ב"ה

Lubavitch International

Journal

3 TAMMUZ 5784 / 2024

Sample

Thirty Years:

A Deeper Look

Essays on the Rebbe's Torah

Hillel Broder, Yosef Bronstein, Michael Eigen,
Susan Handelman, Naftali Loewenthal, Ariel Evan Mayse,
Jacob Olidort, Jonathan D. Sarna, Jacob J. Schacter,
Lawrence H. Schiffman, Chana Silberstein, Devorah Silberstein

Sample

Lubavitch International Journal
Vol 1 | 3 Tammuz 5784 / 2024

COPYRIGHT © 2024 | MACHNE ISRAEL
All rights reserved, no part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission

A PUBLICATION OF MACHNE ISRAEL
RABBI YEHUDA KRINSKY, CHAIRMAN

EDITORS
BAILA OLIDORT
SARAH OGINCE

ADVISORY BOARD
RABBI YOSEF B. FRIEDMAN
RABBI DOVID OLIDORT
RABBI ELI SILBERSTEIN

PRODUCTION MANAGER
RABBI SHNEUR BROOK

Photos by Shlomo Vishinsky
Courtesy of Zev Markowitz, Chai Art Gallery

Art direction and design by Spotlight Design

CHABAD LUBAVITCH
HEADQUARTERS

770 EASTERN PARKWAY, BROOKLYN, NY 11213
718-774-4000 | EDITOR@LUBAVITCH.COM
WWW.LUBAVITCH.COM

Thirty Years:

A Deeper Look

Essays on the Rebbe's Torah

Sample

Lubavitch International Journal

Contents

5 **Foreword**
BAILA OLIDORT, SARAH OGINCE

9 **A Philosophy of Servant Leadership**
Inverting the roles of leader and follower for an interdependent model
HILLEL BRODER

13 **A Leader Who Transcends Himself**
What is the providential lesson behind the fame of the Rebbe's face?
YOSEF BRONSTEIN

17 **Presence That Keeps Opening**
The Rebbe's words took me to places I couldn't have guessed
MICHAEL EIGEN

21 **Thankful Am I**
Unpacking the spiritual complexity of a simple prayer
SUSAN HANDELMAN

29 **Standing at Two Thresholds: A Chasid in Academe**
Can faith and reason coexist?
NAFTALI LOEWENTHAL

35 **Thinking with Trees: Spiritual Growth and Human Flourishing**
Gleanings by an activist devoted to Jewish ecology
ARIEL EVAN MAYSE

41 **The Rebbe and the Art of Loving**
The legal rigors behind a commonplace slogan
JACOB OLIDORT

45 **A Debate That Changed Jewish Life in America**
Chabad's public menorah displays confront the First Amendment
JONATHAN D. SARNA

51 **The Six-Day War of 1967 and Beyond**
The halachah responds to changing circumstances
JACOB J. SCHACTER

57 **Towards a Unified Conception of Jewish Spirituality**
Deconstructing the Chanukah miracles
LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN

63 **Helpmate or Adversary?**
Misreading Rashi's interpretation of female agency
CHANA SILBERSTEIN

67 **Reading Rashi Between the Lines**
Discerning insight from the absence of words
DEVORAH SILBERSTEIN

Sample

Sample

Foreword

Rabban Simeon ben Gamliel says: One does not build mausoleums for the righteous; their words become their remembrance.

—Jerusalem Talmud, *Shekalim* 2:5

In 1980, on the thirtieth yahrzeit of *his* father-in-law, the Lubavitcher Rebbe quoted Ezekiel: "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year . . . that the heavens were opened, and I saw a vision." For the Rebbe, the vision was as notable for its timing as for its content. The thirtieth year, he said, is when new horizons open up to us. This was an auspicious moment to begin searching his predecessor's legacy for deeper dimensions.

On the thirtieth yahrzeit of the Rebbe, it is, for us as well, an auspicious time to search his legacy for deeper dimensions. The Mishnah tells us that thirty years is the "age of strength." The commentaries elaborate: this refers also to spiritual strength, for after thirty years, one has accrued enough wisdom to inspire and influence others. The Rebbe's thirtieth yahrzeit, then, represents a spiritual coming of age.

His passing in 1994 preciptated a cascade of literature examining his legacy. The Rebbe ascended to Chabad's helm during the fraught and fragile post-Holocaust period, shepherding the Jewish community through the ensuing forty years. He and his consequential leadership have therefore proven to be a subject of unremitting interest.

That the Rebbe's life-project—ensuring that *no Jew would be left behind*—continues to gain momentum, is itself testament to a legacy that has few parallels in the annals of leadership.

Still more has been written and recorded about the Rebbe's

Sample

private meetings—with everyone from world leaders to street cleaners. These individuals have filled volumes, recounting their experiences and the lasting imprints left on their lives. And more has yet to be told.

And then, of course, there are books and articles about the person himself. Who was this man who came upon the scene to uplift the Jewish people at their lowest ebb? Who were his parents? What was his childhood like? What interests did he pursue?

But a more probative path to understanding the Rebbe is through his teachings. His hours-long Shabbat *farbrengens*, the countless volumes of his talks and discourses: these are surely the most penetrating portal into the mind and the man—the seventh and last Rebbe of Chabad.

As the Tannaitic sage Rabban Simeon ben Gamliel says: the righteous are remembered by their words.

For this reason, we chose to commemorate the Rebbe's thirtieth yahrzeit with this journal, examining many aspects of his Torah. That the contributors hail from various backgrounds, disciplines and perspectives is not incidental.

While the people who flocked to the Rebbe for guidance and blessings were often as different from one another as could possibly be, the same could not be said of his students—at least in the early years. They were a homogenous group for the most part. Schooled from childhood in the Rebbe's distinct vernacular and idiomatic expressions, they immersed themselves in his oeuvre of *sichot* and *maamarim*. They were, almost exclusively, Lubavitcher Chasidim.

But over the decades, this circle has widened, as people from diverse backgrounds and various schools of Torah have ventured into the Rebbe's corpus, studying his teachings with fresh eyes. The unique perspectives from which they parse his words and interpret his ideas often call on us to deepen our own understanding of the Rebbe and his Torah. The scholars and thinkers in this journal now do the same.

Sample

In these essays you will learn how the first words uttered upon awakening inspired one of the Rebbe's most essential discourses on Chasidut. You will read about his counterintuitive approach to preparing for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, see how he interpreted a troubling commentary on a verse in Genesis, and how he explained our spiritual roots through the study of trees. Several of the essays take us on a tour of conflicting ideas that become unified in the Rebbe's spiritual ethos.

In the thirtieth year, Ezekiel said, the heavens open. We are so grateful to each of the writers who contributed to this journal, calling in the chariot, revealing new dimensions to the Rebbe's Torah. Here, we remember the Rebbe through his words.

The Editors

Sample

Sample

A Philosophy of Servant Leadership

HILLEL BRODER

On an initial reading, *Ve-atah Tetzaveh*, the last of the Rebbe's monographs published under his supervision,[1] appears to be a nearly autobiographical statement of his lifework. Growing a committed Jewry in postwar America required devotion to his flock in exile, and a true love and appreciation for his people. As an educator and newly appointed head of a large Jewish day school, I read it with interest.

Returning to the discourse after an unprecedented and challenging year, however, I was drawn to some of the more radical points embedded in the work. I found the Rebbe's words deeply resonant and novel.

Opening with the paradigmatic leader, Moses, the Rebbe calls him the "head" of his people. Yet a head can go only as far as the mobility of its feet. And so, with Moses serving as their head, the people carry, elevate, and increase the reach of their leader. This interdependence is striking in the Rebbe's reading: through Moses' binding of the people to G-d, Moses himself becomes fully realized as a leader, extending his reach and capacity to lead.

1. Published in English as *Nurturing Faith* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2005).

Sample

I have often thought about the interdependence that exists within a school, where diffused leadership is the most effective, and where a leader can demonstrate success only when a school or program continues on without their presence. I've also thought about how it is the students who realize the mission of the teachers, carrying their education forward into the world, extending and expanding their teachers' legacy.

Later in the work, the Rebbe focuses on the leader not only as a faithful shepherd of his people, but as a shepherd who stewards faith—and, in so doing, nourishes and sustains faith. This form of leadership, as nurturing and believing in his people, inverts the roles of the leader and followers so that the responsibility is not on the people to follow, but on the leader to fan the flames of his people's faith.

The Rebbe, in my reading, distinguishes between faith in an unknown and inaccessible transcendent reality and a faith in one's own, embodied, immanent, divine self. Accordingly, the role of the leader is to inspire a faith literally in the divine self of each and every person. Perhaps this is not such a radical teaching to the initiated in Chabad.

As an outsider, however, what I find so remarkable is the way this approach privileges an intuited, tangible, and very human faith over faith that only the soul knows and that the mind trusts. As an educator, too, I know how important it is to both challenge and support students and faculty to realize their own potential: students need to know that leaders believe in their worthiness and ability to succeed, as do the adults mentored and supported on their professional journeys.

At the core of this work is the premise that faith in one's divine self is nurtured by a leader and realized by a people during some of the most oppressive and crushing moments of diasporic Jewry. This, no doubt, is an autobiographical statement of the Rebbe's belief in his people's ability—especially given the challenges of the Holocaust and the subsequent comforts of the American diaspora—not only to aspire to faith or self-sacrifice when things are hard, but to sustain such a faith and ethos when things are comfortable, too.

Sample

The Rebbe contrasts the transcendent revelation at Mount Sinai, when the people received the Torah, with the Babylonian exile, the time of Queen Esther and Mordechai, when, under an existential threat, the Jewish people reaffirmed their faith in G-d. The event at Sinai required no absolution of the self—just an absolute submission—whereas the events described in *Megillat Esther* stimulated a moment of true self-realization. And yet the latter's sensibility of sacrifice for the mission, the Rebbe insists, must be maintained even when one is not literally crushed by the exile.

As an outsider, however, what I find so remarkable is the way this approach privileges inherited, tangible, and very human faith over faith that only the soul knows and that the mind trusts.

When the people are beaten down by historic forces, when pressure is applied and the response is a commitment by a self to one's faith, then, paradoxically, one also realizes a faith in one's own abilities, a faith in one's own self. In my reading, it is a paradox central to the entire work, one that the Rebbe analogizes to the crushed olives that provide oil and illumination of the Temple's menorah.

His philosophy of leadership, of a leader who serves his people by nourishing a faith in their own abilities, especially when they are at their lowest point, is the paradigm of servant leadership. Such leadership refuses to see employees as means to an end, instead shouldering the responsibility to elicit the best in them, so that they bring their best selves to work. And in a school, this form of leadership is crucial: when a school leader contributes to their staff, it is the students who are the primary beneficiaries.

The Rebbe saw such a model of selfless leadership in his father-in-law's fostering of Jewish life under Soviet oppression. Now, thirty years since the Rebbe's passing, it is also the Rebbe's leadership that continues to nourish faith during an extraordinarily challenging time for world Jewry. In my own work, I have

Sample

found that not only does an educator who believes in his students extend and expand the reach of the teacher—the empowered student, too, advances the teacher's mission, nourishing that faith in himself and in all whom he encounters.

HILLEL BRODER is the Head of School at the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy in Rockville, Maryland. He previously served as Principal of DRS Yeshiva High School for Boys of the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach. He holds a Ph.D. in English from the CUNY Graduate Center, an M.A. in Jewish Philosophy from Yeshiva University, and a B.A. in English from Yeshiva University. He studied with and was granted rabbinic ordination by Rabbi Ari Enkin of Ramat Beit Shemesh.

Sample

A Leader Who Transcends Himself

YOSEF BRONSTEIN

The Lubavitcher Rebbe might have the most well-known face in the history of the Jewish people. His countenance smiles upon you from overpasses, gently reminds you from the walls of homes to grow, and wishes you well in the terminals of airports. It is nearly impossible to travel on the highways of Israel without encountering the face of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

While the immediate precipitants to this ubiquity are easily identifiable, the Rebbe himself taught to always try to disclose deeper and relevant messages that underlie worldly phenomena. In that spirit, we can ask—what is the providential lesson behind the fame of the Rebbe's face? And, more importantly, what does it mean for our practical service of G-d?

While I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, perhaps an explanation may be found in a curious feature of the Rebbe's teachings. The Rebbe's Torah spans the gamut of topics in Jewish tradition, history, and life. Included in his vast corpus are numerous passages about individual figures and their roles in G-d's historical plans. The Rebbe wove together intellectual and spiritual biographies of many great Jewish leaders, from Abraham and Moses to his own teachers, such as his father and the Rogatchover Gaon. He analyzed their personalities, achievements, and legacy for us today.

