

# LAMPLIGHTER

26 Iyar  
Parshas Bechukosai  
Shabbos  
Mevarchim  
Sivan  
**1402**  
31 May  
5779/2019

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## LIVING WITH THE TIMES

Continuing the practice of studying Ethics of the Fathers on Shabbat afternoons, this week we focus on Chapter Five:

"There were ten generations from Adam to Noah," we learn in the second Mishna, "to indicate how great is His patience; for all those generations repeatedly angered Him, until He brought upon them the waters of the Flood. There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham, to indicate how great is His patience, for all those generations repeatedly angered Him, until Abraham our father came and received the reward of them all."

The first ten generations were different from the second ten in how they "repeatedly angered Him." There are two types of evil in the world: evil so completely bad that the only way to overcome it is through total destruction, and evil that can be transformed into good, because it contains a spark of goodness.

We see this reflected in the wars that the Jewish people waged against their enemies in ancient times. They were permitted to derive benefit from some spoils of war, but other items had to be destroyed outright. In one instance it was a positive mitzva to transform into something holy an object that had belonged to the realm of unholiness, yet in the other it was a positive mitzva to obliterate it.

The evil perpetrated by the first ten generations was absolute. For this reason, G-d erased them from the earth with the Flood.

The evil of the next ten generations, however, was of the kind that can be elevated into good. Abraham was able to correct the failings of the previous ten generations, and thus merited the reward of all of them.

Goodness lasts forever, but evil has no true existence. Every good deed we do is added to the previous ones, accumulating from generation to generation. We therefore have the greatest merit of any generation since the world was created, and will thus merit to see this mighty storehouse of good speedily revealed with the coming of Moshiach.

## Self-Made Holiness

*By Menachem Feldman*

Many people expect inspiration to come from above. "If G-d really wanted me to follow the Torah," they argue, "He would plant within my heart a burning desire to do so." "If G-d felt it important that I dedicate time to Torah study," they insist, "then I would be naturally drawn to the wisdom of the Torah." In effect they are saying, "If G-d wanted me to be holy, He would have made me holy from the womb, without any effort necessary on my part." When they think about holiness, they think of G-d descending on Mount Sinai to inspire a people who could not inspire themselves.

True, this is one form of holiness. The highest form of holiness, however, is the one that is manmade.

At the culmination of the book of Leviticus, the Torah discusses two categories of holy animals which must be offered in the Temple: the first is the bechor, the firstborn animal; and the second, the last offering of the book of Leviticus, is the maaser, the tithe.

These two offerings represent the two forms of holiness. The first is imparted by G-d; the second is manmade.

The bechor is sacred by virtue of being born first. No human intervention is necessary. As Maimonides explains:

It is a mitzva to sanctify a firstborn kosher animal and say: "Behold, this is holy," as the verse states: "Every firstborn shall you sanctify unto the L-rd your G-d." Even if the owner did not sanctify it, it is sanctified as a matter of course. It is sanctified upon its emergence from the womb.

The last offering of the book, the maaser, is not sacred until the Jew sanctifies it himself. As described by Maimonides:

He should gather all of the lambs or all of the calves born that year in a corral. He then makes a small entrance, so that two cannot emerge at the same time. He positions their mothers outside the corral, and they bleat, so that the lambs will hear their voices and leave the corral to meet them. This is necessary, as implied by the verse which states, "All that passes beneath the staff," i.e., they must pass on their own initiative; one should not remove them by hand.

As they leave the corral one by one, the owner begins to count them with a staff: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. The tenth animal that departs, whether male or female, whether unblemished or blemished, should be marked with red paint, and the owner should say: "This is the tithe."

Of all the Temple offerings described in Leviticus, the book culminates with the maaser offering—specifically because its holiness is dependent on man. The person does not expect G-d to inspire him. The person is required to take steps to foster holiness. He cannot rely on heaven to send him a firstborn, an already-assembled dose of inspiration. Here he must gather his lambs and calves, he must count, he must apply the red paint. It's in his hands. By doing so, he realizes that the ultimate holiness is created only when he is the one generating the inspiration.

Don't wait for the inspiration to come from above and fill your heart with a passion for G-d. Even if you are not in the mood, count your sheep and give one to G-d: take some time out of your day and sanctify it, use it to pray, to study Torah, to do a mitzva. It may not be as dramatic as the holiness that comes from above, but it is what G-d finds most meaningful.

