

# MTc MOSAIC

A PUBLICATION OF THE MONTREAL TORAH CENTER BAIS MENACHEM CHABAD LUBAVITCH  
JOANNE AND JONATHAN GURMAN COMMUNITY CENTER • LOU ADLER SHUL

*Spring • Passover*  
5765/2005



BAIS MENACHEM  
CHABAD LUBAVITCH

# Gleanings

*From the Rebbe's wisdom*



*From your challenges you may know your strengths.*

*You did not make yourself.*

*You did not choose your parents, nor did you design the environment that nurtured you.*

*The One who brought you to this world, who knew you before you were conceived  
And who fashioned you in the womb -  
He knew intimately all the challenges you would meet,  
Your faults, your struggles.  
He was the one who designed they should be there.*

*And for each brick wall, He provided you a ladder.  
For each chasm a bridge.  
For each mountain a deep reserve of superhuman strength to surprise even your own self.*

*When one of those challenges arises, you need only imagine what it must take to overcome -  
And you can be confident that strength is within you.*

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Editor-In-Chief **Rabbi Moishe New**  
Editor **Joannie Tansky**  
Managing Editor **Rabbi Itchy Treitel**  
Administrator **Velvel Minkowitz**  
Adult Education Director **Rabbi Zalman Kaplan**  
Accounting **Fraida Malka Yarmush**  
Youth Directors **Chana Refson (Treitel) & Rochel New**

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Questions or return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:  
**Montreal Torah Center Bais Menachem Chabad Lubavitch**  
**Joanne and Jonathan Gurman Community Center**  
28 Cleve Road, Hampstead PQ H3X 1A6  
Tel. 739-0770 Fax 739-5925  
Email: [mtc@themtc.com](mailto:mtc@themtc.com) • [www.themtc.com](http://www.themtc.com)

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*"A beautiful home broadens a person's mind."  
(Talmud, Berachos 57b)*

So, all of us who are privileged to be part of MTC's new home, have now been blessed with the virtue of a 'broadened mind'. An expanded mind appreciates that the boundaries I once set for myself, for others, and, yes, even for my G-d, have shifted – opened up. What was improbable or even impossible a moment ago, now becomes within reach. Indeed, a truly broadened mind recognizes that, in truth, there are no boundaries at all.

I believe that the new and pulsating energy that we are experiencing at MTC is an expression of this new consciousness.

One area where this is clearly manifest, is in the learning at MTC. Thanks in large part to the appointment of Rabbi Zalman Kaplan to the position of director of the Lou and Joey Adler Adult Learning Institute, MTC now offers over thirty classes each week. Our Wednesday night Kabbalah class and special lectures, sponsored by the Miriam and Batya Medicoff Lecture Foundation, are drawing hundreds of participants.

Our youth programs, led by our devoted and talented youth directors, Chana Refson (Treitel) and Rochel New, are another example. MTC's Kids in Action, for children ages six to twelve; Sunday Funday, for children ages three to five; Jewish Teen Connection (JTC) for girls ages 14 – 16, are all enjoying rave reviews and growing popularity. We are having an exciting three-tiered summer day-camp program for children ages 2 to 12 and we are in the midst of putting together a new slate of educational and fun programs for kids and teens year round.

Women's programming has gone on to a whole new level. Particularly popular is the Tuesday night class for women given by Rabbi Kaplan that explains the foundations and applications of everyday Jewish law. 'Around our Table' is a unique setting that brings together women each month over an elegant dinner for informal discussion on topics of current interest and relevance.

It is our pleasure to take this opportunity to thank Jill Aberman and Sigal Weizmann for organizing a beautiful Pre-Passover luncheon prepared by chef Shoshana Quint that was both entertaining

and educational. Our thanks are extended to Amy Farkas and Anna-Sue Wiltzer for initiating and co-chairing the first of 'An Evening with Friends' where women have the opportunity to pose questions on whatever subject in Jewish life they are interested in exploring. Both these much-enjoyed venues attracted young women for whom this was their first experience of MTC.

We recently celebrated Purim in grand style with five major events that catered to all age groups. All of us at MTC extend our gratitude to the following who gave of their time and resources to ensure that our community-wide holiday awareness project – the distribution of over one thousand beautiful shalach manot packages – were successfully accomplished: Mr. Mort Besner, our chief co-ordinator; Lianne Vineberg, who is always there beyond the call of duty; June Alper; Anne and Sid Applebaum; Terry Convoy; Yossi Davis; Chana Diamant; Esther Deutsch; Sara Eldor; Randy Farber; Amy Farkas; Osnat Feldman; Ronit Gal; Mikey Gottesman; Ivan Gurevitch; Stacie Letovsky; Rochelle Merovitz; David Migicovsky; Jacob Tink; Sigal Weizmann and Aubrey Zelman.

Dear friends, this is only the beginning. Yet to come, please G-d, as we complete our interior furnishings, are a plethora of programs that will center around the Lounge and the Health Spa.

*"A beautiful home broadens a person's mind."* The Joanne and Jonathan Gurman Community Center is by all standards a beautiful home. Let us hope that together, we will continue to go beyond whatever boundaries – satisfaction and comfort level – we will undoubtedly encounter along the way.

It is my wish that wear-and-tear will soon compel us to replace the welcome mat.



Nechama, Itchy and Zeldie join me in wishing you and yours a happy, healthy and meaningful Pesach.

May we merit lasting peace in Israel and the world over.

Chag Kasher vesameach,

Rabbi Moishe New

# Ribbon Ceremony



# Faith in the Path of the Tsunami

by NECHEMIA WILHELM

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*When the tsunami hit on December 31 of last year, most of the world was relegated to horrified spectators. Those in Thailand, one of the hardest hit places, were rendered unable to fend for themselves, due to shock and injury. Chabad has had a presence in Thailand for over ten years. Moments after the disaster happened they were called. They worked and continue to work, tirelessly, helping victims. Below are excerpts of a diary kept by Rabbi Wilhelm, one of the Rebbe's shlichim (Chabad emissaries) in Bangkok.*



Ten minutes after the disaster hit, my phone started ringing. It's been ringing ever since, 24 hours a day. Husbands looking for wives. Mothers looking for daughters. Friends looking for their traveling companions.

As one of the Chabad emissaries living in Southeast Asia, I was dispatched that very night to the hardest hit areas. My mission: to aid with the search and rescue efforts, particularly in regards to the thousands of missing Israelis and other Jewish travelers. Yakov Dvir, the Israeli Consul in Thailand, conveyed an urgent request in the name of Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom to Rabbi Yosef Chaim Kantor, director of Chabad-Lubavitch activities in Thailand, that Chabad step in to help. All of us - the six permanent Chabad rabbis and our families and the twelve rabbinical students now living and working in Thailand - immediately moved into 24-hour mode, fielding calls, compiling lists, and offering aid and comfort to the survivors.

When I arrived in Phuket the bloated bodies still lined the streets. We had hundreds of names on our lists, with new ones being added every hour. For three days now I have been making my rounds of the morgues, hospitals and makeshift shelters, trying to match faces and fates to the names in my lists.

For the dazed survivors we arrange food, clothing, medical care and transportation back home. For the dead, we now have the unfortunate task of helping the ZAKA (Disaster Victims Identification) volunteers who've flown in from Israel make the identification, arrange for a proper Jewish burial, and get the news to loved ones keeping vigil by the phone. But in a place where unfortunately so many will be thrown together in mass graves, there is some sense of relief and closure knowing that the victim has been found and will receive a Jewish burial. From the moment a Jewish body is identified, it is not left alone for a minute. This is the last respect and love we can give to our brothers and sisters.

On Monday we found Mattan. We searched for him for two days. The 11-month-old boy was torn from his mother's arms as they played on the beach. Both she and her husband survived the tsunami, but Mattan was nowhere to be seen. On Tuesday morning, Steve and Sylvia Nesima found their son. He was in the makeshift morgue along with the hundreds of other children who had no chance against the monstrous waves. Mattan was flown to Bangkok where Chabad emissaries took turns sitting with him, around the clock, until they put his small body on the El Al plane to Israel, the Holy Land, the only appropriate place where such purity and innocence can be buried.

Our three Chabad centers in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Ko Samui have been transformed into crisis centers for counseling, clothing, communication, food, money, transportation and shelter. We have opened our phone lines for free calls to assuage the fear of parents who will not rest until they hear their son or daughter's voice on the other end. Our free email service has enabled hundreds to contact worried loved ones and assure them of their safety.

The survivors come to us shaken, hungry and overwhelmed. They need to go home and be with their family. Until that is possible, it is our responsibility to provide them with that love, comfort and safety while they are still here. For some that means a warm meal, others need money and arrangements for necessary travel documents, some a hug or shoulder to cry on, and others a place to sleep...

I've seen more pain and suffering in the last few days than I've seen in all my 32 years. But I've also been privileged to witness compassion and faith of a magnitude that I never imagined existed. I have watched as people from different cultures, faiths, countries and mentalities join together to help another. For the G-dly soul, hidden deep within, often shines forth precisely when externally there is nothing to depend on. When physicality is

*Our three Chabad centers in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Ko Samui have been transformed into crisis centers for counseling, clothing, communication, food, money, transportation and shelter.*

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addresses to:  
The Montreal Torah Center  
28 Cleve Road,  
Hampstead PQ H3X 1A6  
Tel. 739-0770 Fax 739-5925  
Email: mtc@themtc.com

destroyed, the only thing left is spirituality, and that is now what is apparent throughout this annihilated area.

So, for now, I continue to help rescue and identify the victims, working along with representatives from throughout the world here to do the same. The Israeli embassy has asked all hotels in Thailand to request their Israeli guests to call either the Israel embassy or one of the Chabad Houses so we can ensure that the people who are safe and sound have called home and are not considered "missing." This Shabbat we will be hosting many tsunami survivors at at our Shabbat tables here in Phuket, and hundreds more at the chabad houses in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Ko Samui.

We are still hoping to find more survivors, to provide the injured with all their needs, and to make possible for those who were not so fortunate to be brought to their families for a proper burial. Thanks to everyone's unbelievable dedication and work, we have made much headway. From an initial list of 2,000 missing Israelis, only 17 remain unaccounted for. May G-d bless us to continue to be successful in our work, and may this disaster be the last we know of pain and suffering and the beginning of the true ushering in of goodness and redemption.

*The following is an excerpt of a letter sent by Rabbi Yosef Chaim Kantor, a week after the tsunami, to hundreds of Chabad institutions over the world.*

Chabad of Thailand  
96 Rambuttri St.  
Banglamphu, Bangkok  
10200 Thailand

[www.jewishthailand.com](http://www.jewishthailand.com)

By the Grace of G-d  
January 7, 2005

Dear Friends,

To witness the loving care of one human being to another is humbling.

My colleagues and I are moved beyond words by the overwhelming display of love you've expressed toward the victims of the tsunami disaster during the past couple of weeks.

We witnessed the unspeakable horror of little bodies mangled beyond recognition, felt the indescribable joy when someone presumed missing was discovered alive elsewhere, experienced the tenuous irony of families' relief when a brother or sister or child turned up "only" badly injured. Days later, incongruously, we were part of the "excitement" every time a body was positively identified...

Throughout all this the light of a world united in its effort to alleviate the plight of the victims shone brightly. We cannot possibly calculate how many calls and emails have come our way. Many of you sent money, others offered their services, still others asked how to care for the children.

... Our dedicated staff worked tirelessly also to deliver food, lodging and emotional support to the survivors of this horrendous event. We visited the hospitalized, sent off food packages for survivors and aid workers on the ravaged islands, and alerted and facilitated thousands of travelers to get in touch with their families via our free internet cafes and complimentary long distance calling facilities. (We gratefully acknowledge a \$25,000 allocation by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's to aid us in these efforts.)

In addition to our own efforts in Thailand, our colleague Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg of Chabad in Bombay traveled to the Andaman Islands where he helped the young Jews vacationing there to get in touch with their families after miraculously escaping death and even injury by the deadly Tsunami.

This week our three Chabad Houses are flooded with hundreds of young travelers still recovering from the shock, keeping our rabbis and rebbetzins busy from early morning till early morning.