Sample

Interestingly, this focus on individuals ends with the generation before him. For example, the Rebbe described in great detail the historical role of each of the leaders of Chabad in advancing G-d's redemptive plan. But in his over forty years of public teaching as the leader of Chabad, he never discussed his own place in the chain.

In fact, as students of the Rebbe's Torah know, the seventh Rebbe of Chabad nearly excised himself completely from the conceptual framework of his own talks. In over seventy thousand pages of transcribed and written material, he assiduously avoided speaking in first person. In the very first discourse he delivered after assuming leadership of the movement, in which he highlighted the role of tzaddikim, i.e., religious leadership, in the world, he described his six predecessors before moving on to speak of the seventh *generation*, including everyone within it, and never mentioned himself.

When I initially realized the Rebbe's aversion to speaking in first person, I thought it might be attributable to a combination of privacy and piety. But, upon further learning and reflection, it seems reasonable to argue that the Rebbe was, in fact, intentionally implementing a deeply held philosophy.

The Rebbe often spoke of the concept of *bittul* (effacement) before a greater entity. The ideal person, according to his teachings, does not primarily self-identify as an autonomous and distinct individual with clear boundaries, but as part of a greater whole. A person's identity should be subsumed by the greatness of his teachers, integrated into the totality of the Jewish people, and, ultimately, utterly effaced before the all-encompassing Presence of the Divine.

Importantly, *bittul* is not primarily about self-negation. It does not reduce all people to a state of homogenized blandness. Rather, *bittul* is about realizing that the entirety of one's unique personhood was created by G-d to express something greater than oneself.

This point is demonstrated by the analogies employed by Chabad Chasidut and further developed by the Rebbe to describe *bittul*. *Tanya* describes the consciousness of *bittul* in terms of the

Sample

rays of the sun.[1] In Rabbi Schneur Zalman's depiction, we are all unique rays of sun that on the surface appear independent but are ultimately subsumed into the source of light itself. The true nature and purpose of each unique ray can be understood only when the ray is seen as a vehicle to express its source.

Similarly, the Rebbe noted[2] that earlier Chabad writings pointed to the moment of the appearance of the new moon as signifying the consciousness of *bittul*. On the one hand, this is when the moon becomes visible and, from our perspective, comes into existence. But it is also the moment when we realize that the moon's radiance is only a reflection of the sun's. Once again, the moon exists as a unique entity, but as one that can be best understood as a vehicle to express a light that is greater than its own.

The Rebbe seems to have embodied this balance. On the one hand, he was the practical leader of his Chasidim, a group that grew both in numbers and in impact during his tenure. In addition, his teachings, messages, and personal kindness inspired and still inspire millions of people. He clearly articulated a bold vision of a better world and worked tirelessly to create it. By all accounts, he was a leader with a strong presence who accomplished amazing feats.

Yet he never took credit for it. His talks and letters do not intimate any aggrandizement of self. It was always about the "other"—his father-in-law (the previous leader of Chabad), the Chasidim, the Jewish people, the world, and ultimately G-d. The vision of a redeemed world enchanted and challenged him precisely because it would end the suffering and bring the flourishing of all these "others." Even as the Rebbe was a presence, his self-erasure from his own books demonstrates that he lived and toiled to express and better the broader existence of which he was part.

> **The Rebbe nearly excised himself completely from the conceptual framework of his own talks. In over seventy thousand pages of transcribed and written material, he assiduously avoided speaking in first person.**

Sample

---

1. See, for example, *Likkutei Amarim,* chapter 33.

2. See, for example, *Maamar BaChodesh HaShlishi* 5729, *se'if* 5, *Torat Menachem*, *Hitvaaduyot 5729* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2014), 1:185.

Perhaps this is why the Rebbe merited the publicity that he deservedly holds today. There is a rabbinic adage that one who flees from honor merits to have honor chase him. During his lifetime, the Rebbe effaced himself from his own teachings. Perhaps this contributed to the Jewish people's adulation and admiration of him.

In our visual age, then, the Rebbe's image has come to symbolize an idea much larger than himself. It reminds us that it is precisely by focusing on the "other" and seeing oneself as part of the greater whole through which one can achieve the consciousness of *bittul*. It is through this perspective that divinity can shine through us and elevate the world.

RABBI DR. YOSEF BRONSTEIN received rabbinic ordination and a Ph.D. in Talmudic Studies from Yeshiva University. He is the Rosh Bet Midrash of Machon Zimrat Haaretz, a community learning center in Efrat, Israel, and the author of *Engaging the Essence: The Philosophy of the Lubavitcher Rebbe* (New Milford: Maggid Books, 2024).

Sample

A Presence That Keeps Opening

MICHAEL EIGEN

It's hard to pin down how or when a sense of the holy begins in one's life. It can come from many places within and outside oneself and there can be many touchstone moments throughout a lifetime. A sense of the holy can have many dimensions and function in many ways. Yet one finds traces of it throughout one's being, and different moments in one's life come to mind without warning or search. Sometimes it is possible to assemble some of these moments and find moving patterns and concerns that have made a difference—a difference that continues to deepen, a sense of presence that keeps opening.

One such presence appeared once or twice a year at my home in Passaic, New Jersey, when I was a child. He had a white beard and black hat, and my father would stop everything and treat him with great respect, kindness, and awe. In time I understood that he came for a donation. What was most significant for me, little Mike, was a glow I saw on, and around Rabbi Kellner's face and head, a glow that as time went on I would come to call holy.

Many years later, when I was a graduate student in my thirties, a friend took me to 770 Eastern Parkway for a High Holidays service to see the Rebbe. At the time the most moving moment was the absolute hush as the Rebbe entered and walked down the main aisle to the front of the hall. I'm not sure I understood much of what was happening, but I already learned a tiny bit about the power of not understanding, part of which I would later call creative unknowing. The hush itself felt like an awesome

Sample

blessing, and as a psychologist-to-be I could not help but imagine what kind of silence and peace a baby might experience when its mother calms it with her hush-little-baby touch and voice. To be touched by silence, quiet, love. I think of a psalm that tells us to be still in our bed and hear G-d. Not that silence is the only, or even main, path, although it can be *a* path or part of a path. The Psalms end with music, cymbals, drums, and horn. What will take us where, and when, is often a mystery. Ancients spoke of the music of the spheres. I like speaking of the music of the psyche. Many speak of soul music. We live in a musical universe with musical beings—although cacophony also has its values. For me, singing in shul was an uplifting part of my childhood.

Shortly before his death, sitting in my sister's house, my father told me how he regretted his bad behavior towards me as I was growing up. Still, he felt he was "going back" with his integrity intact, a feeling I shared very deeply. He told me I didn't have to say *Kaddish* every day, but to do so at his funeral so as not to shame him. He spoke of *Kaddish* (a mourning song) as praising G-d. Indeed, I did say it at his funeral and more. One day that year I was able to sit with the Rebbe at the latter's home when he said *Kaddish* for his wife and I for my father. Hearing the Rebbe's deep singsonging tone helped open dimensions of being.

When I returned to Crown Heights, I met Rabbi Kellner's two sons, who were then living across the street from 770. I spent some time in their small apartment and tasted many aspects of Chabad life and spirit. The confluence of studying with the sons of Rabbi Kellner from my childhood, now old men themselves, was very special and moving.

As time went on, the Rebbe's writings became part of my life. Two particular moments were transforming: One was reading about the *Yechidah* soul in his book *On the Essence of Chassidus*.[1] I had read this book before, but as I neared my eighties, passages about the *Yechidah* soul's contact with G-d, essence to essence, changed my life. In part, it made me feel that no matter how soiled other soul areas may be, there is still unspoiled contact with G-d. Mysterious and unknown, perhaps, yet very real. It does

1. (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2003). Translated from the Hebrew original, *Inyanah shel Toras haChasidus*.

Sample

not mean total redemption, but even if infinitesimal, the effect is momentous, transforming, a breath of faith. I think the invitation to love G-d with all your heart, soul, and might has deep support. Something I thought would never get better broke open. Voiceless conversation with the unknown source of creation opens life. The Rebbe's words took me to places I couldn't have guessed.

> **I had read this book before, but as I neared my eighties, passages about the *Yechidah* soul's contact with G-d, essence to essence, changed my life. . . . It does not mean total redemption, but even if infinitesimal, the effect is momentous, transforming, a breath of faith.**

I was not totally ill-prepared. In 1977 I had a meeting with Wilfred R. Bion, an amazing presence in psychoanalysis, and out of the blue Bion asked, "Do you know the Kabbalah?" I said I don't *know* it but I have read parts of it on and off for many years in many ways. He knew what I meant and said he felt the same way. We spoke a while at his stimulus about *The Zohar*, then, again, seemingly out of the blue he said, "I use the Kabbalah as a framework for psychoanalysis." To say I took this like a Zen koan would be mild. Yet it also gave me deep permission, and thirty-some years later I wrote three books about Kabbalah and psychoanalysis.

What leads to what in life? Did Bion ever meet the Rebbe? I think both would not merely have enjoyed the other's presence, but found it restoring and generative. I like to think of their meeting enlivened by ever-deepening soul sparks.

To paraphrase another of the Rebbe's writings that touched me deeply, drawn from *Tanya* and credited to the Baal Shem Tov, "G-d creates the world from nothing every moment." As a psychologist I take this to mean, in part, that there are ways we are always open to something more, nameless dimensions of being involved in self-creation. No matter how "stuck" we are, there is the possibility of "news of difference" (a phrase from Gregory Bateson).

I suspect there was something of this resonance when, as an older man, my father returned to the immigrant shul he had been

Sample

part of years before and began chanting the *haftorah* on Sabbaths. The last *haftorah* he chanted was the Book of Jonah on Yom Kippur, just months before he passed. Through Jonah, we experience our captivity and freedom through the Word of G-d. Is it sacrilegious to imagine something of G-d's essence as ever Creative Presence, a resonance reverberating in the heartbeat of our being?

Born in Passaic, New Jersey, eighty-eight years ago, **MICHAEL EIGEN** has written more than thirty books and many papers. He is a practicing psychologist-psychoanalyst in New York who brings together many authors and disciplines with thanks and appreciation for all we give to each other in living.

Sample

Thankful Am I

SUSAN HANDELMAN

מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם,
שֶׁהֶחֱזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה. רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ.

Thankful am I before You, living and eternal King, that You have mercifully restored my soul within me. Great is Your faithfulness.

As a young boy in 1950s Brooklyn, Nachum Stilerman delivered groceries from his father's store to the Lubavitcher Rebbe's mother. She would invite him into her apartment, tell him to sit, give him milk and cookies, and speak warmly with him. He once asked her, "What is the Rebbe's favorite prayer?" She didn't know, she said, but promised to ask her son. When Nachum made the next grocery delivery, she had the answer:

> "It's a very short prayer," she said. "It's the very first prayer we say in the morning, *Modeh ani lefanecha: "Thankful am I before You, living and eternal King, that You have mercifully restored my soul within me. Great is Your faithfulness."*
>
> "That's it?" I asked.
>
> "Yes," she said. "That's his favorite."[1]

That short, seemingly simple prayer, which Jewish law directs us to say immediately upon awakening from the fog of sleep each morning, later became a focal point of a profound and complex monograph that the Rebbe delivered on 19 Kislev 5726

1. As recounted by Stilerman in an interview years later. https://videos.jem.tv/video-player?clip=10359.

Sample

(December 13, 1965). In it, he explored the question, What is the essence of Chasidut?[2] It was all of seventeen pages, with 135 extensive footnotes, several of which the Rebbe wrote. He then appended the monograph to the first volume of the *Chabad Encyclopedia*. To the Rebbe, this was an essential explication of Chabad philosophy.

A decade later, in 1977, I was a Ph.D. student in English literature at the State University of New York at Buffalo. I had become a regular at the Chabad House near campus, which was drawing me closer to God and Torah. One of the rabbis with whom I was studying, Rabbi Heschel Greenberg, suggested that we honor the Rebbe's upcoming seventy-sixth birthday by translating that extraordinary monograph into English. We went slowly for months, agonizing over every word, looking up and explaining every reference in the footnotes from the Bible, to the Talmud, Jewish law, Midrash, Kabbalah, philosophy, general *Chasidut*, and the writings of the previous six Chabad rebbes. Our translation was published with the title *On the Essence of Chassidus*.[3] Looking back now, I realize that nothing else I have learned in Torah and Jewish thought in the past forty-seven years has affected me so profoundly.