# Slice of LIFE

## On Miracles and Death

By Sara Tzafona

I had a bit of an argument with G-d a while ago. To my credit, it wasn't over petty stuff this time. I didn't really whine either, although I'm fully capable of it. I wanted my way, even demanded it and expected it. After all, G-d had always come through before. Granted, oftentimes He would take His own sweet time, ignoring my schedule, and no doubt shaking His head at my infantile temper tantrums as I urged Him to get His act together and hurry up. But come through He would. But not this time. He ignored my heartfelt cries, the Psalms that I recited, the prayers and the bargaining. He did it His way, and in the process my heart was shattered.

I lost a good friend, a woman whom I had met when I was fifteen, some fifty years ago. She was a woman who had quickly become a mother figure for me, a woman who loved me unconditionally, accepted me and held my head above water during difficult times. For the past several years we had spoken nightly, often our conversations filling up the phone line for well over an hour. We would discuss recipes, politics, family, future plans, and the past which had blessed us both. She had no children, so we adopted each other. My children became her grandchildren. We were family.

She had been a healthy woman. Ninety-four years with just a few blips. Oh, there had been cancer, twenty-five years ago or so, but she had dealt with that quickly, never looking back. And colds had been few, and amounted to nothing more than a minor irritation.

Then she fell. No bones had been broken, but some muscles felt like they had been pulled clear across the country and back. The doctor gave her pain pills, pills that attacked her body and only masked her extreme discomfort. She ended up in the hospital, and my pleading with G-d began in earnest.

I spoke with her twice a day, then, trying to diminish the miles between the Canadian north and her hospital room in central California. I told her to hang in there. G-d still needed her in this world,

and her vote was needed in the 2012 election. She didn't know about the first, but she had readily agreed on the second.

She apologized for missing my birthday, and I told her that we would celebrate when I was there in June. After a week, it seemed that G-d was finally listening. She improved a great deal. The treatment was working, and they moved her to a transition house, with the next step being assisted living. I thanked G-d profusely for His miracle - and He responded by sending her a stroke which took her within a matter of hours. Talk about backstabbing.

So, in turn, I responded by denying that He had created any miracles at all. I gave Him credit only for creating a hole in my life, as well as the lives of my family.

I rushed to her funeral, stayed in her home, kissed her casket before she was consigned to the darkness, and was comforted by her many friends. And during those few days, I did what I had done since the whole ordeal had begun. I buried my head in the sand once more, telling myself that it couldn't really be true, that she would walk through the door at any time and our lives would return to normal. But G-d didn't offer up a miracle then, either. He was fresh out of miracles as far as I could see, and I became even more irritated with Him.

When I returned home, the numbness that had been a constant companion since the beginning of her illness, began to wear off. It was then that the tears began to stalk me, threatening to spill over at the slightest infraction—whether straightening a twisted string, or glancing at a picture that she had painted, or even allowing my fingers to brush over the fridge magnets that I had brought home from her place. I was turning into a real mess.

Then, on the first Shabbat after my return, just before the end of Shabbat, I was blessed with an overwhelming sense of peace and love. It was as if G-d had reached out to touch me as I was looking out the window at the darkening sky. It was then that my mind began to clear, and I realized that I had fallen into the miracle trap. I had come to believe that miracles defied nature, overruled the mundane, split the oceans, dried the sea, stopped the sun and turned a ragtag bunch of whiners into a holy people. I had wanted a showstopper, and as a result, closed my eyes to the miracles that kept my life going and kept the world going.

I had forgotten the miracle of a chance encounter of a young girl and a woman with a generous heart. I had ignored the miracle of a woman who had lived for ninety-four years in a body that had seldom betrayed her, a body that healed quickly and carried her up ski hills, up ladders as she reached for the reddest and plumpest of cherries. I had ignored the miracle of a mind that could grasp the ungraspable, see both sides of an argument, and hold onto thoughts and facts when the memories of so many people her age had diminished.

But, most importantly, I had not seen the miracle of a soul who had reached out to her neighbors, gave generously to charity, and overwhelmingly loved and respected her country. She was a woman who had laughed easily, and was not ashamed to let tears flow. And she listened. Oh, how she would listen, really listen. No mind-wandering for her. She would gather up words, parse them to the best of her ability, and give advice—if she were asked. Is that not a miracle itself? How many people really listen? How many have the ability to climb inside another's heart, as Helen did? What a miracle that was. What a miracle she was.

