Jewish life needs to become a steady part of his world: To-

rah classes, Shabbat meals, youth programs, community moments. Children feel safest in what is familiar. When being Jewish becomes part of his weekly rhythm, it stops feeling like a target and starts feeling like a treasure.

You can't erase what he heard. But you can give him new memories that are stronger. You can't pretend away our enemies. But you can surround him with friends.

We will not give up our gift because someone else resents it. We hold it tighter, share it louder, and pass it on with joy.

Who Has the Best In-Laws?

I have been asked to say one of the Sheva Brachot blessings at a wedding. I read the translation and saw that it speaks about G-d creating Adam and Eve. I was wondering, why mention that at a wedding?

Answer

Adam and Eve had a great marriage. We want every couple to be a bit like them. Think about it:

Adam and Eve never wondered if they married the right person. They had no doubts. Well, I guess they also had no alternatives. But every couple should feel the same. Even though they had many options, in truth there is only one. The person standing under the chuppah with you is the one for you.

Adam and Eve also had no issues with their in-laws. That alone is a huge blessing. We wish the same for every couple.

But deeper than that, Adam and Eve were originally one being. G-d split them into two so they could find each other again. That is every marriage. Two halves of one soul, finally reunited.

Adam and Eve did not meet at a party, or at work, or on an app. Their match came from a much higher network. G-d introduced them. So with every couple. They don't just find each other. They are guided to each other. The app is just the tool. The match wasn't made in the app. It was made up, way up in Heaven.

That is why we mention Adam and Eve at a wedding.

We are telling the couple that like Adam and Eve, your union is not random. It is divine. People are limited. G-d is not. He can perform miracles, like leading soulmates to each other. With G-d in the picture, anything is possible. Even good in-laws.

A Force greater than you brought you together. Stay connected to that Force. It will hold you together, forever.

What Rubs You The Wrong Way?

I am so upset I don't know what to do. I am Jewish, but not practicing. I married a non-Jewish man, and Judaism has not been part of our home. Now my worst nightmare has come true. My 19-year-old daughter at university has joined the pro-Palestinian camp. She marches against Israel. She speaks against Jews. It feels like she has turned her back on her family and her heritage. I tried talking to her and it didn't go well. We hardly have any contact now.

My question is not about my older daughter. I feel she is too far gone. But I still have a 15-year-old daughter at home, and I am terrified she will go the same way. I can't let that happen. How can I protect my younger daughter and keep her from rejecting her people?

Answer

Here is what you need to do. Light Shabbat candles.

Every Friday evening, on time, without fail. Even if you've never done it before, start now.

You may not have expected this response. Perhaps you were hoping I would give you a book for your daughter to read, or a Jewish group for her to join. But your children don't need more words. They need to see what a Jew looks like. They need a mother who is not just worried about anti-semitism, but who is pro-Judaism. One small flame on your table will say more to them than a thousand lectures ever could.

Children can sense what their parents truly value. When you light Shabbat candles, when you put a mezuzah on your door, when you study Torah or give charity, you are showing your daughter that Judaism is real to you. No arguments, no debates, just living it. You'll be surprised how impactful that can be. Give a Jewish soul some oxygen and it comes alive.

And here is the secret. Those flames you light on your table may travel further than you think. Even your older daughter, far away with her activist friends, may one day feel the glow of your candles. Don't write her off. Right now her fire is burning in another direction. But a soul never loses its flame. One day, the sparks you ignite in your home may awaken hers as well.

This is not about your older daughter, and it's not about your younger daughter. It's about you, the only person you can control. Light your flame.

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The recital of Kaddish is the bond which unites the generations from the immemorial unto eternity. It is the way we show our timeless devotion to our parents and loved ones. In the event you cannot personally observe this hallowed expression of love for the duration of eleven months, alternate arrangements can be made through the Chabad Lubavitch Organization. You may also consider placing bronze name plates of your departed loved ones on our Memorial Board which will insure The Observance of Yartzeit in perpetuity.

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Top 30 Jewish Quotes

By Motteleh Schusterman

Here are my top 30 Jewish quotes, sampling from different parts of our rich tradition. The list includes life advice, instructions, deep insights into the human psyche, and important Jewish values.