Our translation was published with the title *On the Essence of Chassidus*. Looking back now, I realize that nothing else I have learned in Torah and Jewish thought in the past forty-seven years has affected me so profoundly.

Over those decades, most of the details and intricate analyses of *On the Essence of Chassidus* receded from my conscious memory. I became a professor of English literature and taught for twenty years at the University of Maryland. I moved to Israel in 2001 and spent another two decades at Bar-Ilan University. But some words never left my heart and mind. In the past months of

Sample

---

2. Edited and published in Hebrew as *Inyanah shel Toras haChasidus*.

3. Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 2003.
Editor's note: While the work's title uses the Ashkenazi pronunciation ("Chassidus"), the essay employs the Sephardic form, "Chasidut," for the sake of consistency across the journal.

cruel and unending war that began on October 7, 2023, in Israel, these words have given me solace, resolve, and strength. In the limited space I have here, I want to share them with you.

I. The power of *Modeh Ani*

My task is somewhat difficult. The monograph introduces novel explanations of fundamental concepts in Chasidic thought such as the three levels of creation, the four modes of Torah interpretation, the five orders of the soul, the ten "Divine attributes," and the infinite meanings of G-d's kabbalistic name.

But in the second part of the talk, the Rebbe returns to his favorite prayer. Of all the possible topics in Torah literature to illustrate the "essence" of Chasidut's light and vitality, he chooses *Modeh Ani*. As he looks to the Chasidic depth embedded in the prayer's literal meaning, he shares the words that I have never forgotten.

Why, the Rebbe asks, are we allowed to say the *Modeh Ani prayer* immediately upon awakening? All other prayers require us to wash our hands first, clearing away the ritual impurities of sleep. The Rebbe answers:

> Because all the impurities of the world cannot contaminate the *Modeh Ani* of a Jew. It's possible that a person may be lacking in one respect or another—but his or her *Modeh Ani* remains perfect.

All the impurities of the world cannot contaminate the Modeh Ani of a Jew. There is, he explains, an indestructible, pure essence to every Jew's soul that is connected to the essence of G-d. He goes on to say that this connection imbues every Jew with a selfless devotion to his or her Divine purpose. This is the source of a Jew's willingness to sacrifice his or her life for G-d, Torah, a fellow Jew, the nation of Israel.

For me personally, looking back over the thirty years since the Rebbe's passing, and the forty-three years of his term as Rebbe, those few words summarize the way he was "waking us all from sleep." The Rebbe inherited a post-Holocaust generation of Jews who had lost connection to their deepest soul. The Rebbe woke us from this sleep, and in our confused fog, he activated the power of our *Modeh Ani*.

Sample

II. The simplicity of essence

I can only briefly give you a taste of how the Rebbe elicits this essence from within even the most basic, literal level of the prayer's interpretation. The Rebbe explains why we are obligated to say the *Modeh Ani* prayer upon awakening each morning: so that we will immediately remember the presence of G-d, Creator of all worlds, "standing over" us, and so "arise with zeal."

And, the Rebbe adds, this is also how we serve G-d throughout the entire day, and why we follow the Torah and fulfill its mitzvahs throughout our entire lives: to have G-d constantly in mind. The *Modeh Ani* prayer ends with a period, but, as the fifth Chabad rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer, said: "One must spread the 'dot'—the period after the word 'mercy' in the prayer—out over the entire day."[4]

There is also something curious about the way this prayer is formulated. It does not contain the standard, familiar, legally codified words we usually use for blessings of gratitude or enjoyment: "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe . . ." It doesn't have any of the holy names of G-d that are used in those blessings (*Ado-nai; Elo-keinu*), or any of the seven other names for G-d that we're not permitted to erase. Jewish law explains this omission as due to the prohibition on pronouncing any of these names until *after* the ritual washing of the hands first thing in the morning, to remove the "ritual impurities" of sleep from the soul and body.

Chasidut, says the Rebbe, offers a different reason for the omission of G-d's names: even with impure hands, the essence of the Jewish soul, which is drawn from the essence of G-d, *is higher than G-d's seven names.* The Jewish soul remains pure and perfect, despite any external imperfections.

This highest level of soul is called in midrashic and kabbalistic sources the *Yechidah*. In Hebrew, *Yechidah* means "sole," or "only one." It's the "soul of the soul," as it were. The "quintessence." In Kabbalah, it's beautifully described as the "small spark [of G-d, which] enclothes itself in the small spark [of the human being]."

---

4. *On the Essence of Chassidus*, 54.

Sample

The *Yechidah* receives directly from and unites with G-d, who is *Yachid*, meaning literally in Hebrew "the Sole, Only One."

Let me offer a personal way of explaining this. After my mother passed away, while cleaning out her apartment, I found a box of love letters to her that I had never seen before. They were from my father, who had died fifty-two years earlier. Some were several pages long and beautifully written. One of them, in its utter simplicity, was among the most moving to me: just a few words on an aerogram, written from a plane while on a business trip: "I love you only." That's it. In other words, you are the sole, only one; I am yours completely, I belong to you only. That is the "simplicity" of essence.

In Chabad thought, "essence" *(atzmut)*, the Rebbe reminds us, is defined as abstract, ungraspable, beyond all description and division, beyond all form, or any particular manifestation. But it also underlies, enables and unites all those manifestations.

> The *Yechidah* level of the soul is this essence. It is abstract, ungraspable, beyond our names, beyond our biographies, beyond all the particular ways in which we express ourselves. Yet it underlies and gives life to everything we are.

The *Yechidah* level of the soul is this essence. It is abstract, ungraspable, beyond our names, beyond our biographies, beyond all the particular ways in which we express ourselves. Yet it underlies and gives life to everything we are. It is at once utterly transcendent and particular; and that, the Rebbe notes, gives rise to the Jew's capacity for self-sacrifice.

III. Simchat Torah revelation

I had earlier encountered a slightly variant explanation of this quality of the Jewish soul in chapter 18 of *Tanya*, by the founder of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman. He writes emphatically that "even the most unlearned, and those ignorant of G-d's greatness, and even the transgressors of Israel, in the majority of cases, sacrifice their lives for the sanctity of G-d's Name, and suffer harsh torture rather than deny the One G-d."

I confess that I had always been somewhat skeptical, even

Sample

though it was a beautiful idea. Maybe it was true for the great heroes of past Jewish history, or those who have highly developed themselves. But the notion that it's in the power of each one of us, no matter what our spiritual status, or level of knowledge, or observance, or transgressions, was hard for me to accept or empirically experience.

And then came Simchat Torah, October 7, 2023. Since that day, and up to the very moment I am writing these words, I witnessed a traumatized nation arise, and Jews of all kinds—religious and non-religious, learned and unlearned, soldiers and citizens—give their lives and limbs to defend their fellow Jews and the nation of Israel. The masks came off; the *Yechida* was revealed.

I have space for only a few short examples among endless possible others, which I read and hear on the news every day. Consider that one of the hostages released in the exchange of November 2023 related that after her time in Hamas's tunnels, she had been held in an apartment with fellow nineteen-year-old female hostage Agam Berger (who was still in captivity as of this writing). Agam was kidnapped from her military base near the Gaza border early in the morning of October 7th. In the apartment, the two were treated as servants and commanded to clean, cook, and so forth. When Friday evening arrived, however, Agam refused to light the stove or cook . . . because it was Shabbat. Jewish law would have permitted her to override the prohibitions of Shabbat to save her own life, but she resisted nonetheless. From where did Agam gain this strength?

Ben Sussman was a twenty-two-year-old combat engineering soldier from Jerusalem who had finished his formal service and been discharged in July 2023. He heard the news on October 7 and, before receiving any official call from the army, packed his bag and went directly into action as a reservist. Here are a few lines from the letter he wrote that day, which his mother Sarit read at his funeral in December 2023.

> I'm writing this letter to you as I'm heading to the base. If you're reading this, something must have happened to me. . . . I am happy and grateful for the privilege I have to defend our beautiful land and beautiful people of Israel. In case something happened to me, I forbid you from sulking in sorrow.

Sample

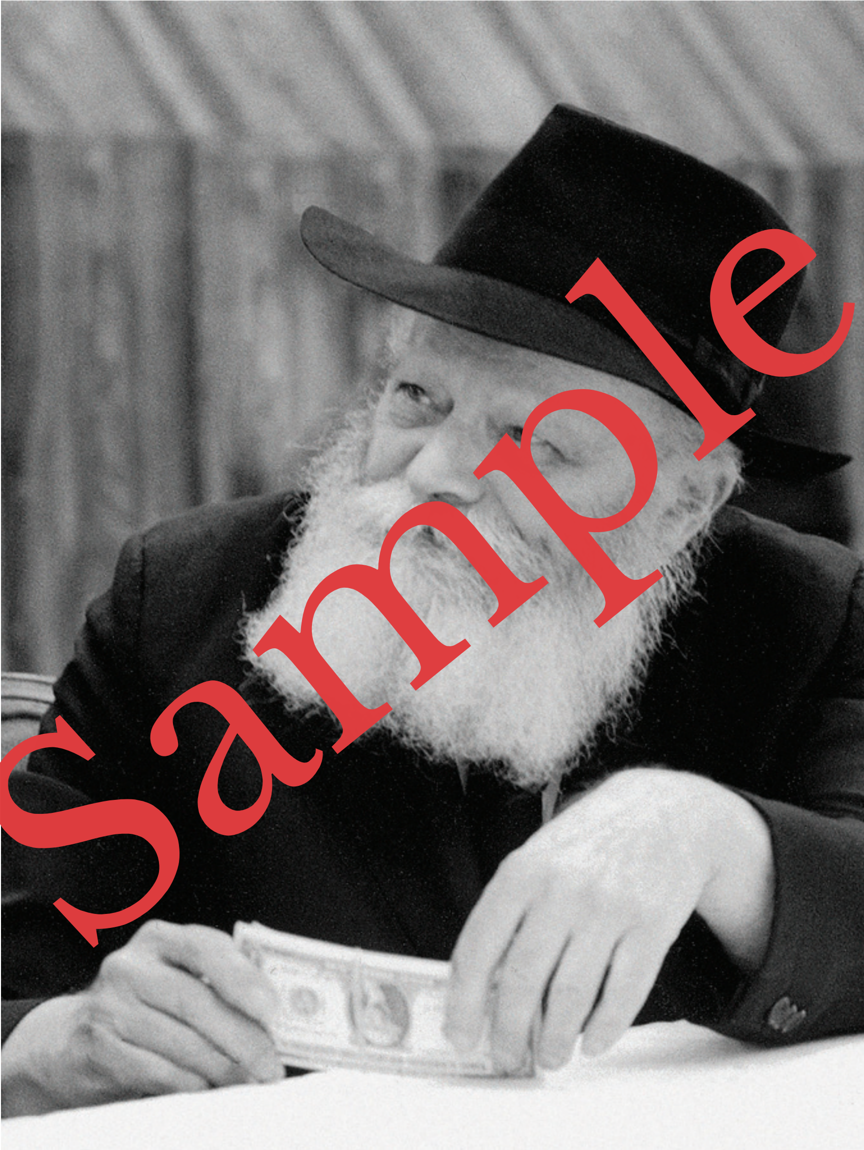
. . . I am filled with pride and a sense of purpose, and I always said that if I had to die, I wish it would be in defense of others and the State.

All the impurities of the world cannot contaminate the Modeh Ani *of a Jew. It's possible that a person may be lacking in one respect or another, but his or her* Modeh Ani *remains perfect.*

Thankful am I.

SUSAN HANDELMAN is Professor Emeritus of English Literature at Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv, Israel. She is the author of many books and articles, including *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany, NY: SUNY University Press, 1983), and *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Scholem, Benjamin and Levinas* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

Sample


Sample

Standing at Two Thresholds:

A Chasid in Academe

NAFTALI LOEWENTHAL

In 1968 I began studying Hebrew Literature and Jewish History at University College London. The course was fascinating, with some leading scholars teaching us. At the same time, I was part of a small group of Orthodox students who would support each other in discussion of issues which came up in class, such as the Documentary Hypothesis,[1] and other challenges to the Orthodox worldview.

One might ask why people with beliefs which might seem more appropriate to the Haredi enclave of Meah Shearim had chosen to attend a secular university in London. Each field has its own history of Orthodox Jewish takeup (or avoidance). In the 1960s it was quite common for alumni of the esteemed Gateshead Yeshivah to study law or accountancy, which would eventually ensure a *parnasah* (income) that would give them time for extensive daily Talmud study, their real heartfelt desire. The case of Jewish Studies is somewhat different (especially as regards *parnasah*!); however, one might say there is much to be gained by developing broader and more extensive approaches to the history and nature of traditional Jewish sources. But the academic

1. For a recent scholarly Orthodox discussion of this issue see Joshua Berman, *Ani Maamin: Biblical Criticism, Historical Truth, and the Thirteen Principles of Faith* (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2020).