...In the beginning of the week a couple of us flew down to Krabi and met with aid workers, helped update the rolls of the missing, and met with groups of locals - and heard and saw their heart-rending stories of devastation.

We met with the country's Minister of Agriculture and gave the mayor of Kao Lak (considered to be the hardest hit city in the country) funds for rebuilding.

We just completed the purchase of a refrigerated truck, which will assist us greatly in our efforts to gather and deliver food.

*continued on page 8*



# Tsunami

(cont'd)



We are working with home improvement stores to create a voucher system to pass on to villagers in order to improve on whatever basic housing they receive to help transform whatever will be built for them into a home truly their own.

...There is more to report but I must sign off for Shabbat.

On behalf of the six families and 12 rabbinical students serving in Chabad of Thailand - thank you for entrusting us with the sacred mission of representing you in this important relief work.

We welcome your continued outpouring of support.

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,

**Rabbi Yosef Chaim Kantor**  
Executive Director  
Chabad of Thailand

## MTC EXTENDS ITS DEEPEST SYMPATHIES TO

The Applebaum and Kwiatt families  
on the passing of Mrs. Mary Kwiatt

Diane Billig on the passing of  
her husband, Mr. Daniel Billig

The Chankowsky and Bell families  
on the passing of Mr. Ben Bell

The Chankowsky, Rak and Robin families  
on the passing of Mrs. Raizel Chankowsky

The Dankoff and Friedman families  
on the passing of Mr. Sidney Friedman

Avie Dolgy on the passing  
of his father, Mr. Bennett Dolgy

The Etcovitch and Galambos families  
on the passing of Mrs. Sonya Shegelski

The Fishbien and Stelman families  
on the passing of Mr. Ernest Fishbien

The Goldberg and Pila families  
on the passing of Mr. Carl Pila

The Golfman and Spoon families  
on the passing of Mr. Max Spoon

The Hascalovici family  
on the passing of Mr. Levy Mimron

The Karp and Goldfarb families  
on the passing of Mr. Leo Goldfarb

The Levitt Family on the passing  
of Mrs. Lillian Levitt Shuchat

The Litwin and Sorkin families  
on the passing of Mrs. Anne Sorkin

The Miller family on the passing  
of Mr. Lionel Miller

The Pearl and Smart families  
on the passing of Mrs. Goldie Pearl

The Polter family on the passing  
of Rabbi Moshe Polter

The Richman and Beitchman families  
on the passing of Mr. Leon Beitchman

The Rohr, Fleishman, Glazer and Yaffy families  
on the passing of Mr. Martin Rohr

The Routtenberg, Tannenbaum and Zelman  
families on the passing of Mr. Joey Routtenberg

The Stein family on the passing of Mrs. Riva Stein

The Zemel and Sigal families on the passing  
of Mr. Tommy Zemel

*May G-d spare you further sorrow and  
may you only know of simchas.*

# Sunday Funday!



This year, we started a Sunday program for ages 3-5. Mommies and Daddies come with their child(ren) to MTC for a story and craft!

Coffee and muffins are set up for our moms and snacks and drinks are served to the kids.

So far, the children participated in activities such as; baking challah, making stuffed Torahs, decorating Purim masks, crafting our own charity boxes, putting together eatable mezuzahs, listening to animated stories with puppets and much more!

Can't wait to see you Sunday for some more fun at MTC!



4th session • May 15 - June 5 • 10:15 - 11:15 am  
Call Rochel for info 739.0770



# Return to Israel

## A Notebook

by JOANNIE TANSKY

**I**t has been ten years since we last visited Israel - a lot of water has since passed under the bridge on a personal level and, in Israel. To say that we were going with no trepidation would not be true. We are products of what the media feeds us, and in the past few years we have been

fed a steady diet of information advising us that the tourist industry is almost gone, that people are no longer going to Israel, that the taxis are empty, the restaurants void of diners, the hotels at 75% vacancy rate. Still in the airport in

Toronto, we (I'm travelling with Freddy, my husband) as yet cannot attest to the validity of what we have read. Time will tell.

### All Aboard

Not. Our Air Canada flight was scheduled to leave at midnight, and as I do not do well sitting like a pretzel for 11 hours straight, I secured a 'sleep-eeze', a mild over-the-counter sleeping pill, from my husband. The directions said to take the pill about an hour before bedtime, which translated to 11 pm, one hour before flight time. Unfortunately, the flight was delayed a couple of hours. So, at midnight, when the pill began to work its magic, I sat in the airport slightly dazed, people and things floating around me, the little pill taking effect. Floating does have its advantages, but not when trying to board a crowded aircraft.

The flight itself was long, but thankfully uneventful given the amount of small children on board. One thing I will say is that the flight attendants on these flights deserve a medal. No such thing as people taking their assigned seats. The flight attendants gave up on searching out those who had ordered kosher meals. Half the plane had changed seats. No such thing as staying in your seat when the seatbelt sign is lit. Not even a *hint* of it. And praying aboard rivals any synagogue. At various time throughout the flight men were standing and davening in the aisles, at their seats, in the front of the plane, in the back of the plane. The plane was hopping for 12 hours!

As we drew closer to our destination I noticed that people began to get quieter, even those who have been to Israel many times. I wondered what I would be thinking when we landed given what I have learned in the past eleven years. I thought of Abraham, when G-d tells him that this land is bequeathed to you and your seed... I wondered why this is not the motto emblazoned on every flag in Israel. As we touched down I was overcome with emotion. I really did feel like I was coming home.

### Walking in Jerusalem

On our first day we were completely jet-lagged and missed the tour of the tunnels under the Kotel. Instead we opted to do our own walking tour of Jerusalem. This was one of the things that made me a bit nervous before coming to Israel. Would I be able to simply walk around the city as though everything was normal? Just to give you an example: The driveway of our hotel is blocked from the street with foot-high steel stumps. When we arrived, our *sherut* driver honked his horn and the stumps magically disappeared into the ground. The security guard had a master guest list and our name was there. From then on, every time we came back to the hotel we were checked, frisked, and asked our name and room number.

Our walk turned out to be fascinating and safe. We began with the Kotel, known also as the Western Wall. Some history of the Kotel: Because of its nearness to the site of the Holy Temple, the Kotel has become the most hallowed spot in Jewish religious and national consciousness. The Ottoman ruler Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in the second half of the sixteenth century gave the Jews full exclusive rights to the Kotel as a Jewish holy place of worship. The prayer area was established along a twenty two metre section of the wall, with a width of three metres which was closed off by a wall running parallel to the Kotel. The area was paved, and this small enclosure became the sacred prayer site of the Jewish people.

Up to 1967 a stone-paved alley three metres wide existed in front of the Kotel. It was bordered on its west side by a slum area, the Moghrabi Quarter, established in the 14th century. As it is seen today, the wall is about 50 metres long and 20 metres high. The tiers of large stones in the Kotel date from the second century BCE (over 2000 years ago), though its upper sections were added at a



View of Arab territory as seen from our guest house

*So, at midnight, when the pill began to work its magic, I sat in the airport slightly dazed, people and things floating around me...*

later date. Above ground, the Kotel has 24 rows/layers of stones of different dressing (chiselling and shaping).

From December 1947 until the third day of the Six Day War, June 7th 1967, Jews were not able to approach the Kotel. After the Six day War the buildings placed against the Kotel were removed and the entire area in front of it was cleared, leveled and converted into a large paved open space. The area was partitioned off; one third is reserved for women and two thirds for men. The Kotel once more became a place of pilgrimage and prayer for Jews from all over the world.

On the first day of Shavuot after the Six Day War, a quarter of a million Jews swarmed to the Wall. Jews had not gathered there in those numbers for more than 2000 years.

To get to the Kotel one must first pass through a security check, similar to one at the airport. The site itself is teeming with people from all walks of life, every religion, color and background. It is not only we Jews that know that Jerusalem is the holiest city in the world. We stayed for while opting to come back and pray there on Friday, erev Shabbos.

After the Kotel we wandered through the small, intimate streets of the old city, going in and out of the small shops that dot the way. We stopped for a coffee at a small bistro-type restaurant and just sat outside watching the world go by. At the end of this mini sojourn jet lag took over and we had no choice but to return to our hotel.

## Tiberias, Safed, Miron

We began our long day at 9:00 am. I think that had we known exactly how long the day would be we would have paced ourselves a bit better. We were embarking on a tour in the north of Israel, about three hours from Jerusalem. What's in Tiberias? Rabbi Akiva is buried there in a cave, behind which are his 24,000 students. The Rambam – Maimonides, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk a student of the Baal Shem Tov, and other great tzaddikim are also among the great Sages who rest in Tiberias. I have taken years of classes with Rabbi New, and I don't think that there was one class that he did not refer to either the Rambam or to someone who was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. To visit the graves of holy Sages is

something that one cannot really take in while there. It takes time to absorb the magnitude of these moments.

We spent about an hour in Tiberias and then proceeded to our next destination in the hills above Safed. I decided to use the time between stops to 'drimel' on the bus. You know the kind of sleep where your head really has no place to go so you loll from side to side. Imagine my shock when I woke up to the following sight: On the right side of the bus, where I was sitting, was a sheer drop of about 1000 feet into a huge quarry – with no guard rail separating us from the quarry. On the left side – a car attempting to go the other way on a road that really holds about half a car. Our guide was cool – he obviously has seen this a few times in his twenty-two years of 'guiding'. But all the rest of us on the bus gasped a collective gasp and waited for the car to pass while we were forced onto the 'shoulder' of road. After that I was wide-awake.

## Safed

We arrived as the sun was beginning to set, adding an aura to a city that already glows with holiness. Our guide explained that in 1867 there had been a huge earthquake in Safed which killed at least half the population. It also displaced the entire cemetery. Buried in Safed is the Arizal, Rabbi Isaac Luria, who revealed, in 25 volumes, a powerfully elegant mystical structure, which deciphers the secrets of Kabbalah and upon which the teachings of Chassidus are largely based. Also buried on a slope in the cemetery are Chana and her seven sons. (The Talmud records that during the story of Chanukah, Chana and her seven sons were captured and brought before King Antiochus. One by one each son refused to bow down to Antiochus and one by one they were killed, along with Chana) She is buried in a cave which, probably before the earthquake had a normal entrance but has since partially collapsed and one has to crouch to enter and then stay that way once inside. As I have a granddaughter named Chana, I decided that I would squat in the cave and say my Chana's psalm(i.e. the chapter that corresponds with her



*The Menucha Rochel Kollet and Shul*

*Our guide was cool – he obviously has seen this a few times in his twenty-two years of 'guiding.'*

*continued on page 12*

# Israel

(cont'd)



Me unpacking our Hebron accommodations

*To those who will read  
this and live in Hebron,  
my apologies if I did not  
accurately reflect who you  
are and the extraordinary  
lives that you lead.*

age) in the book of Tehillim. How fitting. I quickly found out that crouching/squatting is not a position for me so I half-stood in the dark cave, lit by a few flickering candles. Even though I felt like I was again a pretzel, these were a few very poignant moments.

I was still recovering physically and spiritually when a few moments later we were completely blown away. The cemetery in Safed has a section reserved for Lubavitch. The Rebbe's brother is buried there, along with other Lubavitchers. Imagine our surprise when our guide, Eli, stopped by a relatively new stone and explained that this was a great man who was sent to Safed by the Rebbe and died a few years ago in a car accident in Russia. Who was this man? Rabbi Arye Leib Kaplan, of blessed memory, the father of our very own Zalman Kaplan who works at the MTC. Although not part of our story in Israel, the story of Zalman's father and Rabbi New is worth knowing. It gives one a glimpse into Divine Providence and the far-reaching insight of the Rebbe:

In the mid sixties the Rebbe sent six young rabbinical students from their Yeshiva in New York to the other end of the world – Australia. They were sent to augment Yiddishkeit in this far-off place. At the time Australia was a very exotic, very distant place and getting there took not hours, but days. Emissaries of the Rebbe were also not as prevalent. There were some, but not like now. When these young men left New York for Australia, the Rebbe closed down the Yeshiva at 770 (Lubavitch World Headquarters) and sent everyone on busses to the airport to see these young emissaries off. Among those leaving were Yosef Minkowitz and Ayre Leib Kaplan.