All of us, I think, want the jaw-dropping kind of miracle, the kind that heals the sick and prevents wars and catastrophes. And when this kind of miracle doesn't drop into our lap when we want it, we tend to blame G-d. By expecting the fireworks, we turn a blind eye to the subtle beauty that permeates our lives, whether awakening each morning to a fresh world, the kiss of the sun on your cheek, or the loved one who had showered you with so much love throughout her lifetime.

When it comes to grief and mourning, it's easy to become overwhelmed by the darkness, and no matter the amount of faith that we have, many of us feel abandoned, as if we're walking through the shadows alone. Softly spoken words of condolence seem trivial to our loss. There are no miracles at such times. Or so it seems. But that's not true, of course. Because, as I learned on that Shabbat, after my return from Helen's funeral, the biggest miracle of all was the realization that none of us are alone in our grief. We don't have to walk a solitary path. If we just hold out our hand, G-d will surely take it and accompany us through the valley that is shadowed by death.

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B"H

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# INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

## Tzedaka, Tehillim, Engraved VS. Written

14 Tammuz, 5711,  
Brooklyn.  
Greetings and blessings,

Through the chassid, Mr. ..., I received your donation of five dollars which I deposited in the account of Lishkas Chasha'in, a fund from which assistance is granted to individuals or causes without public knowledge. When charity is given in such a manner, your merit is very great. I hope that giving tzedakah in a private manner will aid your request on behalf of ... (for whose [merit] you gave the tzedakah) and will help that he will begin to feel better and healthier.

The Talmud teaches us that when a person prays for his friend when he [himself] is in need of the same thing, he is answered first. In the present time, by and large, everyone is lacking something. I would like to wish you that G-d will give you what you need, and that your house be a true Jewish home, replete with Torah and mitzvos. I will be happy if you write to me about this.

As I understand, you attend shul frequently. I would like to suggest that you resolve to carry out the practice ordained by my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, to recite the daily portion of Tehillim as the book is divided up according to the monthly cycle, every day after prayer in the morning. I would also suggest that you give something to charity every day before the morning and afternoon prayers. The amount you give is not significant. What is significant is that it become a fixed practice; that you should not miss giving to tzedakah before prayer.

The Torah reading that we read last Shabbos begins with the verse: "This is the statute of the Torah." In Chassidus, it is explained that the term chukas, "statute," alludes to letters that are engraved, and clarifies the differences between letters that are engraved and letters that are written. When letters are written, the ink is one entity and the surface on which one writes is a second entity, and when the person writes, the two entities are combined. When, by contrast, letters are engraved into a stone, the letters are part of the stone itself. So too, our study of the Torah and observance of its mitzvos must be carried out with the approach of "engraving." The person and the Torah and mitzvos that he carries out are one thing. When a person observes the Torah in such a manner, the Torah promises us: "If you proceed in My statutes" — bechukosai, which connotes engraving—"I will grant your rains in their season and the land will produce its yield."

I hope to hear good news from you. Concluding with blessing,

## QUESTIONS FOR THE RABBI

### Is Monotheism Hazardous to Life?

By Tzvi Freeman

**Question:** It seems to me that monotheism is a solution to nothing. Before monotheism, we had barbarians. After monotheism, we had barbarians. Monotheistic barbarians.

Before monotheism, we had wars in the name of a whole pantheon of gods. After monotheism, we had wars in the name of a supreme god.

It's one thing when you go to war with "Our god is bigger than your god." Those wars, bad as they were, were local. It's another when you declare "Ours is the only god!" Those are the wars that can destroy the world.

Or is that the entire goal of monotheism—to wipe all disbelievers off the face of the earth?

**Answer:** You're right. Monotheism is a dangerous belief. Perhaps one of the most dangerous beliefs there is. Because it leaves no room for anything else. You could destroy the world with this belief.

There's another dangerous belief. That's belief in the human being. One who worships human intellect as the measure of all things has also proven himself capable of destroying the world with his beliefs. Because a human's mind cannot help but be bribed by his own ego.

For either of these beliefs—the belief in human beings and the belief in One G-d - to safely enter our world, the two concepts had to be married together.

For monotheism to work, a crucial fact about this One G-d must be accepted: That He is in love with this world He has made, and especially with the people He has placed upon it.

For human intellect to function safely, we must first accept that there is something beyond intellect, something eternally and immovably good and life-affirming Who determines what is true and what is not, what is right and what is wrong.

Look through the annals of history and you will see it: When this sort of belief has guided men and women, whatever religion they followed, those people brought peace, wisdom and progress into the world.