Sample

perspective also has to be critical, which in practice often means demolishing cherished beliefs. The question for us, as undergraduate students—and also later—was how far one could go in navigating faith and reason together. Would we have to choose one or the other, or could they somehow coexist?

Of course there are several pathways, going back centuries, which seek to stitch the two modes of thinking together. A midrash says a divine "day" is a thousand years, so the six days of Creation might mean six thousand years, or, taking a step further, six billion years, or as many as you like, in order to fit the latest version of the Big Bang Theory. But the Orthodox "fundamentalist" position is not satisfied with that. The Orthodox want the words of the *Kiddush* recited on Friday night to be taken literally: "[It was] the sixth day. The heavens and the earth and all their hosts were complete. With the seventh day G-d completed the work He had done, and He rested on the seventh day . . ."

> The Rebbe's answer surprised me. "You should write all the footnotes you need," he said. Then he added, with a broad smile, and switching to Yiddish, "and after that you should do *teshuvah*!"

During my years as a student, the challenge was sometimes presented in a very direct and personal way. One charming lecturer—who around 1930, had himself made the journey from traditionalist Hungary to Berlin and then on to London—once asked me: "How long will you stand uncertain at the two doorsteps?" quoting Elijah's plea to the Jews who were uncertain whether to follow the G-d of Israel, or Baal (I Kings 18:21). He meant, why don't you choose the path of secular scholarship instead of keeping to traditional views about issues such as the authorship of the Torah? I smiled in response, without saying anything. But it was clear to me on which side of the line I wanted to be.

Having gained my first degree, there was a period of uncertainty. Did I really want to be part of academe, with its secular pitfalls at almost every step? Despite these doubts, in 1972, I reluctantly began studying for a doctorate in the field of Chasidism, encouraged by Chimen Abramsky, who became my

Sample

supervisor. But I was still unsure.

Hence a year later, in July 1973, when I embarked on my first visit to New York, my primary goal was to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and then to ask him what I should do.

My main question to the Rebbe in my first *yechidut*, private audience, was: should I continue working on the Ph.D.? As an alternative, I suggested that I should go to Jews' College (now London School of Jewish Studies) and study to be a rabbi.

I met the Rebbe in his room, at around 2 A.M.; he looked at my written note with my question and encouraged me to continue working on the doctorate. "But what about the *apikorsus*?" I asked, meaning the critical, rational, secular perspective.

The Rebbe's answer surprised me. "You should write all the footnotes you need," he said. Then he added, with a broad smile, and switching to Yiddish, "and after that you should do *teshuvah*!"

I took these words to mean that indeed I should read and assess all the various views I might encounter. But I should know where I belong; I should know, from the point of view of Torah teachings and perspectives, what is inappropriate. The Talmud, although somewhat ambiguous, is critical of the study of "Greek wisdom,"[2] and Rabbi Schneur Zalman's *Tanya*[3] is even more negative, although it also gives reasons why one might study secular knowledge, such as to make a living, or to use one's knowledge to serve G-d, as Maimonides did.

It was clear that the Rebbe wanted me to write the doctorate thesis. Indeed some years later he strongly urged me to get it finished. After the doctorate came other pieces of academic research, till the present.

Despite having attended university himself, the Rebbe did not recommend it for the mass of his followers. People who were already entrenched in the university when they first met the Rebbe were in a different category. It is also likely that he saw in them the possibility of advancing the cause of Jewish observance, which he understood as the need of the time.[4]

---

2. *Bava Kama* 82b–83a.

3. Part 1, chapter 8.

4. There are today a considerable number of Chabad-educated followers who gain university qualifications, but usually at a later stage in life, such as after marriage.

Sample

But one does not have to go to university in order to encounter difficult questions about Torah, Judaism, and life. Is there a place for pure rationality in Judaism?

Maimonides claimed that use of reason in philosophical thought led to greater appreciation of the oneness of the Divine. This oneness was ultimately beyond reason, and beyond any definition, leading the individual to intense love, as Maimonides describes in his Laws of Repentance and the *Guide for the Perplexed*.[5] He also argued that Talmudic study without philosophical depth was gravely lacking.

As is well known, Maimonides' views on philosophy were harshly criticized by many other Jewish sages. For the anti-Maimonists, it was either Jewish faith or philosophical reason. You could not have both. The historical Rambam, as I understand his writings, believed that reason was a path to a deeper faith. As Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn, the fifth Lubavitcher rebbe, described it, Maimonides put faith in the center of the circle of reason. Wherever reason might wander, it was anchored to faith at the center.[6] This meant that reason could become a support for faith, rather than its opponent. Many feel the Chabad movement has taken a similar approach.

Contemporary academia is, on its face, not a realm where reason can lead to faith; instead it is a place where faith will often be challenged. Nonetheless, the Rebbe did encourage some people to enter that realm, just as he encouraged many of his *shluchim* to live in areas remote from the organized orthodox Jewish community and from kosher food shops, so that they would be able to spread "the wellsprings of Judaism." For the Chasid in academe, it is not Faith or Science. Somehow, they must coexist.

The Rebbe's vision was that, at some deep level, they do coexist, and that this will eventually become evident to all. One of his talks[7] discusses a passage in the *Zohar*, commenting on Genesis

Sample

---

5. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 10:3: "What is the love which is fitting? That he should love G-d with a tremendously great strong love, with his soul bound with love of G-d, thinking of this all the time, like those who are sick with love whose minds are continuously focused on the love of that woman. . . ." See the *Guide* 3:51.

6. See Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneersohn, *Torat Shalom*, 244.

7. *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 15, 42–48.

7:11: "In the six-hundredth year of the life of Noah . . . all the fountains of the great deep poured forth, and the windows of heaven were opened." The *Zohar* interprets this as a prophecy that, in the future (generally understood as the year 5600 A.M. [1840 C.E.]), the fountains of the great deep, "the lower wisdom," will pour forth, and the windows of heaven, "the upper wisdom," will also be thrown open. Through that, says the *Zohar*, the world will ascend to the messianic age.

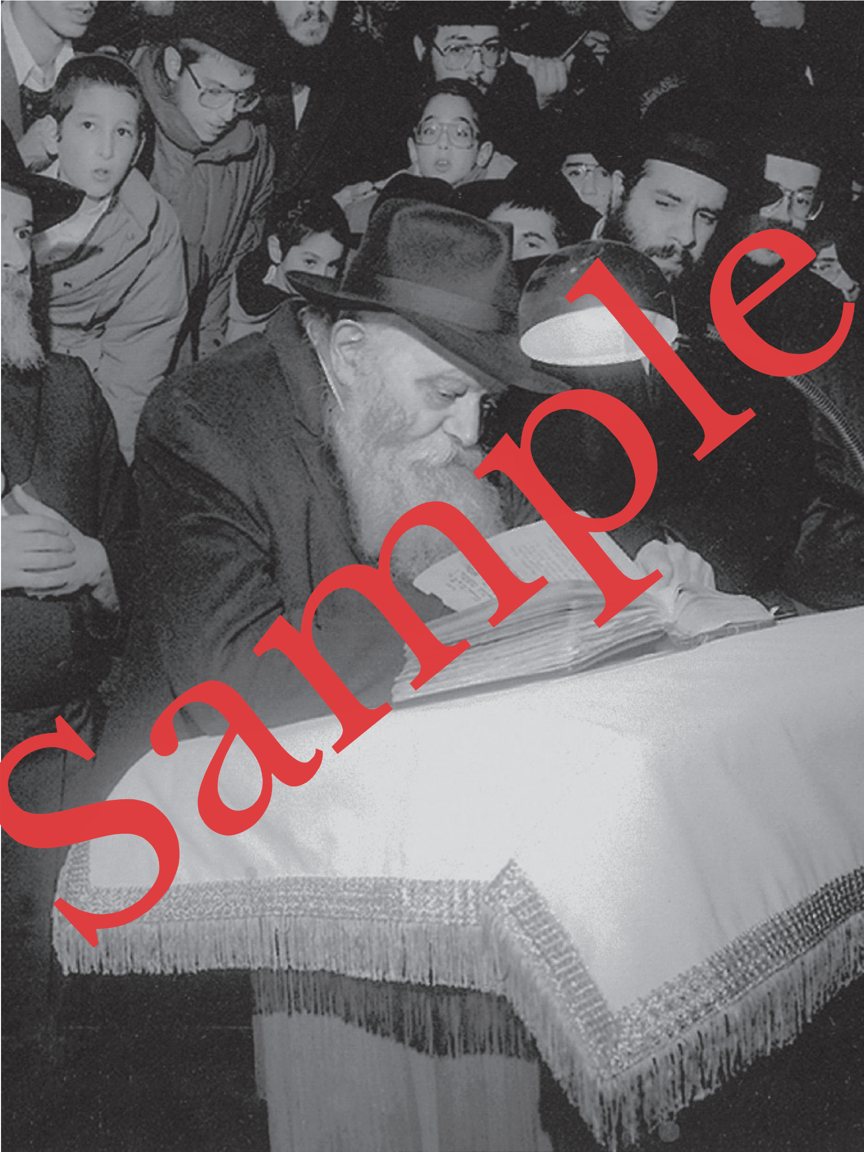
The Rebbe interprets these two types of wisdom as (a) science, the lower wisdom, and (b) the Chasidic dimension of Torah, the higher. The Rebbe firmly believed that the more science advances, the closer it comes to the truths of Torah. He also believed that it is through the lens of Chasidic teaching that those truths can best be understood.

For the Chasid in academe, it is not Faith or Science. Somehow, they must coexist. The Rebbe's vision was that at some deep level, they do coexist, and that this will eventually become evident to all.

One might say that, in the Rebbe's view, the Chasidic dimension provides the faith, the center point of one's being. There then comes science, in every form, including theoretical physics, biology, philosophy, psychology, literary theory, economics, critical history, whatever it might be. One explores, with care. And at the same time, with the sense of a constant quest for the center point of faith, one does *teshuvah*.

Sample

NAFTALI LOEWENTHAL is a Lecturer at the Dept. of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University College London. He is the author of *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) and *Hasidism Beyond Modernity: Essays in Habad Thought and History* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2020).



Sample

Thinking with Trees

Spiritual Growth and Human Flourishing

ARIEL EVAN MAYSE

Sample

I have long been captivated by the Rebbe's bold mystical teachings and his radical social vision. Alongside his exploration of traditional Chasidic concepts and theological keywords, I am particularly drawn to his willingness to think with the findings of modern science, physics, and engineering, and to consider their implications for our inner spiritual lives. His personal notebooks discuss everything from Pascal's law of fluid dynamics to contemporary advances in mathematics. This engagement was, of course, rather complicated: in his sermons and letters, the Rebbe sought to refute scientific accounts of creation and evolution on theoretical grounds. Far from a cursory engagement with these subjects, the Rebbe's writings reveal a knowledge of the broader vistas of human intellectual activity and of the natural world itself.

Much of the Rebbe's early efforts in America were devoted to strengthening Jewish education and religious institutions. This activity was the context of a striking letter written around the early spring holiday of Tu BiSh'vat in 1944, a text that investigates what we might learn from careful attunement to the growth patterns and anatomy of trees. The letter was addressed to a religious fellow traveler and partner in the work of education,

a certain Mr. Bezborodko, evidently a Jewish scientist who had known the Rebbe since his time in the academic communities of France. In this text, written before he had assumed leadership of Chabad, Rabbi Schneerson makes the following observations:

> Regarding this month's holiday, which is the New Year for the trees, there is much to learn from this, for one who pays attention to everything in their environment will gain wisdom from each and every thing, [learning about] one's conduct [both] in the service of G-d and toward other people. This is true not only when we witness something extraordinary, but even [in] the most common phenomena—like a blossoming tree. Countless teachings may be gleaned from ordinary life.
>
> I will explain a few of them to you:
>
> Most types of vegetative life, and especially trees, are composed of many different parts that are, in essence, three: roots, body (trunk, branches, and leaves) and fruit (the peel or shell, the fruit itself, and the seeds).
>
> The difference between them:
>
> Roots are hidden from our vision, but they are the locus of the tree's primary vitality (even though its leaves draw necessary materials from the air, heat from the sun's rays, and so forth). Moreover, the tree stands because of its roots. If they are strong, it has no fear of being uprooted by winds.
>
> The body of the tree—this is the decisive majority of its stature. As time marches on, thickness is added to the branches and leaves, so that through it—and especially by means of the trunk—we can ascertain the tree's age.
>
> The ultimate stage in the tree's completion is producing fruit, because the seeds it yields can bring forth new trees, generation after generation.
>
> "The human being is a tree of the field" [Deut. 20:19][1]—

---

1. The verse, which discusses a scorched-earth strategy when besieging a city, uses the comparison in the negative sense, prohibiting wanton destruction of vegetation because trees are *not* people. Rabbinic tradition, however, has long used it in the positive sense for educational purposes.