Upon their arrival in Melbourne, amongst their responsibilities, they taught the boys who were enrolled in the Jewish day schools. Rabbi New was one of the 10-year-old boys whom they taught and subsequently changed the course of his life. As Mr. Mendel New, Rabbi New's father recounted once, "Soon after their arrival in Melbourne, I went over to this group of young men and told them that they should know that they have already been successful." This unsolicited statement shocked them. He went on to tell them the following, 'I asked my young Moishe what he wants to be when he grows up and he said he wants to be like

you.'" The two young scholars referred to above went back to New York, married and were sent to their permanent postings as shlichim (emissaries) of the Rebbe. Rabbi Kaplan was sent to Safed by the Rebbe to oversee all of the institutions in Safed and Israel. Rabbi Minkowitz was sent to Montreal to become principal of Beth Rivkah. Many years passed. Rabbi New had indeed become like one of those men.

Seven years ago, Rabbi Kaplan was tragically killed in a car accident in Russia, leaving behind his wife Sara and 9 children. This past November there was a very special wedding in Montreal. The son of Rabbi Kaplan, Zalman, married the daughter of Rabbi Minkowitz, Frayda. The shadchan (matchmaker) was Rabbi New. The lives of these three men, brought together by the Rebbe, went full circle, now forever intertwined.

## Rachel's Tomb and Shabbos in Hebron

Words cannot do justice to the Shabbos we spent in Hebron. Words cannot describe the look in a person's eye, or the determination of their demeanour. So, to those who will read this and live in Hebron, my apologies if I did not accurately reflect who you are and the extraordinary lives that you lead.

We began this part of our sojourn early Friday afternoon when our bulletproof van arrived to take us to our first destination, Rachel's Tomb (Kever Rochel), which is located in Bethlehem, now in Palestinian hands. A bit of history - Rachel was the wife of Jacob. When she died, Jacob did not bury her with the other matriarchs in the Cave of Machpela in Hebron. Instead, he chose to bury her on the side of the road in Bethlehem. ...'Rachel didn't mind giving up the holiness and specialness of the place (Machpela) for the sake of her children, to be buried instead in a place where there is no glory at all. (It was only in the 1840's that the building that now stands over Rachel's Tomb was completed by Moses Montefiore.) For thousands of years, Kever Rachel was just a grave at the side of the road – without glory, and without credit. But because it was an expression of Rachel's nature to be completely self-effacing, had she had any say in the matter, she would have preferred to be buried in a place where she could be of assistance to her

1. Sicha of the Rebbe as told by Nechoma Greisman, of blessed memory

*children — the Jewish people in exile. And that is why Yaakov buried her there, and not in the Maaras HaMachpelah, out of respect for what would have been her wish.'<sup>1</sup>*

Bethlehem is located just outside of Jerusalem – a mere 10 minutes away by van, but a world away in terms of security.

We arrived to a checkpoint and our driver left the van to speak to one of the soldiers. He reported back that it would not be he who would take us to Rachel's Tomb, one minute away – we would have to hook up with another group. From 2000, the beginning of the intifada, for three years, the government would not allow visits to Rachel's Tomb. They could not guarantee anyone's security as the Arabs were shooting at anyone who tried to get there. Things eased up a bit and the gravesite has reopened but security is very tight. Anyone going to Rachel's Tomb must be accompanied by a soldier in full battle gear, on a bullet-proof bus. It would have been too costly and a waste of time for Freddy and I to go alone with a soldier. We hopped on a bus with about ten other people and proceeded to our destination. The Israeli Government has built a veritable fortress around this holy place. The bus drives right up to the door stopping in front of a cement wall. The door of the bus opens almost directly into a small building which houses Rachel's Tomb. We were told to go directly into the building and that the driver would be back to pick us up in exactly 15 minutes. We entered the building and a steel door was locked behind us. We then proceeded down a small hallway to the small room that houses Rachel's Tomb. Exactly fifteen minutes later a soldier who had gone back to his post, returned with the bus, opened the door from the outside and we got back onto the bus, which took us to our van.

We then began our journey to Hebron. I sat in the front to try to engage our driver in a conversation, but it was not to be. I cannot speak Hebrew and he could not speak English. Frustrating for both of us. Our ride to Hebron took 30 minutes, the longer part through Arab territory.

When we arrived in Hebron, Rabbi Danny and Batsheva Cohen, the Chabad emissaries living there, were waiting for us. Although both of them grew up in Israel, neither speak English with any trace of accent. Danny was born in Brooklyn and

his parents made *aliyah* to a settlement outside of Ramallah when Danny was very young. Batsheva, an olive-skinned, soft-spoken beautiful woman, grew up in the Golan Heights. Batsheva's mother is American, attesting to her accent when speaking English. We spoke to them for a while and then it was time to get ready for Shabbos. Danny brought us to our sleeping quarters, a guest-house right next door to where he lives.

### **A Short History of Hebron**

The small enclave of 80 families in Hebron is located at the bottom of a valley, surrounded on all sides by over 200,000 Arabs. It is heavily guarded by soldiers and by the men of the community. People take their guns with them like you take your wallet. There has been a Jewish community in Hebron since the time of Abraham. In 1929 there was a *progrom* in Hebron. Sixty-nine people were brutally murdered. The British government at the time decided that they could not protect the remaining Jews and so they were told they had to leave. When they vacated their homes and businesses, the Arabs moved in. In the early 70's a group of stalwart Israeli's decided to take back that part of Hebron. They succeeded only partially as the Israeli Government decided that although the Jewish part did belong to the Jews prior to 1929, once they left and the Arabs moved in it became kind of a no-man's land. The result is that most of the property in Hebron is unused. Stores are boarded up, houses empty. The homes that the Jews do live in are not allowed to be renovated in any way. They are not even allowed to open stores where they once were.

One of the families who came in the 1970's to reclaim Hebron were Baruch and Sarah Nachson. They still live there. However, when they first went back, the Israeli government was not eager to have Jews living there again, so they made their lives difficult – to put it mildly. During those early years, Baruch and Sarah Nachson had a son named Avraham. When he was three months old he tragically died of crib death. As they were now living in Hebron, Sarah wanted to bury her baby there.



*Rabbi Danny Cohen, his wife Batsheva and one of their four sons*

*When he was three months old he tragically died of crib death. As they were now living in Hebron, Sarah wanted to bury her baby there.*

*continued on page 14*

# Israel

(cont'd)



Rabbi Danny Cohen farbrenging outside the Menucha Rochel Kollel

*The energy and enthusiasm that these children have, coupled with the conditions under which they live, is mind-blowing.*

The government however, had other ideas. They reasoned that if the Jews begin to bury their dead there, then Hebron would become again a permanent place for Jews. They told Sarah that she would have to bury her baby in Jerusalem. She steadfastly refused. On the morning she was to bury her infant son, she opened her door to the commander of troops stationed in Hebron. He told her that he had strict orders that she was not to bury her child in Hebron and that he would escort her and her family to Jerusalem. Sarah looked directly at him and said, "Over three thousand years ago, Avraham buried his wife Sarah in Hebron. Now I, Sarah, will bury my son Avraham here." She then proceeded, with an entourage, to the ancient cemetery to lay her child to rest.

## Friday Night

We were not the Cohen's only guests. Two other couples and about twenty students from the Lubavitcher yeshiva in Kfar Chabad had also come to Hebron to spend Shabbos. Friday night I went with the men to services in the Cave of Machpela. A brief bit of history about Machpela. It is the first piece of land the Jews owned in the Land of Israel. This is documented in the Torah Portion of Chaye Sarah, in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 23 verses 23-16... 'Abraham understood what Ephron meant. He weighed out for Ephron the silver that had been mentioned in the presence of the children of Heth, 400 shekels in negotiable currency. Ephron's field in Machpela adjoining Mamre thus became Abraham's uncontested property. This included the field, its cave and every tree within its circumference. It was Abraham's purchase, with all the children of Heth who came to the city gate as eye-witnesses. Abraham then buried his wife Sarah in the Cave of Machpela Field, which adjoins Mamre, also known as Hebron, in the land of Canaan. This is how the field and its cave become the uncontested property of Abraham as a burial site, purchased from the children of Heth.'

And so, it was into this Holy place that we went on Friday night. One more piece of information;

buried with Abraham and Sarah are Adam and Eve, Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Leah.

There is a very, very eclectic group of people who go there Friday night, made up predominately of Shlomo Carlebach followers. I think that in that 1 1/2 hour service they managed to sing every Carlebach song ever written.


The Shabbos meal at the Cohen's was electric. People spoke, the boys from Kfar Chabad sang beautiful niggunim and gave over inspiring insights of the Torah Portion of that week, 'Shemos'. At one point in the meal, two of Danny and Batsheva's children stood up on their chairs and began leading the Yeshiva boys in singing. These young children would start a *niggun* – chassidic melody and their middle son, Shaye, would clap, jump on his chair and get everyone going. The energy and enthusiasm that these children have, coupled with the conditions under which they live, is mind-blowing. The meal ended, the tables were cleared and then pushed together for a farbrengen<sup>2</sup>.

Danny began by apologizing for not being completely upbeat at the meal. He explained that just before Shabbos a commander from the army in Hebron approached him to reveal a startling bit of news, which, to understand, one must have some background.

In 1823 a Chabad community was established in Hebron. The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Lubavitch, sent Menucha Rochel, the daughter of the third Lubavitch Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, with her family to Hebron. She became a leader of the Chabad community and a source of inspiration. Many people sought her guidance and blessing. Menucha Rochel was buried in the cemetery in Hebron. When the Jews were pushed out in 1929, the shul and cemetery, as everything else in Hebron, lay empty and was almost totally destroyed by Arabs.

In 1993 the cemetery was part of the land that was to go under Arab occupation according to the Oslo agreement. International pressure intervened and that did not happen, although proper security was not provided. In 2000 the Arab intifada began and again the cemetery and shul were desecrated.

2. A farbrengen is a chassidic get-together, over refreshments and l'chaim.



In 2002 the Israeli Defense Minister permitted the creation of a learning center in a small building just outside the cemetery. This is where Danny Cohen comes into the picture. He took charge of this building. One of the things that Danny does in Hebron is run the kollel/shul at the site of where Menucha Rochel is buried.

Everything in Hebron must be heavily guarded, how much more so this small, isolated learning center and synagogue. And so, it has a small army base in the adjacent building. What the sergeant revealed to Danny just before Shabbos was that he was seriously contemplating removing the soldiers guarding this holy site. Danny knew that if this actually came to pass, the community would have to take over protecting the site. A sobering thought, given the limited resources and people...

## The Evening Continues

I am a farbrengen person. I live my life from farbrengen to farbrengen. Those few hours, that Friday night, were mystical. Where we were, together with the group of people present, lent itself to an unforgettable night. The farbrengen lasted into the wee hours of the morning.

I can never go to sleep after a farbrengen and I had already decided that sleep was not a necessary commodity on this part of our trip. So when we got back into our room, while my husband was neatly tucked into his mini-bed, I set myself up by the window. I had forgotten to turn on the heat before Shabbos, so the room was a bit chilly. I put my robe over my clothes, then my shawl over my robe, then my scarf over everything. I took the chair in the room, placed it in front of the window, placed my pillow on the windowsill and gazed out at the incredible view. I saw the hills above our living quarters, filled with Arabs. I saw the hill where Danny lit a huge Chanukah menorah for the first time last year. It was from that very same hill that two years ago an Arab shot into the compound that I was now staying in, murdering 18-month old Shalhavet Pass as she slept in her crib. I saw the soldiers patrolling in pairs, back and forth all night. I saw the spotlight continuously shining on no-man's land, the large piece of land separating the Arabs from the Jews. At 4:30 am I decided that perhaps I should sleep for a couple of hours. So, dressed in my full garb, I gingerly placed myself into my mini-cot (try and envisage the scene).

Imagine my surprise when the tortuously loud incantation calling the Arabs to pray rudely awakened me at 5:15.

