

# LAMPLIGHTER

10 Cheshvan  
Parshas  
Lech Lecha  
**1214**  
23 October  
5776/2015

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## LIVING WITH THE TIMES

In this week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, we are told about the births of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac.

When G-d promised Abraham that he would have Isaac, Abraham already had a son, Ishmael. Thus Abraham responded to G-d, "I pray that Ishmael might live before You" - i.e., that Ishmael would conduct himself as he should and pursue the Divine way of life. G-d, however, replied, "No. By Isaac shall your seed be called." From Isaac, Abraham was assured, his true joy would come.

There is a basic difference between Ishmael and Isaac. The birth of Ishmael was natural, without any heavenly intervention. Isaac's birth was miraculous for Abraham and Sara were far advanced in age.

Another difference between Ishmael and Isaac relates to the commandment of circumcision. Ishmael was circumcised when he was thirteen years old. At the age of thirteen a youngster has sufficient reason to be held accountable for his conduct and he becomes obligated to observe the mitzvot. Ishmael thus used his reason to determine his readiness to enter the covenant with G-d, and accepted circumcision.

Isaac was circumcised when he was eight days old. An infant that young cannot give consent; nevertheless he was bound up with G-d at that early age. This type of bond can never be dissolved and erased; it is eternal, as the Torah calls it "an eternal covenant."

Isaac's supernatural and miraculous birth was in contrast to Ishmael's natural birth. And Isaac's covenant with G-d was in a supra-rational manner as opposed to Ishmael's covenant.

Normally a child is born and raised under the supervision of his parents, guarded against any harm. He is educated to gain proper understanding, which in turn leads to attachment with G-d. This was the way of Ishmael. He was raised in the home of Abraham and received an education which made him understand that he ought to attach himself to G-d.

This course of life, however, provides no assurances. When religious commitment is based exclusively on reason, we cannot predict how it will be affected by the variables of life. Thus we find with Ishmael, that as soon as his inheritance was affected by Isaac's birth, his behaviour deteriorated and G-d commanded Abraham to listen to Sara when she asked that Ishmael be sent away.

Lech Lecha teaches us that, to establish Jewish continuity, one cannot set out with strictly natural calculations. The very existence and purpose of the Jewish people transcends nature. A Jew's life, right from birth, is intertwined with miracles and a disregard for the course of nature.

*Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.*

## Judaism, Reason and Beyond

*By Tali Loewenthal*

There is a comfortable, rational way of looking at life, which fits quite comfortably into normal frames of consciousness. It is acceptable. This is why "Reason" and reasonableness are often the underlying tone of the voice of the media, claiming to speak for everyone, whatever the message which is really being conveyed. Perhaps surprisingly, Reason can also include what we might term "religious" perspectives and valiant, apparently heroic behavior. The person who makes reason his theme can be dedicated to an ideal, and might carry out extraordinary deeds to further it.

In fact, Reason can also skillfully use false premises and lead to false and dangerous conclusions. In the right circumstances and environment, reason can lead to mass abortion and euthanasia, even to terrorism. The heroes of the French Revolution claimed to worship Reason and also organized "The Terror" in Paris in 1793-4 in which men, women and children of the nobility, as well as thousands of others, were led to slaughter at the guillotine, watched by an appreciative crowd.

By contrast, there is a Jewish concept of reaching beyond Reason. This does not mean "religious fundamentalism." It means the perception that the logical structures of Reason need guidance which comes from absolute values which transcend culture, nationalism and revolution, such as the sanctity of life: everyone's life.

The Jewish theme of reaching beyond reason means a bond with G-d which is higher than our own intellect, and an awareness that our lives are based on Divine premises: the miraculous rather than the natural.

It is intriguing that among the many interpretations of our Parshah (the Torah reading of Lech-Lecha, Genesis 12-17) there is a presentation of the difference between the path of Reason and the path beyond, exploring the contrast between the two sons of Abraham: Ishmael and Isaac.

Abraham's wife Sarah was not able to bear children. As was quite conventional in that time, she gave him her young Egyptian maid Hagar as a concubine, and Ishmael was born. Later in the Parshah, G-d told Abraham that his wife Sarah would miraculously bear a child. He would be named Isaac and he would be the true inheritor of Abraham's message to the world.