FROM SCRIPTURE

1. I have set before you life and death ... and you shall choose life. ¹
The Torah lays out the principle of free choice and urges us to choose well.
2. The L-rd sees into the heart. ²
G-d reminds the Prophet Samuel to always look beyond superficialities.
3. The footsteps of humans are directed by G-d. ³
King David assures us that nothing happens by chance.
4. A righteous person falls down seven times and gets up. ⁴
It is not the fall that counts, but how you respond to it.

FROM THE MISHNAH

5. If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? ⁵
The great sage Hillel's psychological tongue-twister teaches us not to rely on others, remain selfless, and seize the moment.
6. Study is not the most important thing, but actions. ⁶
This holds true in life, as well as with Torah and mitzvahs.
7. Who is wise? The one who learns from all people ... Who is mighty? The one who subdues the evil inclination ... Who is rich? The one who rejoices in his portion ... Who is honored? The one who honors other human beings ⁷
This Mishnah reveals the true meaning of success in different areas of life.
8. Look not at the flask but at what is therein; there may be a new flask full of old wine, and an old flask wherein is not even new wine. ⁸
The original "don't judge a book by its cover."

FROM THE TALMUD

9. Either a friend, or death. ⁹
The value of a friend cannot be overstated—literally.
10. A thief standing at the entrance of the tunnel calls out to G-d. ¹⁰
This truth is interpreted both as "there are no atheists in foxholes" and as a reminder that just because you believe in G-d doesn't mean you are automatically virtuous.
11. A prisoner cannot free himself. ¹¹
Another analysis of the human condition. Don't assume that someone stuck in a bad situation will figure it out on their own. Rather you be the one to step in to assist them.
12. ***If a person says I have worked hard but have not found [success], don't believe him. [If a person says] I have not exerted myself, and I have found [success], don't believe him. [If he says] I gave it my all and I have found [success], believe him!*** ¹²
Putting in no effort never leads to real success. Putting in effort always does.
13. ***Wherever Israel went into exile, the Divine Presence (Shechinah) went with them ... and when Israel is redeemed in the future, the Shechinah will be redeemed with them.*** ¹³
G-d accompanies us even in the hardest times.

FROM THE MIDRASH

14. The salvation of G-d is like the blink of an eye. ¹⁴
A reminder to have faith even in the most difficult situations.
15. All beginnings are difficult. ¹⁵
A reassurance that it'll get better soon. Just stick with it. There is light at the end of the tunnel.
16. He who denies the goodness of his fellow is destined to deny the goodness of G-d. ¹⁶
Our relations with our fellow and our relations with G-d are more interconnected than you think.

FROM THE ZOHAR

17. A person cannot know the taste of sweetness until he tastes bitterness. ¹⁷
Struggle and difficulty help a person discover their true depths.
18. A male without a female is considered half a body. ¹⁸
The deeper significance of marriage: two halves of a single soul reunite.

FROM MEDIEVAL SAGES

- 19.** Words that come from the heart, enter the heart. ¹⁹
Be true to yourself, and you will positively influence those around you.
- 20.** A little bit of light can dispel much darkness. ²⁰
The power of good eclipses that of evil.
- 21.** If I were to sell candles, the sun would never set. If I dealt in burial shrouds, no one would ever die. ²¹
An ironic complaint about life's difficulties.
- 22.** The judgments of the Torah do not bring vengeance to the world, but rather bring mercy, kindness and peace to the world. ²²
G-d's Torah is good—good for the person and good for the world.
- 23.** Truth is only discerned through its opposite. ²³
True knowledge of something is only possible if you know its antithesis.