## Shabbos Day

Shabbos dawned unusually warm for the time of year. After a coffee at the Cohen's, Danny announced that we would be davening that morning in the kollel, the learning center just above the gravesite of Menucha Rochel. I, for one was very, very excited. To be able to see first hand *and* pray at such a place was more than I could have asked for. As we prepared to leave their house Danny donned his capota (long black coat), his hat and...his automatic rifle.

We left his house and met the bocherim (yeshiva students) at the beginning of the road. As we turned right onto the main street, Danny smiled wryly and asked if we were in shape. I didn't really understand why he asked such a question but I answered truthfully and said no, I don't exercise. Nothing to be proud of, but such is the situation. As we walked through what used to be a bustling small city but is now eerily quiet and empty, very unobtrusively soldiers began to appear and walk behind us. We rounded a corner and were faced with a very, very steep road, which of course we had to walk up. There was no oxygen at the top, so I had to rest for a couple of minutes to catch my breath. We walked a bit more and lo and behold an even steeper hill. We trudged up this one only to be confronted with yet a third, even steeper hill. By this time I was becoming light-headed from lack of oxygen. Even the soldiers, who are supposedly in good shape, had trouble with these hills. (True they were carrying a ton of gear.)

Finally, we arrived at the shul and I virtually (no, I completely) collapsed onto a chair. It took me a while to come to myself and when I did, realized that we were now on what seemed to be the top of Hebron. We could see for miles in almost every direction. The view was spectacular. We learned a bit of Chassidus and then Danny announced that it was time for davening. Freddy suggested that as the day was so magnificent, perhaps we could daven outside. Danny is up for almost anything (he *lives* in Hebron!) and thought that this was an excellent idea. So everyone

*Even the soldiers, who are supposedly in good shape, had trouble with these hills. (True they were carrying a ton of gear.)*

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# Israel

(cont'd)



Another view of Arab territory as seen from our guest house

*About three-quarters way through the Torah reading an army jeep pulled up just outside the gates of the shul.*

chipped in, and out of the shul flew chairs, tables, siddurim, the shtender (reader's lectern) and finally the Torah. As there was no mechitza (separation between men and women) I stood slightly to the side of the men. I cannot tell you how moving those prayers were. Everyone there sensed that this Shabbos was something extraordinary. About three-quarters way through the Torah reading an army jeep pulled up just outside the gates of the shul. Out jumped the very commander who, the night before had given Danny the bad news about the soldiers guarding the shul. After a few minutes Danny quietly walked over to him and had a brief conversation. The commander stayed a few minutes longer and then went back into his jeep and drove off.

While we were davening, in case for a moment we forgot where we were, from a mosque located a few hundred feet from the shul the loudspeakers (kind of like surround sound) began calling people to pray. The men's davening certainly became more animated when this occurred.

When the services ended, Danny went into the small building and began bringing out food – kugels, danish, wine for Kiddush, plates, forks and knives. We sat outside in the warmth of the sun eating, farbrenging, telling stories and singing beautiful niggunim (Chassidic melodies) – again surrounded by the mosques screaming their call to pray.

After an hour it was time to take leave of the Menucha Rochel Shul. We slowly departed, no one in a rush to go. Escorted again by soldiers behind us, we began our journey back to Danny and Batsheva's home. Walking down hills instead of up was like a breath of air!

On the way back to Danny's house we stopped to daven mincha at a shul in a cave. It is the gravesite of Yishai, the father of King David and of Ruth, King David's great-great grandmother, quite an awesome place. While the men were davening, I climbed up some rocks to a command post, which has a view of much of Hebron. The bullet-proof glass protecting the small garrison was riddled with bullet holes, a testament to the constant danger these people live in.

During Shabbos lunch at the Cohen's I asked them what the hardest part of their shlichus (post) is. For Danny, it is the fact that there is not a blade of grass, not a flower, not a park. It's stones, sand and concrete. For Batsheva being ready, *really ready*, for a houseful of guests at every moment is very stressful, especially with four boys (she just had her fourth son) under the age of five. People just *arrive* in Hebron. No one can measure what support it is to know that you are not alone in such a place. But perhaps a phone call from intending visitors beforehand would give those on the receiving end a few extra minutes to prepare.

We left Hebron right after Shabbos in another, larger bullet-proof van. As we turned onto the highway, the driver looked very seriously at my husband and said, "You can now begin saying the travelers prayer." Driving at night is a much more dangerous than during the day. When we arrived back to our hotel in Jerusalem, I told Freddy it was as if we were coming back to another country. That is how drastic the contrast is.

## New Friends

Our stay in Israel was richly interspersed sharing meals and going on tours with people who at first were acquaintances, but quickly became good friends: Daniel and Jacqueline Gal, Montreal's former Consul general and his wife and Sigal Levy, passionate Israelis who bemoan the current dismal situation and try to change things from within; Mrs. Sara Kaplan, a teacher/mentor to many in Safed (mother of Zalman Kaplan), who made us a delicious lunch. Rabbi Aron Lazar Ceitlin, took us all over Safed, showing us the 35 kindergardens he runs in Safed; Chaim Kaplan (Zalman's brother) who proudly took us to what will be a new yeshiva in Safed housing over 160 boys.

## The Rest of the Story

This article is not meant to be an editorial on the situation in Israel. But I would be remiss in not pointing out certain facts that are real and happening at this moment in Hebron.

There are thirty families waiting to move into Hebron. What is holding them back is government policy. While the Arabs in Hebron are free to modify, add onto, expand or do whatever they wish to their properties, the Jews are forbidden to do anything to their homes. No expansion, no renovations of any kind. When we were there, Danny pointed out a small chicken coop. That, he explained, was what was left of the small zoo the community had put up for their children on the site of an abandoned gas station. When the government got wind that they had built this zoo, they sent a bulldozer and flattened it to the ground. They left the chicken coop standing.

The greatest fear that those living in Hebron have is that Israel is preparing to give it away, regardless of the fact that it is one of the three holiest places in Israel – Jerusalem, Safed being the other two. Even the most secular Jews we met in Israel understand that the soul of the country cannot be tampered with. "What will happen?" asked our taxi driver en route to the only indoor shopping mall in Jerusalem. "What will happen to those living in Gush Kativ, to the 8000 people that the government has decided must leave their homes, leave their land, leave *our* land, in the name of a peace that is nothing but illusion and lies? Hebron is certainly on the table, as is Jerusalem. What will be next...?"

## Postscript to the Menucha Rochel Kollel

POSTED JANUARY 5, 2005 ON A CHABAD LUBAVITCH WEBSITE:

*Last night a call to action was posted to send faxes to the military commander in Hebron to reverse the decision to take away soldiers guarding the ancient Chabad cemetery in Hebron where Rebbitzin Menucha Rochel is buried and the Kollel Menucha Rochel learns daily.*

*The response – in less than 12 hours – brought about the desired result. The soldiers are again guard-*

*ing our holy site. Shliach Danny Cohen received a phone call telling him that due to the response they received, the army has realized the importance of the site, and until they find an alternative way to make sure the place is safe, they will maintain their army position on location..*

*Out of consideration for the army's response it is best if no more faxes be sent to the commander.*

POSTED JANUARY 12, 2005

*On Tuesday General Shai Blosky, commanding officer of the Adjutancy Military School in Tzrifin, visited Hebron, where he prayed at the gravesite of Rebbitzin Menucha Rochel Slonim, of blessed memory. The local shliach Rabbi Daniel Cohen was surprised to receive an unexpected telephone call from the general, who asked him to accompany him on a tour of the gravesite and the nearby kollel.*

*The general told Rabbi Cohen that he was a close friend of the late Hebron commander, General Dror Weinberg, (who was killed when terrorists shot at worshippers returning from davening at the Cave of Machpelah). "Each time that I came to Hebron, Dror would take me to Menucha Rochel," the general recalled. "He would tell me that this was the place to pray for whatever I needed."*

*The two continued to discuss the security arrangements at the Rebbitzin's tomb. At one point General Blosky remarked, "OK, lets make a deal. If you carry on guarding the Rebbitzin, she will look after us all." The commander told him that he had received over 250 appeals regarding the dismantling of the guard post. ■*

# Freud's Great Freudian Slip

by RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS  
Chief Rabbi of the  
United Kingdom

It was Freud's greatest Freudian slip, and for some reason his commentators, at least those I've read, haven't noticed it.

It appears in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, a strange work if ever there was one. It was published in 1939, by which time Freud had taken refuge in Britain. Had he stayed in Vienna, heaven knows what humiliations he would have suffered before being murdered along with his fellow Jews. For some reason, at this desperate time, Freud wrote a book (he originally described it as a "historical novel") in which he tried to prove that Moses was an Egyptian. There have been many speculations as to why he wrote it, and I have no wish to add to their number. Early on in the book, though, there is a most curious episode.

Freud notes that several scholars have identified a common theme in stories about the childhood of heroes. The hero's birth is fraught with danger. As a baby, he is exposed to the elements in a way that would normally lead to death – sometimes by being placed in a box and thrown into the water. The child is rescued and brought up by adoptive parents. Eventually, he discovers his true identity. It is a story told about Sargon, Gilgamesh, Oedipus, Romulus and many others. It is also the story of Moses.

At this point, however, Freud notes that in one respect the story of Moses isn't like the others at all. In fact, it's the opposite. In the conventional story, the hero's adoptive parents are humble, ordinary people. Eventually he discovers that he is actually of royal blood, a prince. In the Moses story, the reverse is the case. It is his adoptive family that is royal. He is brought up by the daughter of

Pharaoh. His true identity, he discovers, is that he belongs, by birth, to a nation of slaves.

Freud saw this and then failed to see what it meant. Instead he changed tack and concluded that the story is a fabrication designed to conceal the fact that Moses was the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he really was a prince of Egypt. What Freud failed to realize is that the story of Moses is not a myth but an anti-myth. It takes a myth and turns it upside down.

Its message is simple and revolutionary. True royalty – the Bible suggests – is the opposite of our conventional wisdom. It isn't privilege and wealth, splendor and palaces. It's moral courage. Moses, in discovering that he is the child of slaves, finds greatness. It's not power that matters, but the fight for justice and freedom. Had Moses been an Egyptian prince, he would have been eminently forgettable. Only by being true to his people and to G-d did he become a hero.

Freud had mixed feelings about his own identity. He admired Jews but was tone-deaf to the music of Judaism. That is why, I suspect, he failed to see that he had come face to face with one of the most powerful moral truths the Bible ever taught. Those whom the world despises, G-d loves. A child of slaves can be greater than a prince. G-d's standards are not power and privilege. They are about recognizing G-d's image in the weak, the powerless, the afflicted, the suffering, and fighting for their cause. What a message of courage Freud might have sent his people in that dark night! Let us at least see what he did not, that the story of Moses is one of the great narratives of hope in the literature of mankind. ■

*True royalty – the Bible suggests – is the opposite of our conventional wisdom.*

## Thanks and Mazeltov!

Our deep thanks and appreciation to Chana Refson-Treitel, our co-youth director for all her wonderful work and devotion this past year!

We wish you and Michael much success and happiness in the future. Toda Rabba!



# As Close as You Can Ever be to G-d

by JANE SOLOMON

**I**t was as scary as anything I'd ever done, and I wasn't sure why. As a Reform Jew, my sense of being commanded by G-d does not come with a set of 613 unambiguous instructions, yet something had drawn me to the mikveh - the ritual bath - and to begin observing its laws, something about bringing G-d into my marriage in a more concrete way.

To me, being Reform means requiring of myself a thorough education in Jewish practices and their meanings. As I seek closeness to G-d, as I try to infuse my life with greater meaning and holiness, I know there is a roadmap that has been traveled for millennia and I know I need to study it. How can I reject rituals I don't understand? How can I demand new rituals when I haven't yet learned the old ones?

What I knew about the mikveh I had learned from books. In a nutshell, they said Jewish tradition requires a couple to abstain from relations for about twelve days beginning at the start of the woman's period; she then immerses in the "living waters" of the mikveh - a manifestation or symbol of G-d's presence - after which she and her husband can be intimate again. The laws of *taharat hamishpacha* or the "purity of the family," are often derided as attaching shame to menstruation, but my reading regarded them differently. The couple separates for part of the month in order to develop the non-physical parts of their relationship - much as we study Torah to develop the non-physical parts of ourselves; and immersion brings the woman physically close to G-d to sanctify her for what follows - that is, physical reunion with her spouse. I saw in this a commandment directed specifically at women and designed to sanctify marriage, too. I knew it was just a matter of time until I would try it. Somehow, I had to be there.