Abraham's response was, "if only Ishmael would live before you!" Abraham seemed content to have only one son, Ishmael, as long as that son would go on a path "before you," a path of closeness to G-d. Yet G-d insisted that Isaac alone would be his inheritor.

What distinguished Isaac and Ishmael from each other? Ishmael was born naturally, and Isaac was born miraculously, from a mother of 90 who had always been barren. Ishmael was circumcised at thirteen years old, an age of recognition and understanding; Isaac was circumcised at eight days, at a stage before intellect and rationality.

Thus Ishmael is explained by commentators as signifying Reason, while Isaac expresses the Jewish dimension beyond Reason.<sup>2</sup> The link of Ishmael with Reason might explain why today some descendants of Ishmael, in the battle of the vast Arab territories against the miniscule Israel, seemingly have the sympathy of quite a number of people.

Yet the message of Abraham, through Isaac, Jacob and the Jewish people, is that all human beings have a potentially positive role in creation. To realize this they too need to make the step beyond rational, to accept absolute moral standards and principles such as that of the sanctity of life. This step beyond is the path to the future.

# Slice of LIFE

*Synopsis: Montreal, 1998. Pesach Nussbaum had just spent Shabbat in blackout conditions when he chanced upon a gentile waitress who had been past The Rebbe and owned a painting of him that she wished to give away to the 'right people' as she felt it was beneath The Rebbe's dignity for her to own a painting of him.*

Pesach Nussbaum relates: I spent Sunday dragging electrical cables from an institution which had power near my duplex, in an attempt (finally successful) to power up only our oil furnace. We were getting used to living in semidarkness without electricity.

I spent Monday gearing up my office which had been closed for the last two days of that previous week because of the power outage and impossibly icy conditions. Although my schedule was full, my mind never strayed from the events of the previous Saturday night.

On Tuesday early morning, the electricity at home flickered, came on for an hour and went back off for four, and that's the way it continued the entire day. I came home from the office uncharacteristically early in anticipation of another evening of semi-darkness. Even though the house did have electricity I knew it might be short-lived.

I decided to call the young lady whom I had met at the hotel. We spoke for a few minutes about the ice age which we were all experiencing - no mention of the painting. Perhaps she had reconsidered (who could blame her), I thought.

"I hope you're calling about the painting," she says unsolicited.

I admit that it has been on my mind. She offers to come over to our house with the painting that very same evening.

She arrived, with a friend, at precisely 7:30, the painting in tow. Our house once again was illuminated by candlelight. My wife and I welcomed both guests warmly.

We were filled with anticipation not only for the painting to be unveiled but, even more so, for the story to be revealed.

The welcomes dispensed with and the coats hung, our young heroine uncovered the painting soon as she entered the dining room where tea and cake were waiting. As, once again, there was no electricity, we were left to inspect the large canvass in the elaborate gold frame with flashlights in hand. It was in fact The Rebbe in the famous hand-waving pose at the Lag B'Omer parade. It looked like a masterpiece.

I placed the frame on a chair against the wall where everyone was able to see it. We all took our places at the table. We had many questions and, thankfully, our heroine was eager to share her story.

"My father was Jewish. He died when I was five years old, his only child. Shortly thereafter my Mother developed Cancer and was near death. I was placed in a foster home as my mother was no longer capable of caring for me.

"As a child of 5, I prayed constantly for my mother's well-being. I would close my eyes, concentrate very deeply and I see before me what I assumed to be G-d's face. My mother recovered by the grace of G-d but the image of the face I saw remained with me.

"As a young teenager, I developed a talent for drawing and I drew the face according to my recollection. This drawing my mother kept.

"When I was fifteen, I was channel hopping on the television when I landed on a broadcast of a Chanukah Special. There I saw the face from my recollections as a five year old - it was The Rabbi. I called frantically for my mother. She came running and when she saw The Rabbi's face she fainted - she recognized him from my drawing.