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

- 24.** Everything is by Divine Providence. If a leaf is turned over by a breeze, it is only because this has been specifically ordained by G-d to serve a particular function within the purpose of creation. ²⁴
The Baal Shem Tov's revolutionary take on Divine Providence: every occurrence in the universe, down to the subatomic level, is ordained by G-d.
- 25.** Your fellow is your mirror. If your own face is clean, so will be the image you perceive. But should you look upon your fellow and see a blemish, it is your own imperfection that you are encountering. ²⁵
It's not about the other person; it's about you. The reason you perceive a blemish is to reveal what you yourself need to work on.
- 26.** This is what man is all about; the purpose of creation ... to make a dwelling for G-d in the physical world. ²⁶
Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the first Rebbe of Chabad, addresses the existential question: Why do we even exist in this world?
- 27.** The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the most important thing is not to be afraid at all. ²⁷
Life is difficult, but the biggest challenge is overcoming the fear.
- 28.** There is nothing more complete than a broken heart, and there is nothing more upright than a crooked ladder. ²⁸
The act of self-improvement is, in itself, a beautiful ideal.
- 29.** Joy breaks all barriers. ²⁹
Joy can accomplish what nothing else can.
- 30.** If you know aleph, teach aleph. ³⁰
The Rebbe's imperative is to teach and spread Judaism regardless of one's spiritual standing or level of knowledge.

What is your favorite Jewish line or quote?

1. Deuteronomy 30:19.
2. I Samuel 16:7.
3. Psalms 37:23.
4. Proverbs 24:16.
5. Avot 1:14.
6. Avot 1:17.
7. Avot 4:1.
8. Avot 4:20.
9. Taanit 23a.
10. Brachot 63a.
11. Berachot 5b.
12. Megillah 6b.
13. Talmud Megillah 29a.
14. Nissim Gaon, Chibur Yafeh Mehayeshuah.
15. Mechilta quoted by Rashi on Exodus 19:5.
16. Bechaye to Exodus 1:8 from Midrash.
17. Zohar, vol. III, Tazria 48a.
18. Zohar, vol. III, Vayikra 7b.
19. Moshe ibn Ezra in Shirat Yisrael quoting arabic poets.
20. Duties of the Heart, Gate 5, ch. 5.
21. Poem by Ibn Ezra.
22. Mishneh Torah, Shabbat 2:3.
23. Yitzchak Kanpanton, Darkei Hagemara 2:8.
24. Keter Shem Tov, addendum 179, footnote 366.
25. Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, quoted in Me'or Einayim, Parshat Chukat.
26. Tanya, ch. 33.
27. Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, Likutei Moharan 2:48:2.
28. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk.
29. Sefer HaMaamarim 5697, p. 223.
30. The Rebbe, 12 Tammuz 5736.

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WEEKLY CLASSES • SUMMER SCHEDULE

SUNDAY

10:30 AM TALMUD (BRACHOS) RABBI MOSHE SPALTER

MONDAY

7:45 PM THE WEEKLY TORAH REVIEW RABBI YOSSI GANSBURG

TUESDAY

11:00 AM TORAH STUDIES - PARSHA RABBI YOSSI GANSBURG (ALSO VIA ZOOM)
 10:30 AM THE JOY OF JUDAISM RABBI MOSHE SPALTER
 2:00 PM LIKKUTEI SICHOS RABBI YOSSI GANSBURG (ALSO VIA ZOOM)
 8:00 PM TALMUD (BAVA METZIA) RABBI MOSHE SPALTER (ALSO VIA ZOOM)

WEDNESDAY

11:00 - 12:30 PM THE JEWISH LEARNING INSTITUTE RABBI YOSSI GANSBURG (ALSO VIA ZOOM)
 7:30 - 9:00 PM THE JEWISH LEARNING INSTITUTE RABBI YOSSI GANSBURG (ALSO VIA ZOOM)

THURSDAY

8:15 - 9:15 TALMUD (PSACHIM) RABBI MOSHE SPALTER

SHABBOS

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

DAILY CLASSES

SUN - THU 8:15 - 9:30 PM KOLLEL CHAVRUTA PROGRAM ALTERNATING
 SUN - THU 9:00 PM RAMBAM ALTERNATING
 SUN - FRI 7:15 AM CHASSIDIC THOUGHT RABBI YOSSI GANSBURG (ALSO VIA ZOOM)
 MON - FRI 10 AM - 12 PM KOLLEL TIFERES ZEKEINIM LEVI YITZCHOK
 TALMUD, MISHNAH, HALACHA & CHUMASH - RABBI DOVID CHAIKIN



Continued from page 12

best to serve Him, and He takes care of the rest.”