Today, we desperately need this marriage of beliefs. With it, we can heal our world.

## A WORD

*from the Director*

"Wild beasts," our Sages tell us in the fifth chapter of *Ethics of the Fathers*, "come upon the world for swearing falsely and for profaning the Divine Name." Animals that would fall into this category are wolves, lions, tigers, cheetahs and poisonous snakes.

The natural habitat of such animals is in the wilderness, far away from where people live. The sins of swearing falsely and profaning G-d's Name cause them to encroach on human society.

And yet, our Sages taught that a dangerous animal will only attack if it perceives a person as another animal. As the Zohar explains, Daniel was safe and unharmed in the lions' den because the animals could clearly see the "image of G-d" upon him.

The Torah promises that if a person behaves properly, "Your fear and dread will be upon the beasts of the earth." Committing the above-mentioned sins, however, causes the "image of G-d" to depart and makes a person vulnerable.

One of the most well-known prophecies concerning the Messianic era, uttered by the Prophet Isaiah, is "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." On a symbolic level this means that when Moshiach is revealed, the Jewish people, "a lone sheep among seventy wolves," will dwell in peace with the nations of the world. Yet on a deeper level, it means that at a certain point in the Messianic era, the nature of predatory animals will actually change, enabling them to derive their sustenance from grains and plants.

In truth, this future change is explained as a reversion to the animals' original nature in the Garden of Eden. There was no such thing as a carnivorous animal before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge!

As the Rebbe has said, the process of Redemption is already in full swing. May we see its culmination with the coming of Moshiach immediately.

J. I. Gutterman

IT HAPPENED



**A Whisper in Time**

By Yerachmiel Tilles

Everyone in town was dressed in their festive best in honor of the great occasion. Guests of exalted stature were arriving from everywhere in the region. Not everyday, or even every year, did such a momentous event take place: the holy Baal Shem Tov himself had arrived, bringing with him one of his grandsons whose wedding was to take place that day.

The wedding procession began. The Baal Shem Tov strode slowly at its head, the bridegroom at his side, the townspeople in their finery following behind.

As the procession approached the location for the chupah (wedding canopy), they were encountered by a solitary Jew in a wagon, a stranger that no one recognized. Nobody paid him much attention either. Then, to everyone's surprise, the Baal Shem Tov suddenly halted the procession, and turned aside to approach the wagon. He whispered something in the ear of the rider, and then after a brief exchange, promptly returned to his place and gave his arm to the groom.

The man in the wagon had appeared to be a simple fellow, but the Chassidim in attendance were now all convinced that nevertheless, he must be one of the hidden tzaddikim. After all, hadn't the holy Rebbe delayed the wedding solely to exchange a few words with him?

But now there was the wedding. The joy and elevation of spirit that night was extraordinary. Everybody was carried away by the celebration, as if their ties to this lowly world had been severed.

The next day, the Chassidim recalled the strange happening of the preceding evening, and were seized with curiosity as to the identity of the unknown tzaddik whom the Baal Shem Tov had bothered himself to interact with at such a precious time. After a lengthy investigation, they discovered at which inn he was staying and hurried there in the hope that he would consent to talk with them. Perhaps he would even reveal what the Baal Shem Tov had whispered.

"Shalom Aleichem, Rebbe," they addressed him with great deference. "Rebbe?" reacted the man, appearing quite surprised. "I'm neither a Rebbe nor the son of a Rebbe."

"There is no need to conceal yourself from us, Rebbe," persisted the Chassidim. "We know the truth. If our master delayed the wedding procession to confide secrets in your ear, it is obvious that you are a holy man."

"I'm neither a tzaddik nor a holy man," insisted the stranger. He seemed to be stressed as he tried to defuse their enthusiasm. "Your master spoke to me about something of a strictly personal nature."

But the Chassidim were not to be denied so easily. "Tell us, then, what he told you," they clamored.

Now he was noticeably uncomfortable. After much hesitation he finally realized that he would not be able to shake them off, and agreed to tell his story.

"I live in a small town. My best friend since childhood lives in the house opposite mine. He is a peddler by profession; he periodically travels to all the villages and settlements in our area, selling petty goods and wares. Whenever he is on the road for a lengthy time, upon his return his friends and neighbors gather at his house to welcome him back.