"By calling the number on the bottom of the screen during the broadcast of the Chanukah special, I was able to obtain more information. I resolved to go to New York in order to see The Rabbi in person. My mother, however, felt that fifteen was too young and would not allow me to go by myself until I turned eighteen.

"I waited in The Rabbi's line with the greatest trepidation and tried my best to make myself as inconspicuous as possible. When the moment arrived and I was standing in front of The Rabbi, I did not say a word and could not even lift up my eyes. The Rabbi spoke to me in French. 'Whatever way you choose for yourself in life, G-d will be with you.' The Rabbi waited until I lifted up my eyes and gave me a dollar.

"I bought a photograph of The Rabbi which I brought back to Montreal. I told my mother about the experience with The Rabbi and how I wished to have a painting made from the photo. She laughed and wondered out loud how a young girl of no particular means was going to pay for a painting. I suggested that she would pay for it. My mother was usually very careful with the little money she had, but in this case she agreed without hesitation.

"So we commissioned an artist and he painted this picture. It hung in the most prominent place in our house for the last five years and had a good influence on whoever came to our house. My mother would speak to the painting every day and even put money behind the painting whenever she really needed something.

"This past year, my mother and I shared a most pleasant Easter dinner. When the meal was completed, my mother became very serious, looked up at the painting of The Rabbi and said: 'Now, it is time for you to go, and it is time for me to go'. I didn't understand it at the time, but a few months later my mother passed on.

"Before she died, she made me promise that I would return the painting to its rightful owners.

"I speak to my mother's memory every day and just a day before I met you in the hotel, I was lamenting to her that several months had gone by and I had not yet found the people to whom the painting should belong. I asked that the person should come forward and you walked into the restaurant."

By the time the young woman concluded her story, the electricity had come on and has stayed on ever since.

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*The Lamplighter contains words from sacred writings. Please do not deface or discard.*

ISSUE 1214

## MOSHIACH MATTERS

When the three angels, in the guise of travellers, visited Abraham, our ancestor treated them with great kindness. For each act that Abraham did, we - his children - will be rewarded by G-d in the Messianic Era, among them: For the water to drink - "On that day, living waters will come out of Jerusalem." (Zechariah 14:8); For the water to wash - "G-d will have washed away the sins of the daughters of Zion." (Isaiah 4:4); For providing shade - "The protective cloud will provide shade in the day to protect you." (Isaiah 4:6); For the bread - "Loaves of bread will grow from the land." (Psalms 72:16); For standing ready - "The king (Moshiach) will pass before them and G-d will stand at their head." (Mica 2:13) (From *Discover Moshiach*, based on *Beraishit Rabba* 48:10)



# INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

Excerpts of a letter dated 12 MarCheshvan, 5722 [1961]

Referring to the subject of your letter, in which you mention that I "admonish" you, it is not my custom to admonish for the sake of admonishment. However, when I see that a person could live on a higher level, no matter how satisfactory the present level seems to be, and if I think that I can do something to encourage that person towards the higher level, I would be remiss in my duty if I remained silent.

In your case, I see three areas in which, with all due respect, I feel that you could do a great deal more:

1. Regarding your own opportunities; 2. In the matter of encouraging your husband to utilize his capacities to the fullest advantage; 3. In the conduct of your home, and above all, the education of your children.

During our conversation we touched upon the subject that, as the Torah has always been called *Toras Chaim*, the Law of Life, and has always been both the source of our life and existence and the guide for our daily life, it is infinitely more so in the present age. The danger to Jewish life and existence in the free countries, especially in these United States, is not the danger of physical extermination, G-d forbid, but there is, nevertheless, a danger which is no less destructive, the danger of assimilation. Precisely because there is no external antagonism and discrimination against the Jews the danger of mass assimilation is a very real one.

It is, therefore, the duty of every conscious and conscientious Jew to do everything possible to stem the tide of assimilation, and it is truly a matter of saving lives.

It is self-evident that such an effort should not be limited to the older generation, but especially in regard to the younger generation, and the very young in particular. And needless to say, a person on whom Divine Providence has bestowed special capacities for influence is especially duty-bound to use these capacities in the direction outlined.