It is clear that this path has been providential. Eight years later, Dashev has become one of the most famous Jewish portrait photographers in the world, shooting famous artists and private clientele, while still being sought after for national advertising campaigns and magazine covers.



Reb Yoel Kahn

The Rabbi Project

For years, Dashev had viewed photography purely as craft, not art.

“I knew that I had nothing to say in photography except to make money,” he acknowledges. “And suddenly, I was making lots and lots more money. And still, I didn’t feel any kind of maturity as an artist.”

But fashion clients had begun requesting portraits alongside their standard work. This required a different skill set: drawing out personality, focusing on the subject as a person rather than a mannequin for merchandise. Dashev proved talented enough at this to book jobs alongside his fashion work, and began finding his voice and style in the portraits he took.

Back in 2012, the fashion industry underwent seismic shifts, and the financial rewards dwindled amidst a new corporate atmosphere. Dashev sensed his time in that world winding down, though he would still be taking jobs for the next few years. He was 35, uncertain about next steps.

One day, paging through a book of Chassidic tales compiled by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, Dashev turned to the back cover and studied Zevin’s photograph—the expression, the pose, the shadows. His immediate thought: “I can do that better.”

He set up a small studio on the corner of Carroll and Brooklyn Avenue in Crown Heights, offering subjects a simple deal: five minutes for a portrait session, a free copy for their use, while Dashev re-

tained the image for his own projects, all while still maintaining his work in the fashion industry.

This style was new to him, as was the customer base.

“It really did feel like starting at zero, because as much as I was Jewishly involved by then, nobody knew me,” he explains. In the fashion world, access follows reputation—one major client vouches for you to the next. Dashev understood he’d need the same currency here, which meant setting his sights high from the start. He began by building a series of noted rab-

bis and Jewish personalities.

He took photos of Rabbi Paltiel, then Rabbi Dovber Pinson, which led to a session with Rabbi Moshe Weinberger of Woodmere, N.Y., among many others. The Rabbi Project was born.

“It was amazing to spend time with all these learned rabbis, but getting a photo of Reb Yoel Kahn—the quintessential Chassid of the Rebbe in our time—was the holy grail,” Dashev says with a smile.

He first connected with Leah Kahn in 2014, when she politely declined. Some time later, Yael began caring for an ill community member who typically attended the Kahn’s Passover seder, and Mrs. Kahn extended an invitation to the Dashevs. After Passover, she agreed to organize her husband’s portrait session.

Her warning proved accurate: “Reb Yoel will be learning, he won’t look at you, but take some pictures, and when you’re satisfied, you can leave.”

“I have done hundreds of portrait shoots, and the results are almost exclusively—besides the technical aspects—based on the personal interaction between photographer and subject,” reflects Dashev. “Even the most reserved and reticent people I’ve photographed engage in the process of crafting an honest portrait if not an intriguing one. For Reb Yoel, I was only a witness, and that seemed appropriate for the caliber of person he was.”

During a “Soul Encounters” symposium hosted by

the Jewish Learning Institute in 2014, the Rabbi Project got traction. Until then, Dashev had only shot a handful of the rabbis that he specifically wanted to photograph. Going to that event that day, held at Queens College, he planned to capture as many of the speakers that he could.

Dashev set up a makeshift studio in a hallway, photographing speakers between lectures. It was there he encountered Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz), the legendary scholar known for his commentaries on the Talmud, Tanya, Maimonides and countless other works.

“Every portrait I took leading up to my time with Rabbi Adin, my anticipation grew greater. I knew the image of him that I wanted to capture.”

Rabbi Even-Israel finished his talk around 10:30 p.m., and Dashev pulled him aside before the building closed.

The rabbi immediately launched into a monologue: “Photographers are the most powerful people in the world. It doesn’t matter if you’re a president or an emperor. As soon as you’re in front of the photographer, the photographer tells you what to do.”

As images appeared on the monitor, Rabbi Even-Israel



Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz)

began laughing. “You should have taken my picture when I was three years old. Before they cut my hair, I had this full head of curly blonde hair.”