Sample

meaning that in many details we are similar to trees and other plants, including our spiritual lives. Here are some general remarks, also divided into three categories:

> The roots—this is faith, through which one is connected to the place and source of their vitality, which is the blessed Creator. Even as one grows in wisdom and commandments, one draws their vitality from faith in G-d's religion and Torah.
>
> The trunk and body of the tree—studying Torah, fulfilling the commandments, and doing good deeds, which ought to be the preponderance of one's stature and actions in this world. We can measure a person's "age"—meaning, the extent that their life is filled with wisdom and action—by [counting the] number of righteous actions and their greatness in Torah.
>
> The fruits—these are a person's ultimate fulfillment when, in addition to fulfilling all that is incumbent upon one, he or she shapes the environment and influences others so that they, too, can reach their fulfillment. His or her actions become the "seed" from which other trees (people) send out roots (the fundamentals of faith), a trunk, and branches (Torah and good deeds), and bear their own fruit themselves (giving to others).[2]

Our roots embed us in the rich, fertile soil of Jewish spirituality and theology, but they also bind us to the community around us in surprising and often invisible ways.

The Rebbe's letter outlines a stirring parallel between the growth and flourishing of a tree on one hand and the religious journey of human beings on the other. Much like our vegetative kin—composed of roots, trunk/branches, and fruit—our spiritual work can be trisected into a set of discrete but interrelated stages. We must first, and forever, remain grounded in

Sample

---

2. *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1987), no. 135 (pp. 247–8). The Rebbe seems to have reworked this same letter into a slightly different form, preserving the intellectual core while developing some ideas further and removing the context of immediate exchanges with Mr. Bezborodko. See *Igrot Kodesh*, ibid., no. 136 (pp. 249–50), and *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 6 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1973), p. 308.

our faith. Without powerful taproots connecting us to tradition, stabilizing our lives, and providing us with subterranean strength and resilience, all forms of spiritual work, activism, and being-in-the-world are impossible to sustain. It should also be noted that recent advances in botany and forest science have shown us that trees can communicate in some fashion through their elaborate mycelial networks. Our roots embed us in the fertile soil of Jewish spirituality and theology, but they also bind us to the community around us in surprising and often invisible ways.

This initial—and forever necessary—element of human growth must be translated into this-worldly activity. The religious labors of study and performing the commandments draw forth the potential energy included in the ground of our faith, transforming that spiritual power and connection into work that uplifts the world around us. These tasks require both fortitude and flexibility, qualities that flow from the depths of our religious roots. We can, in fact, calculate the maturity of an individual by examining the degree to which these inner filaments of spiritual awakening are realized through actions that impact and improve the society around them.

Such work is described as fruit precisely because it is twice-blessed: it represents the mature gift of one individual, but it also contains the seeds of the next generation who will carry this project forward into the future.

Such work is described as fruit precisely because it is twice-blessed: it represents the mature gift of one individual, but it also contains the seeds of the next generation who will carry this project forward into the future.

The Hebrew Bible frequently invokes “be fruitful and multiply” as the ultimate blessing. My father-in-law, Rabbi Nehemia Polen, has often pointed to the dynamic flexibility of this formulation. Seeds from any fruit-bearing plant are like our children: they may be genetically close, but each one is utterly individual and distinct. Their growth is further determined by a host of environmental factors, from soil nutrients, rainfall, and sunlight to their plant or animal competitors and co-inhabitants. In raising

Sample

children, like in the near-miraculous creativity of jazz improvisation, we cannot fully know exactly how they will sprout, but the work of education means ensuring that their roots can take hold in the inexhaustible ground of tradition.

The Rebbe's letter is a powerful spiritual and social teaching that guides my life as an educator, a writer, and an activist devoted to Jewish ecology, and which is core to my work at the helm of the Institute of Jewish Spirituality and Society. Rather than remaining cloistered away from the uncertain complexities of this world, the Rebbe's analogy illustrates that religious life *must* be expressed through engagement, connection, and community. We grow by first sending down roots and becoming linked to the reservoir of tradition. But establishing these enduring anchors is only an initial stage. We must go—grow!—into the world, working on behalf of others and helping them to reach their own fruition. This message is a valuable balm and an orientating principle for our troubled days of political polarization, social discord, and climate crisis. The Rebbe's teaching reminds us that the Jewish community, human society, and this beautiful created world of plants and animals is an enormous forest whose continued health and future are animated by connectivity, relationship, and reciprocity.

ARIEL EVAN MAYSE is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Stanford University, the rabbi-in-residence of Atiq: Jewish Maker Institute, and senior scholar-in-residence at the Institute of Jewish Spirituality and Society. He is the author of *Laws of the Spirit: Ritual, Mysticism, and the Commandments in Early Hasidism* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024), and *Speaking Infinities: God and Language in the Teachings of Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritsh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

Sample

Sample

The Rebbe and the Art of Loving

JACOB OLIDORT

In his work on the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the Rebbe includes a short section describing this period as a "specially designated time to increase one's love for one's fellow Jew *[ahavat Yisrael]*." There he writes:

> Since one is preparing for Yom Kippur, there must be love for every Jew, not only in ignoring their bad qualities—indeed, one deliberately pays attention to only their good qualities and thus loves them and unites with them—but even when one sees their bad traits, one nonetheless loves them without any deliberation. The love is expressed in one's great preoccupation and additional effort to help them overcome and nullify their bad qualities.[1]

It is by focusing on this love for the other, the Rebbe continues, that we merit to be sealed for "a good and sweet year in the physical and spiritual senses, with good that is both revealed and hidden."

On a basic level, the Rebbe's focus on *ahavat Yisrael* during this holiday seems out of place. This is the time of the year on the Jewish calendar for introspection, for looking at one's record and atoning for one's sins. (True, atonement may require asking forgiveness of those one has harmed or hurt, but even then, the focus

---

1. *Sefer Shaarei HaMo-adim: Yom HaKippurim* (Jerusalem: Heichal Menachem, 1995), 68–69.

Sample

would seem to be on one's own spiritual status.) To the contrary, the Rebbe explains—it is precisely because of the need for introspection that Jews should resist thinking only about themselves and should instead focus intently on their relationships. Not only does the Rebbe emphasize the importance of engaging in "love of one's fellow Jew" during this period, but he singles out this particular activity as key to sealing one's fate over the previous year and in determining the year to come.

Ahavat Yisrael has become a commonplace idea in Jewish communities nowadays, more of a slogan than a serious concept for scholarly study or religious observance.

Ahavat Yisrael has become a commonplace idea in Jewish communities nowadays, more of a slogan than a serious concept for scholarly study or religious observance. Yet the Rebbe treated this idea with the rigor he applied to any cardinal principle of Divine service. The older I get, the more I realize not only how central it is to my life, but how important it is to properly understand and practice it.

It is not love in the romantic sense, nor a simple concern for good manners. Rather, *ahavat Yisrael* is closer in meaning to a description of brotherly love the sociologist Eric Fromm gave in his 1956 work *The Art of Loving:* "an *attitude*, an *orientation of character* which determines the relatedness of the person to the world as a whole, not toward one 'object' of love" (emphasis Fromm's).

Maimonides explains that *ahavat Yisrael* is a positive commandment, derived from the verse "*Ve-ahavta lere-acha kamocha,*" commonly translated as "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). He goes on to say that whoever hates a fellow Jew transgresses a negative Torah commandment, based on the prooftext "Do not hate your brother in your heart" (Leviticus 19:17). To sharpen the point that the commandment addresses an internal state, Maimonides provides the following clarification: "The Torah warns us only about hating in our hearts. But one who hits a colleague or insults him, even though he is not permitted to do so, does not transgress the [aforementioned negative Torah commandment of] 'Do not hate.'"[2]

Sample

2. *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De-ot* 6:3–5.

The two mitzvahs—the positive (to love your fellow Jew) and the negative (do not hate your brother in your heart)—share one quality. Unlike many other commandments, which are tied to actions, these are about feelings. As a Torah decree, it is not to be taken lightly. How, then, can a person be certain they fulfill the commandment of *ahavat Yisrael?*

The Rebbe, in the passage I began with, seems to answer the question in two ways. First, about how to see one's fellow Jew: "Even when one sees their bad traits, one nonetheless loves them without any deliberation," and second, how one performs the act of loving: "great preoccupation and additional effort to help them overcome and nullify their bad qualities."

The insight of the Rebbe is that both are essential. Love requires being able to see another in a certain light, and then the ability to act on that feeling.

Love (and avoiding hate) is central to several commandments. Love of a *ger* ("stranger," or, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks translates the term, "one who is not Jewish by birth") is of an even higher status—Maimonides explains that it counts as two positive *mitzvot* (loving one's neighbor and the separate commandment to "love the stranger"). The sages of the Talmud observe that "the Torah commands us in only one place to love our neighbor but thirty-six times to love the stranger."[3]

I and my family have been direct beneficiaries of *ahavat Yisrael*; my parents would not have been able to emigrate from the Soviet Union were it not for expressions of love by Jews in America for their coreligionists beyond the Iron Curtain. Government work, in which I have been engaged for most of my career, is often referred to as "public service," a phrase that literally prescribes a way for me to relate to others. In the personal and professional aspects of my life, I have always thought of *ahavat Yisrael* as the foundation for being a good citizen and public servant—if I can master love of Jews, I can master love of all my fellow compatriots. It helps that my role models happen to be individuals who exemplify both loves.

As Rabbi Sacks observed in his book *To Heal a Fractured World*, "There is a danger in a religion like Judaism, with so many

---

3. *Bava Metzia* 59b.

Sample

clear-cut rules for highly specific situations, that we may forget that there are areas of life which have no rules, only role models, but which are no less religiously significant for that."

There is likely no better role model than the Rebbe. His emphasis on engaging in *ahavat Yisrael* during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur should be a goal for which we spend the rest of the year preparing and practicing. And perhaps it is that way of spending the rest of the year that, in the Rebbe's view, makes the year good and sweet.

DR. JACOB OLIDORT is a historian of the Middle East with nearly a decade of experience in the US government, including as foreign policy advisor to Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Josh Hawley (R-MO). He was also an advisor in the Office of former Vice President Mike Pence and in the Department of Defense. The views expressed here are entirely his own.

Sample

A Debate That Changed Jewish Life in America

JONATHAN D. SARNA

Jews, either individually or communally, should not create the impression that they are ashamed to show their Jewishness, or that they wish to gain their neighbors' respect by covering up their Jewishness. Nor will this attitude ensure their rights, to which they are entitled . . .

—The Rebbe writing to the Jewish community of Teaneck, New Jersey[1]

Written in December of 1981, these lines constituted a landmark in a public debate that had rocked the American Jewish community for close to a decade. The dispute, which portended momentous change for American Jews, centered around the seemingly innocuous issue of Chanukah menorahs.

On the seventh night of Chanukah in 1974, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov, a veteran emissary of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, had daringly organized the public lighting of a large menorah overlooking the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. A year later, another Chabad emissary placed a giant menorah in Union

1. Portions of this essay appeared earlier in *The New Jewish Canon: Ideas and Debates 1980–2015,* eds. Yehuda Kurtzer and Claire Sufrin (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020).

Sample

Square in San Francisco. In 1978, according to a report by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "huge menorahs" were being placed outside "at two major sites in Manhattan and at all New York City bridges and tunnel entrances and in ten other cities." The following year, thanks to Rabbi Shemtov and with timely assistance from presidential advisor Stuart Eizenstat, a menorah was placed in Lafayette Park, just north of the White House. President Jimmy Carter joined in lighting that menorah, ending one hundred days of self-imposed seclusion over the seizure of fifty-two American diplomats and citizens by Iranian students; he also delivered brief remarks.

> Rabbi Glaser urged the Rebbe to "direct a cessation of . . . lightings or other religious observances on public property," depicting them as being "as much a violation of the constitutional principle of separation of church and state as is the erection of Christmas trees and creches depicting the birth of Jesus."