"Once, after an especially long trip, I crossed over to visit him. I was the first, as usual, and the house was empty. His children were playing in the yard and his wife was busy in the kitchen. They told me that he wasn't at home, that he had stepped out and would be right back. Feeling the desire to smoke my pipe while I was waiting, I opened the cupboard where I knew he kept his tobacco. The first thing that struck my eyes was his wallet, just laying there in plain view. It was full of money, all his profits from his last trip that he would use to pay his debts, support his family, and reinvest in new merchandise.

"I was shocked that he would leave his wallet so exposed and accessible. It wasn't right. I decided to teach my friend a lesson. I stuck the wallet in my pocket.

"Will he be startled when he sees it is missing! I smiled grimly to myself. That will teach him to be so careless. Of course, I intended to give it right back. But first I wanted to see the expression on his face.

"I stood there for a while but he didn't show up. I decided to take care of something in my house while I was waiting, and so I left, deliciously anticipating the lesson in responsibility I was about to impart.

"Things, however, worked out much differently than I expected. When my friend returned home and discovered to his shock that all the money he had worked so hard to amass was gone, he erupted in bitter screams. His wife broke down in tears, crying as if her heart would break. The whole family turned the house upside-down in a frantic search, but, of course, to no avail. All the friends and neighbors who were streaming in to welcome my friend were caught up in the whirlwind of excitement.

"When I went back to my friend's house, a heavy gloom of mourning prevailed; it was like a house of mourning. My prank was turning out to be not so amusing after all. In such an atmosphere and with so many people around, I didn't have the courage to confess that I was the one responsible for all of this disturbance and crisis. I composed my face as if I didn't know anything and mumbled some words of condolence to my friend. I figured I could soon return the wallet at a more suitable occasion, at a calmer moment, and when no one would see me.

"But one day followed another, and the opportunity I sought never presented itself. My friend was struggling to arrange terms with his creditors, who always seemed to be around, pursuing him, and I knew I couldn't return the money at such a time without everyone labeling me a thief.

"Several months went by. I still had the money. I found myself considering seriously the seductive suggestions of my Evil Inclination to invest the money in some profitable enterprise. Then, when I returned the money, I could add an appropriate large bonus that I would save for him. But how could I maneuver that in my town, where everyone knew me and my situation? If all of a sudden I engaged in business with lots of start-up capital, it would instantly arouse suspicion.

"I realized I would have to move temporarily to a distant location. I hired a wagon and set off, with my head full of all sorts of plans, I arrived here just at the time of the wedding."

After a few moments pause, the man resumed his story: "When your teacher saw me last night, he walked over to me and whispered in my ear, "It's not too late to rectify your mistake. Go back home and immediately return the money. I promise you that your friend will believe you and won't think that you intended to steal it. If necessary, I'll even come myself and testify as to your true motives. But be careful: if you delay any longer, it may be too late."

"With his words, I felt as if a heavy weight had slipped off my heart. I stayed the night, and now I am setting out to go straight home and do exactly as he told me."

**PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL**

G-d promises that if the people of Israel will keep His commandments, they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell secure in their homeland. But He also delivers a harsh "rebuke," warning of the exile, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant with Him.

Nevertheless, "Even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor will I ever abhor them, to destroy them and to break My covenant with them; for I am the L-rd their G-d."

The Parshah concludes with the rules on how to calculate the values of different types of pledges made to G-d, and the mitzvah of tithing produce and livestock.

**CANDLE LIGHTING**



	Shabbos 31 May - 1 June	
	Begins	Ends
Melbourne	4:51	5:53
Adelaide	4:55	5:53
Brisbane	4:43	5:39
Darwin	6:10	7:01
Gold Coast	4:41	5:36
Perth	5:03	6:00
Sydney	4:37	5:35
Canberra	4:42	5:40
Launceston	4:33	5:36
Auckland	4:55	5:55
Wellington	4:43	5:46
Hobart	4:28	5:32
Byron Bay	4:39	5:34

**CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH**

439 INKERMANN STREET, ST KILDA EAST

**PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI SHABBOS  
MEVARCHIM SIVAN • 26 IYAR • 31 MAY**

<b>FRIDAY NIGHT:</b>	MINCHA	5.00 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS	5.30 PM
<b>SHABBOS DAY:</b>	TEHILLIM	8.30 AM
	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA	9.51 AM
	SHACHARIS	10.00 AM
	MOLAD: MONDAY	2.54 (1 Chelek) AM
	MINCHA	4.45 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS	5.53 PM
<b>WEEKDAYS:</b>	SHACHARIS	8.00/9.15/10.00 AM
	MINCHA	4.55 PM
	MAARIV	5.40 PM