“I probably should have been more intimidated,” Dashev admits, “but he was somehow not intimidating. He was so down-to-earth and accessible. I loved his look, and seeing it, you just know that the mind that lives in there is just spectacular.”

Another rabbinical scholar to accept Dashev’s proposal was Rabbi Nissen Mangel, who after surviving the Holocaust as a young boy became a renowned author and translator, including of the Tehillat Hashem prayerbook. Mangel invited the photographer to

his Crown Heights home.

“I think we all approach Holocaust survivors with a sense of awe. We could never, and should never know



Rabbi Nissen Mangel

what they have experienced. Rabbi Mangel built his life post war in family, Torah and Chassidut. He went from raging devastation, where many walked away from observance, to become a leading Jewish scholar and teacher,” Dashev says. “Entering the rabbi’s house and seeing the dining table set with several volumes of Hemshech Ayin Beit [a deep and encyclopedic Chassidic text authored by the fifth Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer, beginning in 1912], I felt the gravitas of his character in the air. Despite the friendly and casual conversation that pervaded the portrait

That flexibility extends to his assessment of the subjects themselves. “Definitely meet your heroes,” he advises. “With all the rabbis I’ve got-

ten to meet, they’re all pretty amazing people.”

‘Shine a Light on the Observant Community’

At the outset of The Rabbi Project, Dashev contemplated his project’s purpose. He wanted to increase Jewish pride, to document impactful leaders and teachers within the world. He hoped to open a window into a world he’d come to love through a visual medium he felt was missing.

By the reception he’s received, it’s clear that it’s working.

“I want to shine a light on the observant community. I’ve been approached by every stripe of society about the project and how it has affected them,” he says. “Many go on to find out more about who was photographed and what they stand for, which is one of the project’s goals. Even among Orthodox Jews, who I assumed would be less interested, the response has been amazing to me.”

Four years ago, Dashev mounted a traveling exhibition featuring sixty images from the project. The show opened at Miami Beach’s JCC before moving to the Palm Beach and Aventura JCCs. Dashev envisions converting the exhibition into a book in the future.

“These past several years, I feel that the urgency to take more portraits has become compounded. We shouldn’t experience the loss of any individual, but time is marching on, and some of the people that I’ve photographed have moved on to the World of Truth. The necessity to document and celebrate our luminaries is only increasing over time.”

Dashev talks of his own motivations: “The Rebbe said innumerable times that we have to work our talents and abilities for the sake of Heaven, to help others, to spread the light of Judaism. I just want to serve my purpose, to serve the Creator. As long as portraits are how I can do this, I can only hope I do it with an even greater result and impact.”

session, throughout, I felt humbled.”

‘Work With What’s in Front of You’

By now, Dashev has completed over 200 portrait sessions, “and my goodness, I would like to do another 200 at least.”

The shoots vary wildly; sometimes, they are elaborate studio set-ups with extended conversations and sometimes just lighting equipment in a quiet study.

“It’s usually a little more interesting when it’s their space, because they really live in it,” he notes. “But I learned long ago that you should never go into a photo shoot with a lot of expectations. You work with what’s in front of you.”



Marko Dashev Spent Years Shooting Fashion. Now He Photographs Leading Rabbis.

By Rena Vegh

The photograph of Rabbi Yoel Kahn captures him as he lived: bent over a text, absorbed in study, indifferent to the camera's presence. It took photographer Marko Dashev four years to get the shot. Leah Kahn, wife of the ascetic scholar, who had spent



Marko Dashev

his life as chief oral scribe of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory, had laughed when Dashev first pitched the idea, telling him plainly that it was never going to happen. When it finally did in 2018, the pre-eminent scholar of Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidism, who passed away in 2021, greeted Dashev with a handshake, then immediately returned to his studies.

"It was almost a relief that he was so disinterested in being photographed," Dashev recalls. "If there was any character who was so incredibly dedicated to the Rebbe's teachings—and little, if anything else—it was Reb Yoel. It was almost intimidating to bother such a special person. Fortunately, the portrait that I got captured him in his element, studying and explaining the Rebbe's teachings long into his old age."