Rabbi Shemtov had acted on his own initiative, seeking to carry out the Lubavitcher Rebbe's general directive to spread the light of Chanukah "throughout the world." These well-publicized menorah lightings presaged two major changes in American Jewish life. One of them was the transformation of Chanukah from an essentially private Jewish festival, celebrated in homes and Jewish institutions, into a public one marked as well in outdoor squares and government institutions. The second was the emergence of Chabad on the national scene, led by "emissaries" (*shluchim*) of the Rebbe, and housed in Chabad Houses and institutions that spread across North America, making Chabad the fastest-growing Jewish religious movement of the post-war era. Those two developments, we shall see, were linked.

Chabad's menorah displays, as they proliferated, sparked a heated debate across the American Jewish community. Some, especially liberal Jews, insisted that the principle of church-state separation, championed by the American Jewish community since the nineteenth century, meant that the public square should

Sample

be devoid of *any* religious symbols, Jewish or Christian. They viewed the Chabad menorahs as a violation of the "no establishment" clause of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. Others, Chabad's proponents in particular, insisted that the Constitution guaranteed them the "free exercise" right "to practice their religion without fear," and that the public square should be open to religious symbols of *every* kind. They viewed public menorah displays, especially since they coincided with a season when Christmas displays were omnipresent, as an expression of the very neutrality with regard to religion that the First Amendment was supposed to guarantee.

A remarkable—indeed, unprecedented—1978 exchange between Rabbi Joseph B. Glaser, then the executive vice president of the Reform Movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the Rebbe highlighted the two positions.[2] Rabbi Glaser urged the Rebbe to "direct a cessation of . . . lightings or other religious observances on public property," depicting them as being "as much a violation of the constitutional principle of separation of church and state as is the erection of Christmas trees and creches depicting the birth of Jesus. It weakens our hand when we protest this intrusion of Christian doctrine into the public life of American citizens. . . ." The Rebbe, in response, sought to "allay" Glaser's "apprehensions." After presenting his alternative understanding of the First Amendment, he emphasized that Chabad placed menorahs on public property to encourage Jewish religious identity and observance as well as Jewish religious pride. "Where Chanukah lamps were kindled publicly," he wrote, "the results have been most gratifying in terms of spreading the light of Torah and Mitzvoth, and reaching out to Jews who could not otherwise have been reached. . . ."

The exchange between these two rabbinic titans from opposite poles of the Jewish religious spectrum highlighted fundamental differences in outlook between them. Not only did they read the U.S. Constitution differently, they also embraced different

---

2. The exchange between the Rebbe and Rabbi Glaser is published in full in my book *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), and (with David G. Dalin) *Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997).

Sample

priorities and goals. Glaser believed that Jews flourished best in an America where religion and state remained totally separate. "The wall of separation between religion and state is like a dike," he argued. "The slightest breach is a dangerous portent of a torrent to follow." By contrast, for the Rebbe, as his biographer Joseph Telushkin observes, "what was paramount was reaching Jews who were not being exposed to Judaism, in this instance offering them as a point of entry the joyous 'festival of lights.' The Rebbe also wanted to show the non-Jewish world—and through them, non-observant Jews as well—an image of Jews who were willing to be very public about their religious commitment."

In his letter to the Jewish community of Teaneck, New Jersey, some three years after his exchange with Rabbi Glaser, the Rebbe set forth a portentous additional argument on behalf of the menorah displays. "Jews," the Rebbe insisted, "either individually or communally, should not create the impression that they are ashamed to show their Jewishness, or that they wish to gain their neighbors' respect by covering up their Jewishness." Having lived and studied in Paris prior to World War II, the Rebbe knew at firsthand about the French principle of *laïcité*, which *did* separate the French state from religion, thereby distinguishing *private* life, where adherents believed religions belonged, from the *public* sphere where all alike stood equal as citizens, devoid of religious or other particularities. Many enlightened European Jews had similarly embraced versions of this separationist principle. The nineteenth-century Hebrew poet Judah Leib Gordon, for example, in a poem entitled "Awake my People," called upon the modern Jew to "be a human being *("adam")* in the streets and a Jew at home."

Precisely this dichotomy the Rebbe now flatly rejected in his letter to the Jews of Teaneck and elsewhere. He deemed it crucial for Jews to *publicly* adhere to their religion, even as he respected the right of other faith communities to also display their religions in the public square. The development of numerous ideologies promoting racial, ethnic, and religious pride, notably "Black Is Beautiful" and "cultural pluralism," made it possible for him to defend his view in American terms that even his opponents had to respect. Menorah displays, he declared, were "fully in keeping with the American national slogan '*e pluribus unum*' and the fact

Sample

that American culture has been enriched by the thriving ethnic cultures which contributed very much, each in its own way, to American life."

The arguments for and against public displays of the menorah on government property soon provoked court challenges. One of them, in Pittsburgh, made its way all the way up to the United States Supreme Court, which, in 1989, upheld the public menorah on the grounds that it formed part of a broader holiday display akin to the display of Christmas trees, which it likewise permitted. "Both Christmas and Chanukah," the Court ruled, "are part of the same winter-holiday season, which has attained secular status in our society."

Later that year, perhaps influenced by the Court's ruling, Chanukah made its way into the White House itself when President George H.W. Bush displayed a menorah there given to him by the Synagogue Council of America. Twelve years later his son George W. Bush became, in 2001, the first President to host an official White House Chanukah party, and the first to actually light a menorah in the White House residence. In 2005, the Bush Chanukah party even became fully kosher—under the supervision of Chabad rabbis. White House Chanukah parties have taken place every year since.

Just three decades after the first public Chanukah candle-lighting at the Liberty Bell, Chanukah menorahs had become ubiquitous in public and government venues across the United States. Chabad too had become ubiquitous, a familiar presence in communities and college campuses from coast to coast. The widely publicized debates over menorah displays, followed by the U.S. Supreme Court's vindication of Chabad's constitutional claims (to the surprise and chagrin of Rabbi Glaser), helps to explain this development. So too does Chabad's strategy of taking Judaism to the people—opening up its Chanukah and other celebrations to everyone at no cost—rather than confining Judaism to dues-paying congregants. So too does Chabad's political

> The Rebbe deemed it crucial for Jews to *publicly* adhere to their religion, even as he respected the right of other faith communities to also display their religions in the public square.

Sample

savvy, displayed throughout the campaign for public menorahs and then, annually, at crowded menorah lightings where politicians are honored. And so too, finally, does the genius of the Rebbe himself, who steered the controversial menorah campaign, boldly defended it, refused to compromise in the face of legal challenges, and encouraged his emissaries with messianic fervor to kindle more and bigger menorahs wherever they could, so as to "bring Jews back to their Jewish roots."

Following a lifetime of activism, and at an age when most Jewish leaders would have reposed in retirement, the Rebbe expanded his menorah campaign into an international one, promoting public Chanukah displays and candle-lightings on every continent. "We must," he insisted, "not only illuminate the inside of homes, but also the outside, and the world at large." "Go out into . . . the public domain," he entreated his followers, "and create light which illuminates the entire outside world."

JONATHAN D. SARNA is University Professor and Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University and Chief Historian of the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History.

Sample

The Six-Day War of 1967 and Beyond:

The Halachah Responds to Changing Circumstances

JACOB J. SCHACTER

Sample

In a talk the Lubavitcher Rebbe delivered on October 28, 1967, he addressed "the meaning of the events that occurred in the Land of Israel the past summer," clearly a reference to the Six-Day War that had taken place some four months earlier. "With these events there began a new period in the preparation of the Jewish people for redemption by the Messiah," he said. And, he continued, had the Jewish people responded properly, the Messiah would have come immediately and redeemed all the Jews from exile. But he cautioned against despair, citing a "known adage" of his father-in-law that for a Jew "there is no such thing as too late." Nothing is irreparably lost. Indeed, he referred to what happened a few months earlier as "a miraculous deliverance," as "miracles from Heaven."[1]

This assessment of the events of the Six-Day War as overtly miraculous had practical halachic implications for the Rebbe. Some six months later, on the last day of Passover, April 20,

1. See *Torat Menachem*, vol. 51 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2013), 210–21.

1968, the Rebbe delivered a talk on the significance of the day in the Jewish calendar called Pesach Sheni.[2] The Torah (Numbers 9:9–12) rules that if someone was ritually impure or was at least around ten miles away from Jerusalem[3] on the day before Passover, *erev* Pesach Rishon (the fourteenth of Nissan), and was therefore unable to bring the paschal sacrifice to the Temple at its requisite time, all was not lost. A person who fell into one of those two categories could bring that sacrifice exactly one month later, on the fourteenth of Iyar, on the day called Pesach Sheni, or "The Second Passover."

> The assessment of the events of the Six-Day War as overtly miraculous had practical halachic implications for the Rebbe.

The Rebbe began his remarks by noting the very unusual nature of this ruling in that, unlike other *mitzvot* whose fulfillment is linked to a specific time and which if not fulfilled the possibility of doing so is lost, in this case there is an opportunity for a second chance to do the *mitzvah*. He once again quoted his father-in-law, who drew from Pesach Sheni the lesson that one should always operate with the assumption that matters can be rectified, that "there is no such thing as too late."

The Rebbe then cited the ruling that even someone who deliberately refused to bring the paschal sacrifice at the correct time can get credit for the fulfillment of the *mitzvah*, and avoid the very extreme biblical punishment of *karet*,[4] if that person brings it on Pesach Sheni.[5] Although normally repentance, or a second chance, is not an option if one deliberately violates a law, that is not the case here.

The Rebbe continued by going a step further, citing the rabbinic ruling that if a majority of the Jewish people were ritually impure and were therefore unable to bring the paschal sacrifice on the fourteenth of Nissan, bringing the sacrifice on Pesach

Sample

---

2. See *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 12 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1977), 216–26.

3. *Bederech rechokah*, the "on a distant road" of the verse (Numbers 9:10), is defined as a distance of fifteen *mil* or roughly ten miles. See Talmud, *Pesachim* 93b; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Korban Pesach* 5:8.

4. The exact nature of this punishment is the subject of debate.

5. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Korban Pesach* 5:2.

Sheni would not be an option. He noted, however, that the second chance was precluded only in a case where Jewish law itself prohibited the sacrifice from being offered at its correct time; in that case it cannot be offered on Pesach Sheni. But if there were other, external, circumstances that prevented the majority of the Jewish nation from bringing the offering on *erev* Pesach Rishon, then it could be offered on Pesach Sheni.

This led the Rebbe to a very striking conclusion relevant to that year. He noted that after the Six-Day War in 1967, the Jewish people gained control over the Temple Mount. As a result, the Passover of 1968, the first Passover after the war, posed a potential halachic challenge due to a number of considerations: (a) now that the Jewish people had control over the Temple Mount, the Rebbe noted that the external circumstance that had hitherto prevented them from offering the paschal sacrifice was no longer relevant; and (b) the Rebbe cited the opinion of those who maintained that it was possible to offer the paschal sacrifice in Jerusalem even in the absence of the Temple. Given the confluence of both of these factors, the Rebbe felt that it might actually be halachically possible to offer the paschal sacrifice that year. Since, however, he recognized that this would have been logistically difficult, not to mention very controversial,[6] the Rebbe advised his Chasidim to avoid being within some ten miles of Jerusalem both on the forthcoming Pesach Sheni and, going forward, also on *erev* Pesach Rishon, to avoid a possible transgression for failing to offer the sacrifice on those days. He instructed those living far away not to come to the city and those who were living there to leave.

But a few years later, the Rebbe changed his mind. Printed at the beginning of this talk is a letter he wrote on 13 Iyar 5735 (April 24, 1975), the day before Pesach Sheni that year. There he noted that "the situation has changed" and that no longer would it be possible to offer the paschal sacrifice. As a result, he wrote that there would no longer be any reason for anyone to avoid being in Jerusalem either on *erev* Pesach Rishon or on Pesach

---

6. I am assuming that this was the Rebbe's consideration here.

Sample

Sheni.[7] It is clear that what changed was the Yom Kippur War of 1973. The euphoria of the aftermath of the Six-Day War was replaced by the depression in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. What was considered possible after June 1967 was no longer considered possible after October 1973.

After the Six-Day War, other suggestions were also made to change age-old Jewish practices in light of the incredible miracles that were experienced then. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef explored the possibility of walking on, or flying over, parts of the Temple Mount,[8] and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein wondered whether it was any longer necessary to rend one's garments as an expression of mourning upon seeing the city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.[9] In addition, I am aware of one rabbinic authority who, like the Rebbe, took one halachic position after the Six-Day War, only to change his mind in the wake of the Yom Kippur War. The issue for Rabbi Shlomo Goren was not the paschal sacrifice but the recital of the *Nachem* prayer on Tishah B'Av, the Fast of the Ninth of Av.