It was just a matter of time - but this was a little daunting, too, the idea of going into an Orthodox facility. No matter how clearly I understood that the commandment to immerse was as much mine as the *Shema*, I couldn't help wondering whether they'd let me in; surely they would be able to tell that I drive to synagogue on Shabbat

and eat beef and ice cream on the same dishes! I wasn't sure I'd make it in the door, let alone into the actual pool of living waters.

First, of course, I had to begin to observe the laws - and that meant abstaining from intimacy on certain days, days prescribed not only by our social schedules or how tired we were but by, shall we say, forces not subject to our control. In her book *On Women and Judaism*, Blu Greenberg says these laws are beautiful and profound, and that maybe if abstention were shortened to seven or ten days, more couples would observe them. Robbie and I decided to do seven. On day eight I looked up "mikveh" in the phone book and dialed the number. There was a long recording about hours, fees, location and, at the very end of the tape, how to call "Shira" for other questions.

Shira answered the phone. I could hear children playing in the background. "What can I help you with?" she asked. I said I was trying to get up the nerve to go for the first time. Her first question was, "Are you married?" Then she asked who I was studying with. I gave the name of my Reform rabbi, which was not familiar to her. "Never mind, it's fine," Shira said, "and, of course, you've waited twelve days." It had only been seven, but it was clear to me from her seriousness that if I was going to use their mikveh I would respect their rules.

I said I wasn't sure I had the nerve to go, but that my husband would be really glad if I did. I was thinking Robbie would be glad for me to get over being scared, but Shira thought perhaps he was pressuring me to go. "It's wonderful that your husband is supportive," she said, "but immersion in the mikveh is really for you, you yourself." She went on to tell me that when you immerse in the water, you are as close as you will ever be to G-d - that you have to remove all jewelry, makeup, bits of food in your teeth, dirt under your nails, and so on because there should be nothing at that moment between you and G-d. She didn't say anything about being perfectly "clean"; she talked about being completely uncovered (unmasked, I knew my rabbi would say, though I've never heard him discuss it). This is exactly what we work for all year long in our prayers, to free the soul from the bonds of culture which get in the way of our purest selves. Obviously, we must be clothed from one another, but before G-d we must be as exposed as possible, to open our hearts to the divine love and truth.



The 2300 year old Mikveh in Masada.

*I knew it was just  
a matter of time  
until I would try it.  
Somehow, I had  
to be there.*

Thus our tradition offers women an allegorical "uncovering" (for men, perhaps circumcision) that opens a channel to heaven.

Then, at the moment of immersion, when you are as close as you can ever be to G-d - "at that moment," Shira said, "you may make a personal prayer, not for world peace but for something in your own life. The mikveh is for you," she said. "It's a beautiful personal moment. It's just you and G-d."

It took me two more months to finally do it. It was 9:00 at night. From the parking lot I saw a woman leaving the building with a scarf around her head. I realized I was wearing short sleeves. Knowing that the Orthodox require women's clothes to cover the knees and elbows, I arranged a scarf over my shoulders. A security guard stood outside three doors. I asked him which was the right one. I pressed the buzzer and - miracle! - They let me in.

The waiting room was crowded and I didn't know where to sit. I stood against a wall, then somebody offered me a seat. There was a box of laminated numbers on the table. I took number 17 and they were only up to 9! I sat down and fumbled with my scarf. Then I noticed that all the women but two were wearing shorts and T-shirts. Two young women were talking about child rearing issues - a nice, uncranky conversation. Some were reading magazines. It smelled good there - like a bathroom when you've just filled the bathtub. Maybe it was steam, or a hint of soap. Anyway, it was nice.

From then on I wasn't nervous, just filled with anticipation. After a very long time my number was called and I was taken to a room that looked like any bathroom - simple wood cabinets, sink, shower tub, mirror, linoleum floor. The only clue that it was something else was an intercom speaker by the door. There were towels, paper slippers and everything you needed to fix up your nails. And there was a checklist of preparations so you wouldn't forget anything. I stepped into the bathtub and mostly scrubbed my feet - Shira had said they would definitely check hands, nails and feet - and it seemed that no matter how much I scrubbed, more dirt kept coming off. Finally, I gave up and just hoped they would be considered clean enough. I readied my explanation that I'd been gardening barefoot for years and - could I say

this? - I had never really looked at the soles of my feet before that night.

And indeed, this was a bath like no bath I had ever taken. I was striving not to be clean but to be uncovered, to remove anything and everything that could come between me and G-d. I wasn't trying to make my nails look pretty. I was trying to remove all dirt and particles from them. I had to comb out my hair, something I never do; my hair is short and naturally curly. When I was finished, I looked in the mirror and didn't recognize myself. And I knew that was good.

I buzzed. The "mikveh lady," whom I'd read about in books came to the door. She was about 25, sweet and shy. I told her it was my first time and that I didn't know exactly what to do. She said okay; she didn't make any fuss, just smiled shyly. I had a towel on and these paper slippers, and she held up a big sheet as she walked by various halls and doors to the mikveh room. When we got to the top of the stairs that descend into the water, she said, "I have to ask you a personal favor." I was surprised. "I have a baby son. He is eight weeks old and tonight he fell off the bed. Would you please say a prayer for him?"

I was so glad Shira had told me about saying personal prayers in the water. "Of course," I said, and I told her my kids too had fallen off the bed and they were all fine. She looked relieved and grateful. Then she checked my hands and feet. They were okay. I stepped into the water, realizing I didn't know whether it would be warm or cold. It was very warm, almost hot. I walked down the stairs and went under the water. I said a prayer for the little boy. I had forgotten to think of a prayer for myself, so I prayed for him again during the second and third immersions. In between the second and third I said the blessing which I had also forgotten and which the mikveh lady repeated for me. In English it means, "Blessed are You, King of the world, Who has made us holy with Your commandments and commanded us concerning the immersion." Each time I came up, she said, "Kosher - good!" She seemed a little surprised



*When we got to the top  
of the stairs that descend  
into the water, she said,  
"I have to ask you a  
personal favor." I was  
surprised. "I have a baby  
son. He is eight weeks  
old and tonight he fell off  
the bed. Would you please  
say a prayer for him?"*

*continued on page 24*

# As Close as You Can Ever be

(cont'd)

I knew what to do. I was thinking I must be the only Jewish woman in history who learned what to do in the mikveh from a book. Well, a book plus a telephone call.

How was it? For me the preparation felt more significant than the immersion because I had forgotten to think of something to pray for and the immersions were so fast I had no time to think or say much of anything. But it was nice. I felt that I was reaching out further to G-d, more than that G-d was there with me. But like all efforts at meeting the Divine - prayer, for example - surely this must take practice.

The bigger surprise was how normal and ordinary it seemed. The next day in the market every woman I saw seemed to be someone who might go to the mikveh. It no longer seemed alien or exotic - rather a gorgeous privilege, like who wouldn't eat chocolate if they had the chance, or go to Paris, or have children? To be able to immerse yourself in some manifestation of G-d to come so close, and be held so warmly, even as you are bared and exposed - in my mind I heard the words "*Ma tovu ohalecha Yaakov, miskenotecha, Yisrael!*" - How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!

And yes, the twelve days of abstention are hard, but they have their rewards. Obviously, deprivation makes you appreciate what you have taken for granted. And being thus separated while still having the same amount of time together has heightened our appreciation of the rest of our marriage. I think of the twelve days also as a kind of fast, giving thanks to G-d for fertility, for marriage, and even for intimacy, none of which would exist without G-d's endless love of humankind. And eventually the twelve days do end.

It's been several months now, and I can't imagine going back to how Robbie and I were before. Our bodies are but dust; they are on loan to us from G-d and to house our souls, and to enjoy, as G-d wants us to enjoy them. During the twelve days we are commanded to abstain, my husband and I live soul to soul. Sometimes it's hard, but that's when it's the most beautiful. So - what was I afraid of? In retrospect, I think I was afraid of looking like an imposter before G-d. Was I really ready to come into G-d's presence in such a profound way? Was I worthy? And what would I find there? The G-d of judgment or the G-d of mercy and compassion? Go for yourself and see - but I can tell you that the water was very, very warm. I myself am no longer afraid. And I know just exactly why I have to be there. ■

*So - what was I afraid of?*

*In retrospect, I think I was afraid of looking like an imposter before G-d.*

## THE BLESSING OF TRUTH

By Ryan Saxe

*This poem was written by 9 year-old Ryan to his beloved bubbie, Roz Saxe.*

Oh L-rd make the world have peace to make the swords drop  
And make the guns depart to destroy war  
Let there always be unbreakable bonds between friends  
Bless the people that stand up for their rights  
Anyone can be strong  
Help people control themselves and not hurt anyone  
Always help the poor  
Bless the L-rd for all the beautiful things He has given us and we all have  
Thank everyone around you  
Everyone has a right to be who they want to be  
Thank the L-rd that we have friends by our side  
Always believe in yourself no matter what and never say something is impossible  
There is a way to do everything.  
Just keep working hard and never give up.  
Nobody dies if you like them or love them. They will always be in your heart

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### SHABBAT & HOLIDAYS

Evening Service at Candle Lighting Time  
Morning Service - 9:00  
Followed by a Kiddush/luncheon

### SUNDAY MORNINGS & LEGAL HOLIDAYS

8:30 followed by breakfast

### SHABBAT & HOLIDAY YOUTH PROGRAMS

9:30-12:00  
Stories, games, songs, prayer, snacks - ages 3-11

# What Does it Mean to "Believe in G-d"?

by MANIS FRIEDMAN

Even the honest atheist will agree that a first cause, an original being, must have preceded the universe. This original cause or source is what so humbled Einstein, although he incorrectly described it as a religious experience. The questions of faith begin with *how* we understand this First Cause, its nature, and its relationship to us and to the universe.



The statement, "I believe there is a G-d" is meaningless. Faith is not the ability to imagine that which does not exist. Faith is finding relevance in that which is transcendent. To believe in G-d, then, means not that you're of the opinion that He exists, but that you have found relevance in Him. When a person says "I believe in G-d" what s/he really means is "G-d is significant in my life".

*In discussing our relationship with G-d, the question we first need to ask, is, Who cares?*

In discussing our relationship with G-d, the question we first need to ask, is, Who cares? In what way is He relevant?

For some people, G-d is relevant because they are concerned with the origins of existence. For others, G-d is relevant because they are concerned with the afterlife, and faith is a prerequisite for getting to heaven. Finally, for others, G-d is relevant because they believe that life has purpose.

In Judaism, particularly in Chassidism, the interest in G-d comes from the conviction that life has meaning. The recurring question in Chassidic thought is: Why is a soul sent into the world to suffer in a physical body, for 80, 90 years? We know there is a purpose, that G-d is the author of that purpose, and we want to know and understand it.

Chabad Chassidism teaches that the mind is the soul's capacity to detect logic, the heart is the soul's capacity to respond negatively or positively. The respective functions of the mind, heart and soul are often confused.

One who lives by his heart exclusively, trusts only what he feels. One who lives by his mind

exclusively, trusts only what fits. But neither of these tells you the truth. The mind demands that logic be trusted, the heart demands that the emotions be trusted. Yet both can be mistaken. They do not reveal inherent truth. For that, we turn to the soul, the *neshamah*. Because the soul is a part of the Divine – and that is truth. When we have faith, when we find relevance in G-d, we are trusting that instinct in the soul that tells us that G-d is the purpose of life.

In pragmatic terms, the mind, the heart and the soul must each fulfill their function: when we know all that can be known, when we come to the edge of knowledge and logic itself tells us that we have reached its outer limits and it cannot handle what lay beyond this point, faith enters. Where the mind is no longer adequate, the soul responds to truth. This is faith.

This faith, this soul response, is necessary in the fulfillment of that category of mitzvot known as *chukim*, supra-rational laws, laws that do not subscribe to reason.