This is not the time to engage in theoretic research as to all the aspects of the situation, and therefore postpone action pending the results of such research. For, when a house is on fire, there is no time to study the laws of combustion and methods of fire extinguishing, but everything must be done to extinguish the fire before the house is destroyed and there is any possible loss of life.

Another important point to bear in mind is the following - there can be a twofold approach to life:

1. to consider it as a matter of pleasure, in which case every effort should be spent towards getting the most out of life, in terms of pleasure, and in every situation to seek the easiest way out;
2. to consider life as a challenge, and to help make a better world to live in, especially as the society in which we live is far from perfection. In this case, every effort must be spent towards this end, even if it means the sacrifice of certain personal pleasures, and even if it requires a great deal of continuous physical and mental exertion. But it is this latter approach that offers the maximum pleasure, real pleasure and gratification.

To return to the subject matter of our discussion. I have no doubt that you can do a great deal to influence and encourage your husband in the right direction. Similarly, you have the capacity to extend your influence beyond your immediate surroundings at home, to the community at large. This you can do both in a direct way and perhaps even more so in an indirect way, by raising the standards of your religious and spiritual life.

*(To be continued)*

## CUSTOMS CORNER

### BIRKAT HALEVANA

Upon seeing the moon at the beginning of the month one says a blessing called *Birkat HaLevana*. What's the significance of this Bracha? The Gemara says that saying *Birkat HaLavana* is like greeting the Shechina. To emphasize that we only pray to Hashem and the moon is just a tool by which we can recognize Hashem's strength, we say *Aleinu* afterwards.

Preferably, *kiddush levana* should be said outside. However, if one is not feeling well or it is dirty outside (to the extent that he would not be able to make a bracha in that place) he can say it inside.

In a situation where he needs to say it inside it is best to open the window or door, but if this too is not possible (e.g. the person finds it too cold) he may say it inside without even opening the window or door (taking into account he is sure that the light he sees is from the moon).

## A WORD

*from the Director*

*One Motzoei Shabbat (Saturday night), Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch commented on the Torah portion which we read this Shabbat, Lech Lechah:*

*"In the early years of his leadership, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad, declared publicly, 'One must live with the times.' From his brother, Rabbi Yehuda Leib, the older Chasidim discovered that the Rebbe meant one must live with the Torah portion of the week. One should not only learn the weekly portion but also live it.*

*"Bereishit is a cheerful portion, even though its ending is not all that pleasant. Noach has the Flood, but the week ends on a happy note with the birth of our father Abraham. The really joyous week is that of Lech Lechah. We live every day of the week with Abraham, the first to dedicate his very life to spreading G-dliness in the world. And Abraham bequeathed his self-sacrifice as an inheritance to all Jews."*

*Spreading G-dliness and teaching others about the One G-d was what made Abraham so unique. For others before him had recognized that there was only one G-d. Adam and his descendants acknowledged the Creator, Noah and his generation, too, believed in one G-d. We are taught that Abraham's grandson, Jacob, had studied about G-d in a "yeshiva" established by Shem-one of Noah's sons. So, Abraham's realization that there is One Supreme Being was not novel. His distinctiveness lay in the fact that he taught those around him, the majority of his generation who had fallen into the error of believing in many gods.*

*As Rabbi Sholom Ber taught, through Abraham's self-sacrifice, we, his children, inherited the strength to spread G-dliness in the world.*

*J. I. Gutnick*

# IT HAPPENED *Once...*

About 30 years ago, an American rabbi visiting Miami, Florida gave a lecture on the life and accomplishments of the famed "Chafetz Chaim" (Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen Kagan, 1838-1933). He described the life of the great sage who lived a humble life as a shopkeeper in the village of Radin, in Poland, yet was recognized throughout the Jewish world as a great scholar, tzaddik (righteous person) and leader.

There was another story the rabbi wanted to tell, but he hesitated, for he only knew part of it. As he stood at the lectern, he thought for a moment and then decided that he would tell it anyway. He rationalized that even an unfinished story about the Chafetz Chaim would have a meaningful message.