The *Amidah* of the Afternoon Service *(Minchah)* on that day contains an additional paragraph referring to the city of Jerusalem in very stark terms. The city is depicted there as being "in mourning and in ruins, despised and desolate—mourning because she is bereft of her children, ruined of her dwellings, despised in the loss of her glory, desolate without inhabitants. She sits with her head covered in shame . . . Legions have devoured her; idolaters have possessed her."[10]

For more than a millennium, this formulation posed no problem. It correctly portrayed the city in all its destruction and devastation. But in the twentieth century, even before the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, calls were issued to change the text, calls that were magnified after 1948 and certainly in the

---

7. See *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 12, p. 216. My thanks to my childhood friend Rabbi Yaakov Leib Altein, who helped clarify several formulations in this *sichah* for me. This change of heart on the part of the Rebbe is described in Yehoshua Mondshein, *Otzar Minhagei Chabad: Nissan-Sivan* (Jerusalem: Heichal Menachem, 1995), 101.

8. R. Ovadia Yosef, *She'elot Uteshuvot Yechaveh Daat*, vol. 5, #26.

9. R. Moshe Feinstein, *Igrot Moshe*, *Orach Chaim*, vol. 5, #37.

10. See *Siddur Tehillat Hashem* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2019), 107.

Sample

wake of the absolute miracle of the Six-Day War in 1967. At that point, many in the Religious Zionist camp argued that not only were these words out of touch with the new reality, they were actually, manifestly untrue. Suggestions were made to change the text, if not to dispense with it altogether. Some rabbinic authorities (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner) rejected instituting any changes in the text, some (Rabbi Hayyim David Halevi, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein) proposed minor tweaks, and some (Rabbi David Shloush, Rabbi Yisrael Ariel) argued for virtually rewriting the entire prayer.[11]

Most prominent among those advocating for a substantive change was Rabbi Shlomo Goren, then head of the Israeli Defense Forces' Military Rabbinate. Shortly after the war, he composed a new *Nachem* text in which all these references were removed, and he recited it at the Western Wall on Tisha B'Av a few months later. In a letter he wrote on 25 Tammuz 5728 (July 21, 1968) Rabbi Goren explained that the text needed to be altered "in light of the change that occurred in Jewish history with the liberation of Jerusalem and its unification."[12] Nothing less than "a change in Jewish history" had then taken place. But, once again, a few years later the situation changed. In a letter Rabbi Goren wrote on 15 Cheshvan 5739 (November 15, 1978), he withdrew his new text of *Nachem*. He explained that his change of heart was due to the "ethical, moral, and national decline" that he described as having taken place after the Yom Kippur War and to the great upset he was feeling at the preparations then being made to give away parts of the Land of Israel to the Palestinians. In 1967, he wrote, he had believed that he was witnessing the realization of the millennia-old dream of the Jewish return

> **Although normally repentance, or a second chance, is not an option if one deliberately violates a law, that is not the case here.**

Sample

---

11. I deal with this issue in my "Tefillat Nacheim," in Daniel Z. Feldman and Stuart W. Halpern, eds., *Mitokh ha-Ohel: From Within the Tent: The Festival Prayers* (New Milford, CT: Maggid, 2017), 292–98.

12. See R. Shlomo Goren, *Terumat Ha-Goren* (Jerusalem: Yediot Sefarim, 2005), 308–09, #122.

> **The Rebbe noted that "the situation has changed" and that no longer would it be possible to offer the Paschal Sacrifice. . . . It is clear that what changed was the Yom Kippur War of 1973.**

to Zion and felt that it was incumbent that the language of that prayer reflect the new reality. Around a decade later, he was no longer sure. Given the current reality the old text, he now admitted, would do just fine.[13]

The Rebbe concluded his talk in 1968 with a prayer to G-d that we soon merit to see "the true and full redemption via the Messiah, our Righteous One. May he come and redeem us and make us walk upright to our land absolutely soon." He concluded his 1975 letter by praying that the words of Maimonides soon be fulfilled, that when the Jewish people repent, they will be immediately redeemed.

Indeed, may the Jewish people come to recognize and appreciate the truth of Torah, may the Temple be rebuilt, and may the dispersed of Israel be gathered in the Holy Land. May this be fulfilled, soon and in our days.

RABBI SCHACTER is University Professor of Jewish History and Jewish Thought at Yeshiva University. He spent his first years of formal Jewish education at the Lubavitcher Yeshiva Achei Temimim in the Bronx, New York.

13. See ibid., 327–29, #131.

Sample

Towards a Unified Conception of Jewish Spirituality

The Rebbe on Chanukah

LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN

Sample

There has been ongoing discussion in the Jewish tradition regarding how to understand the miracle of Chanukah. For most of Jewish history—from early celebrations of the Maccabean victory in 164 B.C.E. up to modern times—the burning of the one-day supply of oil in the menorah of the Jerusalem Temple for eight days has been considered the Chanukah miracle. That point has been contested, however, and with the renewal of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, some have questioned whether the military victory of the Maccabean forces was in fact the real miracle.

A passage from the Babylonian Talmud on the surface seems to identify the miracle of Chanukah as the burning of the menorah for eight days.[1] On the other hand, the paragraph of *Al HaNisim*, added in both the *Amidah* and the Blessing After Meals during the eight days of the festival, clearly celebrates the military victory as the miracle. The question of which is more important—the renewal of a Jewish symbol (the Temple menorah) as a result of divine intervention, or the defeat of a powerful army through what appear to be natural means—has recently taken on new and increased significance.

1. *Shabbat* 21b, quoting from *Megillat Ta'anit*, a list of festive days from the Second Temple period.

This question was taken up over many years by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in a variety of contexts. His addresses and writings on this topic have been brought together in a Hebrew pamphlet entitled *Mai Chanukah*, literally "What is Chanukah?"[2] a title borrowed from the Talmud's introduction to the passage regarding the miracle of Chanukah. In this unified presentation of his view, the Rebbe examined in detail the central texts and their various interpretations to conclude that the combination of these two events as a totality constitutes the miracle. In doing so, he followed one of the central principles of his halachic and Chasidic teaching, namely, the tendency to see apparently contradictory Torah ideas and practices as an ultimate unity.

A quick summary will be helpful: The Rebbe begins with a close study of the Talmudic passage describing the miracle of the oil. He argues that that very same text, in mentioning the obligation of *hoda'ah*, "thanksgiving," is alluding to recital of the prayer *Al HaNisim*, in which the miracle is clearly the military victory. He notes also that Maimonides[3] mentions the obligation of *simchah*, "rejoicing," on Chanukah, which the Rebbe understands to be an explicit reference to the military victory. He argues that the two aspects are really one, both representing the victory of the holiness of the Torah and the Jewish people over the "Greeks" (who were actually the Hellenized Seleucid rulers of Syria).

Therefore, the Rebbe understands the miracle of Chanukah in its totality to be composed of an aspect that takes place within the context of our natural world, namely, the military victory, as well as of a supernatural aspect, symbolized by the Maccabees' finding of the one pure cruse of oil and its burning for eight days. The supernatural, miraculous aspect of the burning of the oil, and the light it produces, is understood to convey the elevated spiritual nature of the Jewish people, as evidenced also by their willingness to sacrifice their lives for Judaism. Indeed, much of what he explains is based on an understanding of light as symbolizing spirituality within the physical world. Hence, the lighting of the menorah in our celebration of Chanukah symbolizes the need to

---

2. *Kuntres Mai Chanukah B'Mishnato Shel HaRebbe*, ed. Y. Kahn and D. Olidort, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2016).

3. *Hilchot Chanukah* 3:3.

Sample

enlighten the world, that is, to infuse the physical universe with spirituality. Only in this way can the spiritual darkness that surrounds us be effaced. Essentially, the Rebbe sees the miracle of the oil as demonstrating that even the military victory, achieved through natural means, represented a spiritual victory over the forces of darkness.

What cannot be gotten across in a short English summary is the fact that over and over, throughout this text, we see an extremely close reading of the relevant texts from which all the ideas that the Rebbe put forth are drawn. He (and his editors, in the notes) make clear all along that for some of these interpretations there are alternate views. But the key to understanding the Rebbe's approach here is to realize that he developed his views based on a long series of micro-interpretations.[4] Further, as is often characteristic of the Rebbe's teachings, Talmudic texts are accompanied by the commentaries of Rashi and *Tosafot*, Maimonides, the *Zohar*, earlier Chabad teachings, and a host of other Jewish sources, all brought together to first dissect and deconstruct, and then to present a unified conception of how the two aspects of Chanukah teach a central lesson in the quest for Jewish spirituality.

The key to understanding the Rebbe's approach here is to realize that he developed his views based on a long series of micro-interpretations.

I should observe here that the Rebbe's conclusion, namely that the Maccabean victory over the Seleucids, restoring the freedom of the Jewish people to believe and practice Judaism, was a victory of the spiritually infused physical world over the forces of evil, mirrors a common Chasidic teaching that all the physical things around us have a spark of holiness that must be raised

Sample

---

4. For example, in Section 9, the Rebbe points to the Talmud's use of the words "lamp" and "light" to refer to spirituality and divinity. He supports his understanding of the Chanukah victory's spiritual nature by comparing the Chanukah miracle with the daily miracle of the "western lamp" in the Temple menorah, which was the first to be lit, and which burned not only through the night but through the next day as well (*Shabbat* 22b and Rashi). The Rebbe also wrote a detailed halachic and kabbalistic analysis of the Temple menorah, *Reshimat HaMenorah: Seder Hadlakat Haneirot be-Veit Hamikdash* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1998).

up. When we light the Chanukah menorah, we symbolize the victory of spirituality over evil and the lifting of the physical to higher spiritual levels.

From a historical perspective, the Rebbe's analysis relates to some major issues that have been debated in the study of the Maccabean Revolt. As a historian involved in the study of the Second Temple period, I can see from the Rebbe's presentation that some of the very same issues have affected traditional thinkers. We take it for granted today that the Maccabean Revolt began as a struggle between two groups of Jews, those seeking to maintain Jewish tradition as the mainstay of society in the Land of Israel in the Hellenistic period, and those who thought to advance a program of Hellenization that eventually even included pagan worship. In reality, this is a view that emerged as a result of modern academic scholarship based on the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees. In this view, Antiochus and his Hellenistic armies began the persecutions that led to the full-scale war only in order to support the Hellenistic Jews. Earlier understandings, following 1 Maccabees as quoted by the Jewish historian Josephus and his medieval adaptation, Yosippon, simply assumed that the Syrian "Greeks" were anti-Semites seeking to uproot the Jewish religion in favor of a Hellenistic way of life. Approaches like the Rebbe's, which emphasize inner spiritual turmoil and struggle around Chanukah, certainly partake, whether intentionally or not, of the modern scholarly conclusions regarding the origins of the Maccabean Revolt in inner Jewish religious dissension.

Approaches like the Rebbe's, which emphasize the inner spiritual turmoil and struggle around Chanukah, certainly partake, whether intentionally or not, of modern scholarly conclusions.

Sample

The existence of the State of Israel, with a Jewish army that is one of the strongest in today's world, pushes to the fore the description of the military victory in *Al HaNisim*. Those of us who have lived through great battles such as the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, and now the current Gaza war, cannot help but think (even as we mourn the fallen) in terms of the hidden miracles, on large and small scales, that are behind Israel's military victories.

Yet, so many of us think only in binary terms: is the miracle of Chanukah the military victory of the few against the many, the weak against the strong, or is the miracle that the oil in the Temple menorah continued to burn for longer than expected? At a time when we would tend to emphasize that part of the holiday commemorating the naturalistic military victory, the Rebbe's analysis comes to tell us that it is not an either/or question. Rather, the miracle of the burning of that ancient menorah teaches us that the struggle for Jewish safety and freedom must be conducted on both physical and spiritual planes, and that the ultimate redemption can come only when these two facets of human existence are completely unified in us and our community.

LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN is Global Distinguished Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University.

Sample

Sample

JEM/Levi Friedan 13059

Helpmate or Adversary?

CHANA SILBERSTEIN

When my husband and I were in our early twenties and new Chabad representatives to Cornell University, our first visits were to Jewish faculty. My husband met with a noted professor in the Near Eastern Studies department and asked whether he might teach an introductory course in Talmud. The professor laughed.