If someone has difficulties with these particular commandments, that is an indication that they may be relying on the mind and heart at the expense of their own capacity to react to truth – the expression of their soul. When a Jew fulfills a mitzvah before they've fully intellectualized it, they are allowing their *neshamah* to respond to truth.

It is an ability that often needs to be cultivated. The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), recounts in his memoirs that as a small child, he once asked his father to explain to him why we follow a particular custom with regard to the saying of *Modeh Ani* upon waking in the morning. Instead of giving the answer, the Rebbe's father led him to an elderly, simple Jew, and asked the Jew, "Why do you say *Modeh Ani* in this particular way?" To which the man responded, "Because that's how my father taught me to do it." The Rebbe's father might have just as easily given him the rational reason for the custom. Instead, he saw it as an opportunity to exercise his ability to respond with faith.

This is why in Chabad-Lubavitch it is our approach to invite a Jew – even one who claims not to believe – to do a mitzvah, before we engage them in a discussion on faith. Because in consider-

ation of the existence of the soul, we can assume that we don't have to convince people of life's Divine purpose. We just have to get them started, and with each mitzvah they do, their neshama asserts itself more, and questions become answered of themselves. By way of analogy, if a woman's maternal instinct appears to be absent, you don't argue the philosophy of motherhood with her. Just put the baby in her lap and her maternal response will emerge.

The relevance we find in Him will differ from person to person. Being that He is everything, people will experience G-d in every possible way. He is the G-d of Abraham and Isaac, of Benevolence and Might. And it is also true, as G-d says, "I am known according to my deeds." Some will know Him as a rewarding G-d, others as a G-d who punishes, who provides, who saves, who enlightens, who inspires, and so on and on.

In the beginning, G-d revealed Himself as the creator, master, king – all very impersonal roles. In Halachah (Torah law) G-d reveals His laws, but doesn't allow His "personal feelings" to show. Later, in the Kabbalah, G-d makes Himself vulnerable; He shares intimate details. He is humanized in a two-way relationship. So the *Halachist* has great respect for the wisdom of the commandments, while the mystic sees G-d as taking the mitzvot personally. When G-d says, "don't cut down fruit trees," if we were sensitive we would not only hear a commandment, but we'd see something about G-d. Kabbalah reveals that something. The

*halachot* (laws) are the details; Kabbalah reads between the lines.

Kabbalah gives us a very different perspective on G-d's "anthropomorphic" behavior. It reminds us that Torah comes to teach us about G-d, and that expressions such as "G-d spoke," "G-d's hand," "G-d's anger," need to be considered from Torah's or G-d's perspective. We are not the reference point for G-d's behavior; G-d should serve as a reference for our behavior. He created the world. Speech, hand, anger, jealousy – these are all *His* creations, these are all Divine rights. Our speech, our hand, our anger, our jealousy – these are only metaphors for the real thing, not the other way around. When we read that "G-d raises His hand" and splits the sea, we need to measure our own hand against that. When we raise it, what happens? Nothing. We learn then that we are not quite as powerful as G-d. When we read that G-d gets angry and punishes because He created a world with a Divine purpose, and that purpose is frustrated, we ought to measure our own anger against that. What have we created? Nothing. We may not, therefore, get angry and punish as G-d does. Considering G-d's anger and other attributes in this way brings us to a humbling recognition. Only when our anger or jealousy is an expression of moral indignation does it reflect true, Divine qualities. Only then, may we exercise such expressions. Whatever truth there is in anything in us, it is the extent to which we embody what it is He tells us about Himself. ■

*When we read that "G-d raises His hand" and splits the sea, we need to measure our own hand against that. When we raise it, what happens?*

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# MTC Mazeltovs

# Mazeltovs

## MTC MAZELTOVS

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Joanne and Harley Eisman on the birth  
of their daughter, Michelle

Chaya and Yirmiyahu Harrison on the birth  
of their daughter, Dina

Mircia and Ali Hascalovici on the birth  
of a granddaughter, Neshoma,  
to Rosa and Eitan Seidenwar

Elza and Michael Hirsch on the birth  
of their son, Yitzchak Levi

Frances and Gerry Kessner on the birth  
of their granddaughter, Chloe Elizabeth  
to Heidi and Barry Field

Shoshana and Shulie Polter on the birth  
of their daughter, Yutke Rochel

Laurie and David Puterman on the birth  
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Joelle and Martin Sacksner on the birth  
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Ron and Shari Shlein on the birth  
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Goldie to Chaya Schera and Yossi Spalter

On the marriage of their daughter  
Chana to Mendel Kaplan

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Bar Mitzvah of their son, Charles

Brenda and Jack Cola on the  
Bar Mitzvah of their son, Jeremy

Amy and Allan Farkas on the  
Bar Mitzvah of their son, Blake

Brenda and Jeff Kirstein on the  
Bar Mitzvah of their son, Brian

Leah Ross Gazin on the  
Bar Mitzvah of her son, Zachary

Vicky and Lee Karls on the  
Bar Mitzvah of their son, Spencer

Meir and Helen Hakak on the  
Bar Mitzvah of their son, Tal

Lori and Joel Leonoff on the  
Bat Mitzvah of their daughter, Jamie

Bassie and Chaim Treitel on the  
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The Schachter family on the engagement of  
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Sara Eldor on the engagement of  
her daughter, Karin to Michael Wilk

The Rosenfeld and Treitel families on  
the marriage of Nina and Yitzchok Naparstek

The Diamant family on the marriage of their  
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The Minkowitz and Kaplan families on  
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Leslie and Steven Sonnenstein on their marriage

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MTC extends a hearty Yasher Koach to Reva Fleischer of Jostar Décor  
for her generous donation of all the window treatments for the offices upstairs.  
Greatly appreciated!

# This year, KIDS at the MTC were in ACTION!



## KIDS in action



We got together every month for fun, entertainment and a place where we can do good deeds and make this world a better place by helping others! Some of our entertainment this year, included: A world famous vaudevillian entertainer from the dream circus who had us all involved in his interesting stories! We made silly putty, learned about and had a chance to hold a reptile and formed robots with the "Science Frontiers!" We went to Rose Bowl, and bowled to raise money for the children of Chai Life Line. We raised 400\$ in total! We had a portrait of ourselves drawn by Caricaturist Ferg. With song, games and a yummy meal, we all participated in a Shabbaton with family and friends! The high-lite of this year's entertainment was the Limo Ride! Three limos pulled up in front of MTC and brought us kids to Maimonides hospital to spread the joy of Purim to the elderly! Making coloring books for the Israeli children, tie-dying t-shirts for kids in the Ukraine for Chanukah, raising money for the children of Chai Life Line are some of the things we did together to make others happy! Looking forward to greeting you all at the upcoming KIDS IN ACTION events!



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# "Success in Writing"

by DR. YAAKOV BRAWER  
Professor of Neuro-Endrochronology,  
McGill University



No chassidic anthology would be complete without a tale about a tzaddik. Of course in order to properly appreciate such a story, one must have some inkling of what a tzaddik is.

Everyone knows that tzaddikim are holy people with supernormal abilities and prophetic insight. What people generally do not appreciate is that such individuals are not mere miracle workers put on earth to solve the financial, medical, or child-rearing woes of their followers. The principle role of a tzaddik is that of a spiritual physician. A tzaddik is able to fathom the innermost core of the human soul. He can see the strengths and the weaknesses, and more importantly, he can perceive the *tachlis*, the purpose for which a particular soul came into this world. The diagnosis completed, the tzaddik will then implement whatever is necessary to inspire and aid the individual in accomplishing his or her Divinely designated life's task.

The tzaddik does not make decisions for his Chassidim, relieve them of personal responsibility, or solve their problems for them. He challenges them and directs them to fulfill their own mission in life, and if, on occasion, special emphasis is required to get the message across, the tzaddik will produce a miracle or two just to get things started. The following is an example of how a few words from a tzaddik can change a Chassid's life.

For many years I have participated as a speaker in the mid-winter Shabbaton in Crown Heights. Several years ago, however, I began to "burn out". It got to the point that I could barely stand the sound of my own voice. I could no longer bear to answer the same questions over and over again. I had had it.

It was in this frame of mind that I arrived in Crown Heights in December of 1990 for what I perceived as my last speaking engagement. Blended in with the ennui was a large measure of guilt. The Lubavitcher Rebbe had encouraged me in my speaking activities, and now I was afraid that I would be letting him down. Chassidus has little patience for quitters. There was, however, no help for it. I simply had no more talk left in me. I had spent hours casting about for some suitable activity that could serve as a replacement for the speaking, but thus far, I had come up with nothing.

Predictably, the talk that I delivered at the Shabbaton that weekend was a disaster. It was rambling, fragmented and uninspired. My swan song was most definitely off key and in addition to the boredom and guilt, I now felt dejected.

On Sunday mornings, the Rebbe received visitors. Anyone who so wished could meet the Rebbe and obtain from him a blessing and a dollar to be given to charity. The crowd of people hoping to see the Rebbe always numbered in the thousands and the wait in line was uncomfortable and long. Fortunately, I was a participant in the Shabbaton and Shabbaton guests and participants went through first.

Given the miserable performance of the preceding night and my planned retirement from the speaking circuit, I felt more than my usual apprehension at encountering the Rebbe. Nonetheless, at 10:30 Sunday morning I set off for the Crown Hotel to join up with the Shabbaton party, which was scheduled to go by the Rebbe at 11:30.

On the way, I met a group of Shabbaton guests who wished me good morning and questioned me about my horrible presentation of the previous night. They said that the subject matter, although interesting, was quite complicated and difficult to follow. They wanted to know if I had published these ideas somewhere. When I said that I hadn't, they wanted to know why not. I informed them that I am (was) really a speaker and that I express myself poorly in writing. They couldn't understand that. They knew that I had to write extensively and well in order to survive in the academic world. I explained that scientific writing is different from expository prose. Indeed, my stilted writing conformed beautifully to the monotonous, dry, pedantic style that characterizes scientific journals.

When we arrived at the hotel, another group of people approached to ask where they could find my writings. When I told them that there weren't any, they also wanted to know why not. So I had to repeat my explanation once again.

I went up to the lobby to await our departure for "770" (the Rebbe's headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway, in Brooklyn). Several yeshivah students, who had been helping with the Shabbaton, came over and wanted to know where they could find my "stuff". I told them that there was no "stuff" in

*On the way, I met a group of Shabbaton guests who wished me good morning and questioned me about my horrible presentation of the previous night.*

print. "Why not?" By now, I was losing my patience. I explained to them, a little sharply, that I am not a writer, that I never was a writer, and, that in fact, I can't write. "How can that be, you're a professor aren't you?" I got up and walked outside.

Finally the Shabbaton group left for the meeting with the Rebbe. On the way, I was walking next to a couple who introduced themselves and wanted to know where I had written .... I couldn't believe it. I smiled at them, pretended that I didn't hear the question, and walked on ahead.

When we arrived at 770, we skirted the throngs of people waiting in line and entered a door in the basement of the building. As our line crept forward my heart began to pound and my mouth became dry. An encounter with the Rebbe is, after all, no light matter. In front of me was Rabbi Shmuel Lew, a friend from London, and his son who had just become engaged. I could now see the Rebbe handing a dollar to Rabbi Lew and his son and saying something to them. An instant later, I was before the Rebbe.

Although the meeting with the Rebbe lasts only a few seconds, they are very long seconds. During those precious moments the Rebbe is totally attentive to you. No one and nothing else exists. The Rebbe looked at me with unfathomable love, handed me a dollar and wished me *Bracha v'hatzlacha* - "Blessing and success."

I started to move on, when the Rebbe's secretary caught my sleeve. I turned back to the Rebbe, who was holding out another dollar for me. As I took the dollar, the Rebbe, with a little smile and laughter in his eyes, told me: "*Hatzlachah in schreiben*" ("Success in writing").

I was stunned. As we left the building, Rabbi Lew's son, who had heard the Rebbe's words to me, asked: "Yankel, are you a writer?"

"I am now." I answered. ■

*I explained to them,  
a little sharply, that I am  
not a writer, that I never  
was a writer, and, that  
in fact, I can't write.*



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# Are You Happily Ever After?