He began to relate an incident about a teenage boy in the Chafetz Chaim's yeshiva who was found smoking a cigarette on Shabbat -- the sacred day of rest. The faculty and student body were shocked, and some of the faculty felt that the boy should be expelled. However, when the Chafetz Chaim heard the story, he asked that the boy be brought to his home.

At this point, the rabbi interrupted the narrative and said, "I don't know what the Chafetz Chaim said to the boy. I only know that they were together for a few minutes. I would give anything to know what he said to this student, for I am told that the boy never desecrated the Shabbat again. How wonderful it would be if we could relay that message -- whatever it was -- to others, in order to encourage them in their observance of Shabbat." The rabbi then continued with his lecture.

After his talk, the hall emptied of everyone except for one elderly man, who remained in his seat, alone with his thoughts. From the distance, it seemed he was trembling, as if he was either crying or suffering from chills. The rabbi walked over to the elderly man and asked him, "Is anything wrong?"

The man responded, "Where did you hear that story of the cigarette on Shabbat?" He did not look up and was still shaken. "I really don't know," answered the rabbi. "I heard it a while ago and I don't even remember who told it to me." The man looked up at the rabbi and said softly, "I was that boy." He then asked the rabbi to go outside, and as the two walked together, he told the rabbi the following story:

"This incident occurred in the 1920's when the Chafetz Chaim was in his eighties. I was terrified to have to go into his house and face him. But when I did go into his home, I looked around with disbelief at the poverty in which he lived. It was unimaginable to me that a man of his stature would be satisfied to live in such surroundings.

"Suddenly he was in the room where I was waiting. He was remarkably short. At that time I was a teenager and he only came up to my shoulders. He took my hand and clasped it tenderly in both of his. He brought my hand in his own clasped hands up to his face, and when I looked into his soft face, his eyes were closed for a moment.

"When he opened them, they were filled with tears. He then said to me in a hushed voice full of pain and astonishment, 'Shabbat!' And he started to cry. He was still holding both my hands in his, and while he was crying he repeated with astonishment, 'Shabbat, the holy Shabbat!'

"My heart started pounding and I became more frightened than I had been before. Tears streamed down his face and one of them rolled onto my hand. I thought it would bore a hole right through my skin. When I think of that tear today, I can still feel its heat. I can't describe how awful it felt to know that I had made the great tzaddik weep. But in his rebuke -- which consisted only of those few words -- I felt that he was not angry, but rather sad and fearful. He seemed frightened at the consequences of my actions."

The elderly man then caressed the hand that bore the invisible scar of a precious tear. It had become his permanent reminder to observe the "holy Shabbat" for the rest of his life.

Biographical note: Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen Kagan (1838-1933), popularly known as "the Chafetz Chaim" after the title of one of his many influential books, was one of the most important and beloved rabbinical scholars and leaders of the 20th century. His other works include *Mishna Berura*, an authoritative, almost universally accepted compendium of Jewish Law, and *Shmirat HaLashon*, about proper and improper speech.

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### CANDLE LIGHTING: 23 OCTOBER 2015



BEGINS		ENDS
7.26	MELBOURNE	8.26
7.18	ADELAIDE	8.17
5.45	BRISBANE	6.37
6.27	DARWIN	7.17
5.41	GOLD COAST	6.36
6.16	PERTH	7.12
6.57	SYDNEY	7.54
7.07	CANBERRA	8.05
7.23	LAUNCESTON	8.26
7.26	AUCKLAND	8.26
7.32	WELLINGTON	8.35
7.25	HOBART	8.29
6.41	BYRON BAY	7.36

### CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

439 INKERMANN STREET, CAULFIELD  
PARSHAS LECH LECHA • 10 CHESHVAN • 23 OCTOBER

FRIDAY NIGHT	CANDLE LIGHTING:	7.26 PM
	MINCHA:	7.35 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	8.05 PM
SHABBOS	SHACHARIS:	10.00 AM
	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	9.44 AM
	MINCHA:	7.25 AM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	8.26 PM
WEEKDAYS	SHACHARIS	SUN-FRI: 9.15 AM
		MON-FRI: 8.00 AM
	MINCHA:	7.35 PM
	MAARIV:	8.25 PM