“What could you possibly teach the students? In yeshivah, you learn the mishnah *“Hamaniach et hakad”*—if someone puts a jug in the public thoroughfare, and a passerby breaks it there, who is responsible for any damage incurred? Whereas here, we learn what the jug looked like.”

The archaeologist found the debate about an ancient legal system irrelevant. The teacher of Torah, however, concerned with questions of liability and justice, finds the concern with the appearance of the jug quite beside the point.

As an educator, I have come to recognize that the hardest course to teach is a discipline’s introductory course. Students come to the class with their preconceived categories. They decide which facts are critical and which are merely illustrative based on their prior experiences. Yet, often the details they focus on are purely incidental.

Growing up in the ’70s, I had my antennae sensitized to notice examples of gender inequality. There was a verse in Genesis that rankled: “G-d said, ‘It is not good for “Adam” to be alone; I will make him a helpmate opposite him’” (2:18). To my reading,

Sample

Adam had purpose, Adam had needs; Adam was created for a reason; woman was merely created in his service.

Rashi, the eleventh-century biblical commentator, hardly helped: On the words "helpmate opposite him," Rashi succinctly commented, "If he merits, she is a helpmate; if he does not merit, she opposes him." Once again, to my teenage eyes, woman was seen as no more than a tool with which to reward or punish Adam, but she had no agency of her own. She was merely his accessory. It took many years for me to realize that my reading of Rashi was superficial. I was focusing on the wrong details.

When I first encountered the Rebbe's talks on Rashi's commentary,[1] his approach appeared highly technical and academic. First among the Rebbe's principles is that every comment by Rashi had to be interpreted as the most straightforward and simple explanation—one accessible to the five-year-old just being introduced to the study of Torah. While there were other commentators trying to clarify the plain meaning of the text (many of whom were more loath than Rashi to draw on midrashic explanations or multiple interpretations), the Rebbe insisted that, given a child's background knowledge and thought process, Rashi provided the most direct and compelling reading.

Yet this would not be enough to hook me into the Rebbe's approach to Rashi. The Rebbe added another dimension: The *pshat* was both simple and essential. The basic reading of Rashi held the key to profound truths that set the foundation for later learning and whose layers would continue to unfold over time.

As the Rebbe noted, to understand the meaning of "helpmate opposite him," we must first properly contextualize Rashi's remarks by seeing his comments on the first part of the verse.[2] On the words "It is not good for man to be alone," Rashi explains: "It is not good for man to be unique, singular, among the earthly creatures, as G-d is unique and singular among the heavenly creatures."

The problem, then, that G-d is solving by creating a helpmate for Adam is not loneliness, but hubris. Were humans able

Sample

---

1. Collected and translated as *Studies in Rashi* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2011).

2. *Likkutei Sichot,* vol. 5, 20, notes 31–32.

to operate independently, it would be easy for them to imagine themselves demigods, driven by their own desires and impulses with nothing to rein in their ambition.

Indeed, as the Rebbe noted, academics have often presumed that their intellectual knowledge was sufficient to make them the arbiters of moral truth. It was the academy of the '30s that gave rise to the eugenics movement, to human medical experimentation, to genocidal efficiency. The Greeks, the Romans, and dare we say today's Ivy League, have also presumed that their technical prowess and intellectual pyrotechnics bequeathed them moral wisdom. They may have found clever answers. But they are answering the wrong questions. They may do very good science, but they do not necessarily know the purpose for which the science is meant to be used.

To my reading, Adam had purpose, Adam had needs; Adam was created for a reason; woman was merely created in his service.

The rest of Rashi's comment—"If he merits, she is a helpmate . . ."—then, in its simplest reading, is not a comment on man vs. woman but on arrogance vs. humility. There are two ways that people learn to bend, compromise, and take account of views other than their own, truths they may have failed to apprehend. Some approach complex situations with modesty and reserve: they appreciate that they may have more to learn, and that their own understanding may be mistaken, or at least incomplete. Recognizing this, they see the power of collaboration and compromise: they contain the ability to be something larger than themselves by incorporating the wisdom and perspectives they gain from others. But others, those who are unbending, are ultimately brought to the truth as well, albeit in ways that are less edifying. They are cut down by opposition and strife; when they encounter an antagonist who is more powerful, they are forced to recognize their own limits.

A worthy person finds a partner to be a valued collaborator, the secret to achieving more than any one person can do alone. One who is unworthy considers the partner an adversary, slowing

Sample

down progress and obstructing change. But in either case, the result is a world with less hubris and impulsiveness, more humility and reflection.

The Rebbe reminds us of the Torah's essential purpose, which is to allow us to parse the world through a G-dly lens. We are here for a purpose that must be in sync with G-d's purpose. Hence, it is not good for us to feel independent and alone. And one way or another, that purpose will be realized.

This does not mean that there is no place in Torah to discuss gender roles and how to reconcile ancient formulations with modern sensibilities. But a deep reading of Rashi reminds us that when reading Torah, these questions are meant to be framed first with an eye toward our spiritual purpose.

CHANA SILBERSTEIN is Chabad representative and educational director of the Roitman Chabad Center in Ithaca, NY. She serves on the National Accreditation Board of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch and was founding dean of curriculum for the Jewish Learning Institute.

Sample

Reading Rashi Between the Lines

DEVORAH SILBERSTEIN

In October 1964, just a few short weeks after his mother's passing, the Lubavitcher Rebbe debuted a new genre of *sichot*, or public talks: the Rashi *sichah*. Over the next twenty-three years, the Rebbe presented an analysis of the great medieval French sage Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki's commentary on the Torah portion each week.[1]

The typical Rashi *sichah* starts with a comment of Rashi's. The next step: going through Rashi's words with a fine-toothed comb. A mysterious prefix, an elongated phrase, a quotation that deviates ever so slightly from Rashi's midrashic source—any and all of these might give rise to pages of analysis.

But then, there is a fascinating subset of Rashi *sichot*: those centered around a Torah verse with no comment from Rashi at all. For example, the dramatic moment in Genesis (45:3) when Joseph, having been sold into slavery in Egypt and risen to the position of viceroy, finally reveals his true identity: "And Joseph said to his brothers: 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?'"

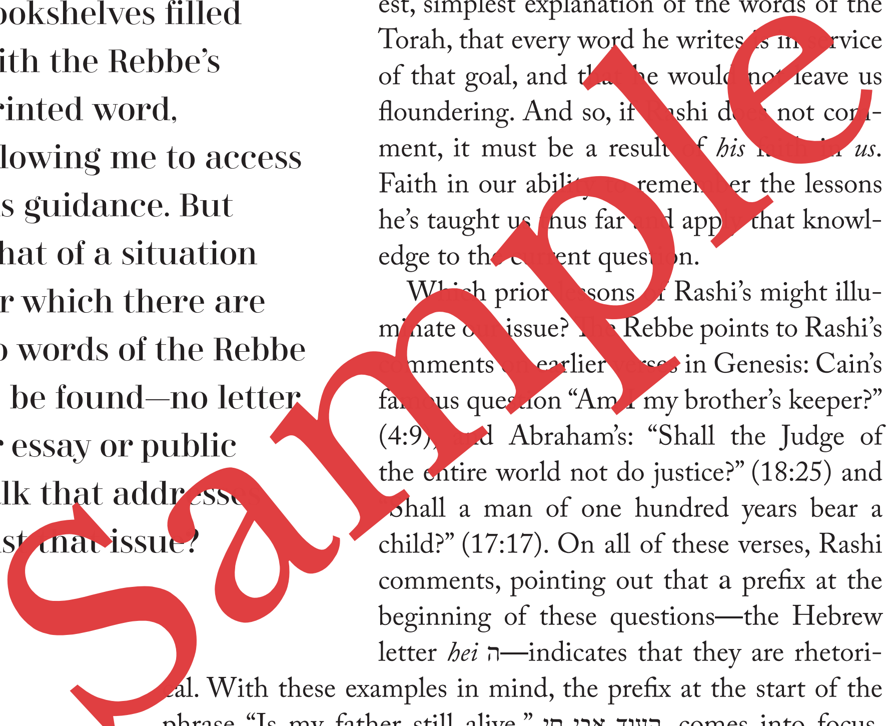
But doesn't Joseph already know the answer to this question? In prior conversations, Judah has mentioned his father Jacob

1. This subject was chosen, some have speculated, because it was something the Rebbe studied with his mother as a child.

Sample

several times: in speaking of his younger brother Benjamin: "The boy cannot leave his father . . ." (44:22). And then, again, in verse 31: "How can I return . . . and witness the evil that will befall my father?" Ralbag, Abarbanel, Sforno, and Kli Yakar—essential biblical commentators—all weigh in on Joseph's apparent memory lapse. But from Rashi—nothing.

> There are bookshelves filled with the Rebbe's printed word, allowing me to access his guidance. But what of a situation for which there are no words of the Rebbe to be found—no letter or essay or public talk that addresses just that issue?



There is an axiom which underlies each Rashi *sichah*: Rashi deserves our trust. Trust in his commitment to bringing us the clearest, simplest explanation of the words of the Torah, that every word he writes is in service of that goal, and that he would not leave us floundering. And so, if Rashi does not comment, it must be a result of *his faith in us*. Faith in our ability to remember the lessons he's taught us thus far and apply that knowledge to the current question.

Which prior lessons of Rashi's might illuminate our issue? The Rebbe points to Rashi's comments on earlier verses in Genesis: Cain's famous question "Am I my brother's keeper?" (4:9), and Abraham's: "Shall the Judge of the entire world not do justice?" (18:25) and "Shall a man of one hundred years bear a child?" (17:17). On all of these verses, Rashi comments, pointing out that a prefix at the beginning of these questions—the Hebrew letter *hei* ה—indicates that they are rhetorical. With these examples in mind, the prefix at the start of the phrase "Is my father still alive," העוד אבי חי, comes into focus. Joseph is not asking a probative question, but making an amazed declaration: "Could it be that my father is still alive!"

Next, the Rebbe refers to a verse which relates that Jacob "refused to be comforted" (37:35) after hearing of Joseph's death. Commenting on these words, Rashi quotes a midrash: "A person cannot accept consolation on a living person who is presumed to be dead. For there is a decree on the dead that they be forgotten from the heart, but not on the living." Now we can understand the flow of Joseph's words. It is because "I am Joseph," it is because

Joseph was still alive, that Jacob was subsumed with life-sucking grief all these years—a grief so abnormal, so intense, that the fact that his father survived it filled Joseph with wonder.

There is more to this *sichah* that won't fit into this eight-hundred-word column—proofs and counterproofs, refutations and resolutions, analyses and syntheses—all deriving not from Rashi's comments, but from his silence. Not from words printed in black "Rashi script," but from empty white space on the page.

As a Generation Z Chabad Chasid, a follower of the Rebbe born years after his passing, I find this style of study particularly resonant. There are bookshelves filled with the Rebbe's printed word, allowing me to access his guidance. But what of situations for which there are no words of the Rebbe to be found—no letter or essay or public talk that addresses just that issue? The answer lies in the Rashi-less Rashi *sichah*: we can mine meaning not just from the words that are on the page, but also from those that are not.

This is because Rashi's goal is not to play narrator, but teacher. Not to merely interpolate his commentary into the verse, but to educate the reader in the process. Thus, he opts not to comment on every word in the text, instead choosing to equip us with the tools to resolve future issues independently.

The Rebbe, like Rashi, was not just a righteous man, or head of a movement—but a master teacher. And so, when in search of guidance from the Rebbe's teachings, I very well might find explicit advice somewhere in the vast corpus of the Rebbe's work. Or I might not. Regardless, I can search for guiding principles to fortify myself as I forge out on my own.

Sample

DEVORAH SILBERSTEIN lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she enjoys learning, teaching and writing about Torah, for both work and pleasure. She teaches halachah at Batsheva Learning Center, and is writing a historical narrative series about the ancestry and origins of Chabad Chasidut. She is also a recent graduate of the Graduate Program of Advanced Talmudic Studies at Stern College, where she spent four years studying Talmud and halachah.

Sample

Sample

Sample

Lubavitch International Journal

770 EASTERN PARKWAY, BROOKLYN, NY 11213
718-774-4000 | EDITOR@LUBAVITCH.COM
WWW.LUBAVITCH.COM

Sample

Lubavitch
INTERNATIONAL
From the Chabad-Lubavitch Global Network
770 EASTERN PARKWAY BROOKLYN, NY 11213

Sample

Honoring the 30th yahrzeit of the

Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

זצוקללה”ה נבג”מ זי”ע

3 Tammuz 5784