## Reflections on Passover

by MOSHE WISNEFSKY

Romance. Passion. Love unrequited due to cruel twists of fate, or achieved due to good luck. These are the kind of romantic tensions that drive the plotlines of everything from dime novels and popular cinema to classic literary masterpieces. These love stories usually end with either catastrophic or blissful resolutions – everyone either dies (as in *Romeo and Juliet*) or lives happily ever after. But in the Western mindset, life after the goal is reached, the happily ever after part, is rarely dealt with. The curtain simply comes down. Viewed as such, the romantic pursuit is, in effect, the goal.

In the Jewish view, romance is only a piece of a much larger puzzle – which includes both a clear picture of the blissful state being worked for and an equally clear way to live once that state has been achieved.

It is quite a difference.

During my youth, I was asked to deliver the sermon at my religious school's Consecration Service. I went on and on about the glories of being Jewish but then added that, even after years of religious education, I really didn't believe in G-d. Instantly, a hush fell over the room (voicing a thought like this thirty-odd years ago was taboo). Forging on, I concluded, "But although I may not have an unquestioning belief in G-d, I have my young, intelligent Jewish mind looking for Him, and who can say which position is better?"

As I returned to my seat, people whispered, brilliant, and, so insightful. The Rabbi took my place at the pulpit and said my attitude was, in fact, the real Jewish approach of constant questioning and searching rather than blind belief.

In other words, there are – so people think – only two possibilities: either you have blind faith in the stereotype of G-d, or you are on an often painful but dramatic, romantic search. To actually find G-d, or absolute meaning in life, and remain a mature, cultivated person is categorically impossible. As someone put it, "If you talk to G-d, you're holy; if He talks to you, you're insane."

If you ask the man on the street what he's working for in life, he might reply, to make a better

world. Then ask him, And once we've eliminated war, injustice, disease, ignorance and all the rest – then what? He'll probably shrug his shoulders. Similarly, ask a spiritually oriented person what Judaism is about and he or she might answer, "Our search for G-d." Follow with, "And once we've found G-d?" The response will probably be, "The searching itself is the finding."

Why this unwillingness to ask what is it all for? What does a real relationship with G-d mean?

Approaching G-d from the Western mindset that the pursuit equals the goal leaves most people without a developed grasp about who and what G-d is. And without this comes fear of the unknown. Many people are afraid to think about G-d because they're afraid of where it might lead them. It's safer to focus on The Search and forget about the possibility of The Consummation, or to declare axiomatically that G-d has not actually communicated with us and never will.

Granted, this makes for a good, taut storyline that can hold people's attention until the final curtain. But if G-d created man and did not communicate what He wants of us, what does that tell us about G-d? Did He create us for sport, to sit back amused as we grope for an understanding of why we're here? Or is He actually incapable of communicating with us? What parent, after his child is born, throws him on the street and says, OK junior, go experience life, or gives him a new car but never teaches him how to drive?

Although there are individuals and philosophies willing to accept such possibilities, Judaism considers them inconsistent with the nature of G-d. Judaism provides clear-cut concepts of who and what G-d is and what our relationship to Him can and should be. Precise answers are offered to the question of what the perfect world is and how to live happily ever after. The Torah makes what were searching for crystal clear.

But where, you may ask, is the romance in the relationship? Where are the passion and tension of the search? If we have all the answers neatly packaged, aren't we abrogating our free will and our spirit of inquiry?

The answer lies in the ultimate Jewish love song – the Song of Songs (*Shir HaShirim*) – that we read on



Illustration by Boris Yefman

*During my youth, I was asked to deliver the sermon at my religious school's Consecration Service. I went on and on about the glories of being Jewish but then added that, even after years of religious education, I really didn't believe in G-d.*

Passover. Through the Haggadah we relive our people's exodus from Egypt. Egypt in Hebrew (*Mit'zrayim*) comes from the word for limitations (*meitzarim*). Going out of Egypt – on a deeper level – means breaking out of our limitations and constrictions.

And since G-d is infinite, no matter how intense or fulfilled our relationship with Him is, we can always search for ways to attain a stronger, purer bond. Therefore, the minute we reach one level in our relationship with G-d, our love creates the yearning that compels us to strive for the next. In this context, each stage (each goal) is unique

and attainable unto it'self, "For this is very close to you: it is in your mouth and heart to do it" (Deuteronomy 30:14). Judaism offers us both the tension and passion of romance as well as the bliss and release of fulfillment. And each one feeds the other: the more intense the fulfillment, the greater the yearning for higher fulfillment; the greater the yearning, the more intense the resolution.

The Haggadah tells us to think of ourselves as going out of Egypt in every generation. Inner Dimensional Judaism adds: every day of our life, we pursue a constant romance and love affair with G-d. ■

## Chosen? Not Me!

**QUESTION:** I have long been uncomfortable with the concept of the 'Chosen People'. To suggest that as Jews we are somehow closer to G-d than all other nations smacks of arrogance, elitism and racial prejudice. How is that any different to anti-Semitism? – *Margaret*

**ANSWER:** That is a fantastic question – a question that could only come from someone who is chosen. Allow me to explain.

In the Jewish understanding, chosen-ness leads not to arrogance, but rather to humility. If it were some human king that chose us to be his special people, then your assumption would be correct – we would become elitists. When a mortal power shows favoritism towards a subject, that subject will become more arrogant as a result. The closer you are to the king, the more significant you are, and the more significant you are the higher respect you feel you deserve, and you look down on other human beings.

But we were chosen by G-d. And the closer you are to G-d, the more you sense your insignificance. While being buddy-buddy with a human leader inflates your ego, a relationship with G-d bursts your selfish bubble. Because G-d is an infinite being, all delusions of petty self-importance fall away when you stand before infinity. Being

close with G-d demands never-ending introspection and self-improvement, not smugness.

This is the idea of the Chosen People – a nation of individuals who have been given the opportunity to sense G-d's closeness, hear His truth and relay his message to the world. All agree that it was the Jews that introduced the world to monotheism and a system of ethics and morals that have shaped the modern view of life and its purpose. And it is the survival of Judaism to this day that attests to the eternal value of this system.

To say that this is ethnocentric is absurd for one simple reason: Anyone from any ethnic background can convert to Judaism and become chosen. Jewish chosenness is not a gene; it is a state of the soul. Anyone wishing to take it upon themselves is welcome – as long as they are ready to have their bubble burst.

So the arrogant person is not acting chosen. The true test of chosenness is how humble you are. You, Margaret, have passed this test with flying colors. Your humility is so deep, it doesn't allow you to accept that you are chosen. While most other religious groups are quite comfortable claiming that they are the best, we Jews will do anything to say that we are nothing special. Now that's what I call a Chosen People! ■

by RABBI ARON MOSS



# If It's Saturday, This Must be America

by DAVID KLINGHOFFER  
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from The Forward

Of the Ten Commandments, the Fourth – Sabbath observance – had until recently received less respect than any of the other nine, among Jews and Christians alike. One joker has called it 'the Rodney Dangerfield of the Decalogue'. America, however, is due for a Sabbath revival, and there is evidence in the culture that one is coming.

Even apart from the Ten Commandments, Shabbat might be the most emphasized Divine imperative in the entire Torah – though nowhere in the written Torah is its observance defined. That would be left to the Oral Torah, expounded at luxuriating length in the Talmud.

In my last column, I recalled that the Talmud also discourages non-Jews from trying to fulfill the commandments as Jews do, but that doesn't mean that the insights into work and rest highlighted by the Sabbath aren't critical for everyone. Christians, no less than Jews, have been picking up on this.

The Pope released a 1998 apostolic letter, 'Dies Domini', urging a Sabbath revival, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) followed up with a report to its General Assembly titled 'An Invitation to Sabbath: Rediscovering a Gift'.

On my desk I've got a little pile of recent Christian volumes recommending the same rediscovery. Wayne Muller's 'Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest' is a lovely book informed throughout by Jewish ideas of Shabbat. Lauren Winner, an Evangelical Christian who went through a Jewish phase in college, writes endearingly in 'Mudhouse Sabbath' of the Torah practices she fondly remembers: "Shabbat is, without question, the piece of Judaism I miss most."

Don't underestimate what a significant statement that is from a Christian. While Jesus celebrated Shabbat, if not according to the rabbinic paradigm, St. Paul discarded it. In his letter to the Colossians, he wrote, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath." A few centuries later, St. Augustine was scolding Jews for having too much fun on Shabbat. They "observe their Sabbath by a kind of bodily rest, languid and luxurious. They abstain from labor and give themselves up to rifles... it is better to plow than to dance."

Paul and Augustine might have a bone to pick with Pat Robertson. In his new book, 'The Ten Offenses, Reclaim the Blessing of the Ten Commandments', the Christian right leader joins the chorus for a renewed commitment to Sabbath rest, praising the most prominent business figure in the country to have made the tough decision to shut down his establishments Sunday: Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-fil-A, the curiously named chicken restaurant chain.

Robertson endorses the old American blue laws, forbidding some commerce on Sunday. That idea got a boost this past summer in Virginia where the state legislature reinstated a nifty law, going back to the 1600's requiring employers to grant requests from employees for a regular day off on Saturday or Sunday.

Meanwhile, in his currently bestselling cheer-leading book for the Christian left, 'God's Politics', the Rev. Jim Wallis offers a prediction for the new millennium: "The concept and discipline of the Sabbath will see a great comeback in the lives of overworked and overstressed people."

On the Jewish side of course, there is the migration of formerly secular Jews back to traditional practices, prominently the observance of Shabbat. Witness the cover review in last week's New York Times Book Review of 'Perfect Madness', Judith Warner's best-selling plaint over the distress of high-achieving women who give up work for children: The biography at the end of the article informs us that the reviewer, Judith Shulevitz, "is working on a book about the Sabbath."

Culturally we seem to be at the center of a perfect storm, where work, stress and burnout from the 24-7 demands of e-mail and cell phones combine with the desire of working moms and dads to get some time with their kids. Business consultant Rabbi David Lapin (the brother of Toward Tradition's Rabbi Daniel Lapin) comments that far from being a dusty holdover from antiquity that is irrelevant to forward-looking modern folks – as we were taught in my Reform temple when I was growing up – Sabbath observance is more relevant to us than it was to the lives of any generation of our ancestors.

The real wonder, Lapin points out, is that those earlier generations preserved Shabbat for us, saw



Illustration by Boris Yefman

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its point, before your cell phone could recall you to work worries at any time and in any place, before your job expected you to be available to answer an 'urgent' e-mail no matter the day of the week.

Anyone who has turned off that cell phone or abstained from e-mailing on Shabbat will see what an obvious boon it has become – a no-brainer, a lifesaver, a gift from G-d. ■

## HOLD THAT DATE!

Wednesday, April 20, 8:00 pm The Eleventh of (Yud Aleph) Nisan	Farbrengen in honour of the Rebbe's birth-date
Friday Night, April 22, 8:30 pm Erev Pesach	Shabbos Family Dinner
Friday night, April 29, from 11:00 pm Seventh night of Pesach	Farbrengen in the Rabbi's home in honour of the seventh day of Pesach which commemorates the crossing of the Red Sea – the culmination of the Exodus.
Sunday, May 1, 7:00 pm Last day of Pesach	Mincha 7:00 pm followed by 'Moshiach's Seudah/Meal' – a taste of the future redemption.
Wednesday, May 4, 8:00 – 9:00 pm	Kabbalah Special Lecture – The Power to Heal
Monday, May 9, 7:30 pm	Around Our Kitchen Table. For women.
Monday, May 16, 7:30 pm	The Art of Challah Baking. For women.
Wednesday, May 18, 8:00 – 9:00 pm	Kabbalah Special Lecture – When Death Does Not Us Part
Friday Night, May 27, 7:00 pm	Family Shabbaton in honour of Lag B'Omer.
Wednesday, June 1, 8:00 – 9:00 pm	Kabbalah Special Lecture – The Secret to Happiness
Sunday, June 5, 5:00 pm	Family BBQ featuring Steve Max – 'Mr. Simon Says'
Monday, June 6, 7:30 pm	Around Our Kitchen Table. For women.
Sunday, June 12, from midnight Shavuos Night	'Tikkun Leil Shavuos' – Torah study sessions in honour of Festival of the Giving of the Torah.
Monday, June 13 First Day Shavuos	10:00 am – Services 11:45 am – Reading of the Ten Commandments followed by a Kiddush and Ice Cream Party
Monday, July 4, 7:30 pm	Around Our Kitchen Table. For women.
Sunday, July 10 The Third of (Gimmel) Tammuz	Family Trip to the Ohel in commemoration of the Rebbe's yarzeit.
Tuesday, August 16, 7:30 pm	An evening with Susie Fishbein – Kosher by Design. For women.