Dashev's portrait of Reb Yoel is part of the photographer's ambitious Rabbi Project: Some 200 portrait sessions conducted across more than a decade, creating what Dashev calls, "an encyclopedia of contemporary Jewish rabbis and personalities." A number of them have appeared in publications such as The New York Times.

To understand the journey of how the former fashion photographer got to docu-

menting rabbis, one has to go back a step.

From Fashion to Faith

Dashev grew up in a Jewish home affiliated with the Conservative movement in Toms River, N.J.. From a young age, he says, he didn't feel any particular attachment

to his Jewish heritage.

"After my bar mitzvah, when I took the obligatory lessons and had the whole ceremony and celebration, my mother asked me if I wanted to continue attending services," Dashev recalls. "I said no, without a second thought."

Always creative, Dashev pursued art and film, studying at the School of Visual Arts in New York. By 1998 he was assisting photographers shooting for Neiman Marcus and Vogue magazine. It was during this time that he met his Israeli-born wife, Yael, and they started their life together in Manhattan before moving to Miami Beach, FL.

Within a few years Dashev had "made it" in industry terms, booking jobs with Ralph Lauren, J.Crew, Bloomingdale's, Saks Fifth Avenue, DKNY and Burberry. Success in fashion photography is rare enough that most who achieve it never leave. But by then, Yael was being drawn to her latent Jewish faith. She began expressing an interest in learning more about Torah and mitzvahs, and began lighting Shabbat candles at home. Within two years, she was regularly attending synagogue services and Torah classes. But Marko wasn't there yet.

"As a freelance photographer, weekends were just like any other day of the week in

the fashion world. We really needed the money, and it was a challenge to even consider thinking about observing Shabbat," says Dashev. "On top of that, I just didn't feel that inspired in my Judaism. Yael was on a certain track and speed, and I was on another."

With effort, they successfully navigated the difficulties of maintaining their relationship while juggling their shifting values. Nevertheless, as High Holidays approached in 2003, things came to a head.

Dashev was offered a job in the south of Spain, a fashion shoot in a picturesque location overlooking the Mediterranean. It sounded perfect—except the dates fell out over Yom Kippur. Despite his wife expressing her reservations about him working on the holiest day of the year, Dashev accepted the gig.

In the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Dashev had a grueling work week, and by the time he arrived at the beach town near Malaga, for the shoot, it was already Yom Kippur and Dashev had come down with a bad stomach virus. He found himself bedridden for the next 24 hours. As Yom Kippur came to a close, Dashev was feeling better and able to resume working.

"It was clear to me G-d was showing me there was room for me to be able to do what I love while learning more about my faith," Dashev says unequivocally. "I needed that push and moment of realization, and from there my religious journey took off."

The couple was living in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn at the time, becoming part of the community led by Rabbi Shimon Hecht, and soon thereafter moved to nearby Crown Heights, identifying by then as fully-fledged Chabad chassidim.

In Crown Heights, Dashev grew steadily in his Judaism. He began attending the Chassidut classes of Rabbi Yossi Paltiel, and found himself transfixed.

"I enjoyed it way more than I expected, and being in the heart of the Chassidic community for Shabbat took my appreciation for it to a whole new level," he says. "I began learning Yiddish and studying the Rebbe's teachings in their original language with a group of friends. I finally felt I had found my Jewish home."

Dashev was still shooting women's fashion—his primary source of income. Various rabbis had given him latitude on the matter, since it was his livelihood. His wife urged him to seek a more definitive answer.

He met with Rabbi Gavri-

el Zinner, a world-renowned Halachic decisor, who indicated that while it was OK for Dashev to continue, ideally he should pivot away. A lesson from Rabbi Paltiel, his primary teacher, on the importance of maintaining the soul's sensitivity, sealed the deal.

In March 2018, Dashev pulled the trigger: Even if his income suffered, he resolved, it was worth it. When

he informed his last client he would only photograph men, they chose not to contract him for future work.

The following month, he received a call: a major job opportunity offering half a year's salary with a two-week timeline. "I tried to elevate this part of my life, and then this job suddenly came out of nowhere. We could say G-d works like that. We do our

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