# Around our Table

## Citrus Salmon Fillet

Salmon fillets are easy to make. The orange and lemon flavors add a great zip to the taste.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
- 3/4 cup finely minced fresh dill
- 4 cloves minced garlic
- 1 and 1/2 T. olive oil
- 3 T. fresh lemon juice
- 2 cups orange juice
- 6 salmon fillets
- 3 T. slivered toasted almonds
- 6 Lemon slices

### DIRECTIONS

Blend all the ingredients together except the salmon and almonds. Coat bottom of baking dish with half the mixture. Place fillets in baking dish and spoon the rest of the mixture over the fish. Top with the almonds; cover with foil and bake in a 375 degree F (190 degree C.) oven for 20 minutes. Remove foil, place the lemon slices on top and bake 5 more minutes.

## Roasted Matchstick Vegetables

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 large zucchini
- 2 large yellow squash
- 4 large carrots
- 1 large onion, cut into julienne strips
- salt, pepper, dried basil, oregano and garlic powder to taste
- oil with which to coat the vegetables

### DIRECTIONS

Trim the ends from the vegetables and cut all into pieces about 3 inches long. To cut the squash and the zucchini: cutting lengthwise, trim the 3- inch piece into a long rectangle by cutting as close to the seeds as possible without trimming the seeds from the finished rectangle. The trimmed sides should be seed free. Cut these trimmed pieces into matchstick sized pieces and set aside. To cut the carrots: square off the 3 inch pieces by cutting lengthwise down each of 4 sides of the carrot. Cut the trimmed pieces into matchsticks, and then cut the remaining carrot rectangle into matchsticks.

Toss all of the veggies, including the onions, gently with the oil, and with the seasonings. Place on a lightly oiled sheet tray and bake in a 350 degree oven until tender, golden and perhaps a bit dark brown on the edges. Remove and adjust the seasonings to taste. Serve.

**Yields: 8 servings.**

# Brisket with Onions, Potatoes and Carrots

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 large brisket, about 4-6 lbs.  
oil to sear the brisket
- 6-8 each, medium sized potatoes  
and large carrots
- 4 large onions, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 cups red wine
- 2-3 cups beef broth, or more depending  
on the way the brisket fits into your  
roasting pan
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder to taste
- chopped fresh parsley with which  
to garnish the serving platter
- fresh flat leaf parsley, (sprigs) also  
for garnishing

## DIRECTIONS

Heat some oil in a large skillet and when hot, sear the brisket in the hot oil. When the first side is browned, turn it over and brown the second side. Remove the meat from the pan, and the pan from the heat.

Place the meat in an oven-proof roaster large enough to hold the brisket in a single layer along with the onions, potatoes and carrots. Place the onions in the roaster along with the meat. Add in the wine and the broth so that the meat is covered about two thirds of the way by liquid.

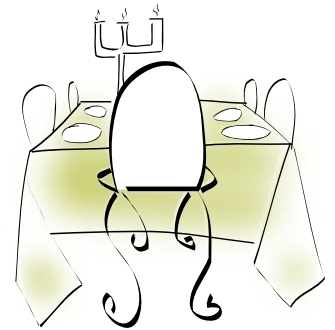
Cover the pan, place it in a pre heated 350 degree oven and allow the liquid to come to a simmer. Reduce the temperature to 275 degrees and allow the brisket to braise for about one and one half hours.

Peel the potatoes and the carrots and cut the potatoes into quarters and the carrots into 2 inch long pieces, either halved or whole depending on their diameter and your personal preference. Keep the potatoes immersed in water until it is time to place them in the oven with the meat, to keep them from turning brown.

After the meat has cooked for about an hour and a half, add the potatoes and the carrots to the roaster and cover the pan again. Replace in the oven and allow the brisket to cook another 90 minutes or so. The brisket is done when the meat is fork tender and the carrots and potatoes are cooked to your liking.

Remove the roaster from the oven, and the brisket from the roaster. Allow the meat to rest for about 20 minutes, and then slice it thinly, against the grain of the meat. Arrange the meat attractively on a large oval platter. Cover the meat with the cooked onions and some of the cooking liquid. Decorate the rim of the platter with the cooked potatoes and carrots.

**Yields: 6-8 servings.**



# Flight from Concord

by ALAN RICHMAN  
Reprinted from  
Bon Apétit Magazine

The first Zinfandel smelled like a candy store. The second was corky, the third overly oaked. Three bottles into my first tasting of new-wave kosher wines, I had made no extraordinary discoveries. Uncorking these bottles was not like unearthing the Dead Sea Scrolls.

A few friends, all with secular tastes but Orthodox beliefs, had brought me to a revered wine shop in Riverdale, a neighborhood in New York's Bronx, to share one of the great pleasures of their lives: drinking first-rate wines that just happened to be kosher. They raved about them, promising wines that would taste no different from the ones everybody else drinks. Although dedicated to the values and traditions of Judaism, these men have abandoned the sweet ceremonial wines made from Concord grapes that I always considered an unshakable foundation of the Jewish religion, to say nothing of the Jewish palate.

After trying the first three bottles, I had to admit they had a point. The wines were indeed much like everyday, non kosher wines – not particularly good. My first inclination was to blame kosher laws: Winemaking by Orthodox Jews under rabbinical supervision isn't how it's done at Chateau Latour.

Then the owner of the store, Jeff Saunders, opened a single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon from the Upper Galilee in Israel. It was deep purple, intense, and immediately drinkable. It was the best Israeli wine I'd ever tasted, but to be honest, I hadn't tried any since traveling to Israel in the early '90s and determining that the best wines there came from Chile.

They informed me that the wine I admired, Ben Zimra, was non-mevushal, which meant that the wine had been made under rabbinical supervision and must be opened and poured by Orthodox Jews. (Mevushal is the process of flash-boiling wine to make it kosher, after which it can be handled by anyone and remain kosher. Such wines are practically tamperproof, free from restrictions.) I begged them to cease such high-concept religious talk, much too complicated for somebody like me. We Hebrew school dropouts can be very sensitive.

As far as I'm concerned, there are only two kinds of kosher wine. The first is the sweet stuff, often

identified with the Passover table, which I've always thought of as the wine that ice cream parlors would serve if they had liquor licenses. The second is the new elite wines that have modern Jews so entranced that I suspect many have abandoned Talmudic studies to concentrate on vintage charts. Even among families, the rift can be deep: "I have two daughters," said one of my friends, a telecommunications executive. "One drinks kosher wine only if it's the sweet, pleasant, and mild stuff, and the other is a connoisseur who only likes the real stuff."

The store where we had gathered, Skyview Discount Wine & Liquors, has about 450 different kosher wines on its shelves. They come from America, Israel, Australia, South Africa, France, Chile, Italy, and Spain, and they are often made from noble grape varieties grown in the world's best wine regions. Saunders bought the shop in 1984 and said, "It didn't take me one day to realize what was going on up here with the kosher wines. I went after the business. People come from all over the country to shop here. I say, 'Thank you for coming.' They say, 'No, thank you for having all this.'"

Even after the Ben Zimra, I remained skeptical of the claims both he and my friends made that kosher wines had "bridged the gap" and were as good as nonkosher bottlings. Then he opened the 2002 Segal's Unfiltered Cabernet Sauvignon from Galilee. It was great: smooth, rich, intense, and beautifully perfumed.

Said one of my friends, a scholar, "The Talmud says that wine makes the spirit happy." That might have been the first Hebrew lesson I ever appreciated.

Down on New York's Lower East Side, in a small booth, patiently awaiting customers, inside the old Essex Street Market, I found Norman Schapiro, grandson of the founder of the company that is now Schapiro's Wine Cellars. His wines are among those disregarded by modern Orthodox Jews as too heavy, too sweet, and too simple, but they continue to sell. "Everybody loves the Concord grape," Schapiro boasted.

Not often does one find a company president pouring wines for passersby in an old bazaar erected in the 1930s, not long after pushcarts came under restrictions in New York. Today the market's prevailing bouquet comes not from pickles but from cuchifritos. Still, Schapiro steadfastly maintains a



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Lower East Side presence, even after selling his buildings on nearby Rivington Street and moving the wine production upstate. "I like to be here, and my customers like seeing me," he said.

To Schapiro, 67, the company will always be a part of the Lower East Side, and it will always be family operated, even if none of his children are interested in succeeding him. He's counting on a grandson, age 5.

"I have three sons," he said. "One is a doctor, a shrink. The next was in the baseball business, the commissioner's office, but now he's in California; I don't know what he's doing, it gets me crazy. The third is making the big money – I can't believe it myself. None are going in the wine business. My grandson, maybe him. This will go on forever."

If wines made from Concord grapes – most of his production – are no longer considered the dinner beverage of choice by modern Jews, they still play a traditional role, particularly at the Passover Seder. Schapiro says 60 percent of his wines are sold for Passover consumption and another 20 percent to 25 percent for Christmas and Thanksgiving. I made an educated guess: The Christmas clientele isn't Jewish.

"Why would you think only Jews drink kosher wine?" he asked.

After finishing our in-store tasting, one of my Orthodox friends called a local kosher-Asian steakhouse, Ginger Grill. He said to the owner, "Can we bring a non-mevushal sealed wine into the restaurant?" The answer was no. He began to explain the reasons, but my mevushal-induced headache began all over again. It lingered until I dug into the grilled Korean short ribs, so sweet and tender that I was miraculously healed.

During dinner, the scholar, who is in his 50's, said, "Our sons and sons-in-law were raised in different worlds than we were. When we were growing up, we didn't have a sense of openness where our orthodoxy was concerned. In the '50s and '60s, we wore hats, not yarmulkes. Otherwise, we'd get the crap beaten out of us every day by boys of every race, creed, and color. The Six-Day War [Israel's victory over Egypt, Jordan, and Syria] changed all that. We felt pride and wore yarmulkes, regardless. And America changed in the '60s,

became open to diversity. Our uncles who wore beards in Europe but were clean-shaven in America went back to beards."

Said another of the men, "Eventually we started to feel that there were no limitations. If we wanted to do something, we would do the best possible. If we were drinking, we wanted the best we could get."

These men seemed not to care about the food denied them because of kosher laws. A son of one of them told me, "I'm sort of curious to go to McDonald's and stuff my face for 99 cents, but I know I have everything I want and more." On the other hand, their desire to drink fine wine is unquenchable. Such beverages are perceived to be aspirational, and modern Orthodox Jews are certainly that. In addition, many affluent Jews who become Orthodox later in life are determined to continue their luxurious lifestyle. And fine wine is an essential part of it.

I asked the scholar if he felt any guilt over his abandonment of the once-cherished Concord grape. He replied, "My father led me to believe those wines were pretty bad even when that's all there was." And Schapiro is clearly not an admirer of new-wave kosher wines, even if he is starting to import some of them. "They're full of baloney," he said, and then added tactfully, "but some of them are good."

With dinner we opened a kosher white Burgundy, an Henri Darnat Puligny-Montrachet. I found it too sweet and too obvious, almost Riesling-like in its balance of sugar and acidity, but it did possess the minerality of a genuine Puligny-Montrachet. The same producer makes a kosher Corton-Charlemagne that sells for \$140 a bottle, but I wasn't tempted. I could imagine my mother wagging a finger at me in disapproval of the price.

My friends seemed utterly thrilled by the French white Burgundy, a pleasure long denied them. I forgave them their enthusiasm, because being deprived for so long can make a man appreciative of so little. The scholar told me that when he was in Israel recently, he ate at a Burger King – kosher, of course – for the first time in his life. He found himself grinning happily at the sheer joy of getting his very own Rugrats watch. ■

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