

Lamplighter

20 Tammuz
Matot
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

This week's Torah portion, Matot, focuses on the Mitzva (commandment) of making vows, whereby a person forbids him or herself from partaking of certain foods or becoming involved in certain activities. Why would a person make a vow? Because he sees that he is becoming too involved in worldly entities; that his life is becoming too materially oriented. Therefore he seeks a safeguard. The intention of this path of conduct is certainly positive, but it has drawbacks. Our Sages teach: "Why add more prohibitions? Is not what the Torah has forbidden enough?" For G-d did not create material existence to be ignored, but instead to be used for a G-dly purpose and intent.

At the heart of this issue is an inner conflict most of us face. Generally, we conceive of a person devoted to spiritual pursuits as otherworldly, somewhat acetic, not the kind of person with whom we'd like to relax and spend a Saturday night. And for that matter, not really the kind of person we'd like to be.

Where did this concept come from? There are some spiritual approaches that consider all material involvement as "a necessary evil." Some get very graphic about how bad material indulgence is and what difficulties it can lead to.

Since people at large aren't willing to accept such an approach, they go to the other end of the spectrum, seeking out sensual gratification and making that the object of their endeavours. They aren't necessarily protesting against asceticism. They're concerned simply with what makes them feel good.

And there are some who vacillate between the two extremes, at times indulging and at times feeling remorse over their deeds and inability to hold themselves back.

Why these two extremes? Because material satisfaction in and of itself is not very uplifting or fulfilling. It does not expand your horizons or enable you to grow. On the contrary, we all know how we can sometimes get caught up in seeking such satisfaction to the exclusion of all else. Then we become coarse and downward oriented. But this is not what we want to do with our lives. We want our lives to have meaning and depth.

On the other hand, we know that we are not angels and we don't want to pretend that we are.

Judaism offers a resolution to this quandary that satisfies both perspectives: Live in the world, but know that it is G-d's world. Be happy. Know how to appreciate the good things in life and do so in a manner that others enjoy your company. However, don't indulge in material things out of selfish desire. Instead, partake of material things as an act of appreciation to G-d for creating a world that contains a great variety of good.

In this vein, our Sages taught that the verse "Know Him in all your ways" is "a small passage on which the entire Torah depends." For the Torah is intended to teach man to relate to G-d in all forms of experience.

(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

I Love You More Than You Love Me

By Yanki Tauber

It's that time of year when we're reminded of our marriage. The prophet's point out that G-d wed us at Sinai, admonished us for our betrayals, and promised that there are good times yet ahead.

You can usually tell when two people are in love, but the best way to recognize a married couple is by their arguments. These are arguments that you won't see anywhere else, for the simple reason that they don't make any sense anywhere but within the context of marriage.

We find one such argument in this week's Torah reading. (Actually, the argument takes two different forms, explained in different ways by our sages; but underneath, I believe, it's the same argument).

The disagreement concerns G-d's instructions to Moses to wage war on the Midianites. "Avenge the vengeance of the children of Israel upon the Midianites," G-d says to the Jewish leader. But when Moses conveys these instructions to the people, he tells them that they're going to war "to take G-d's vengeance on Midian." Who is the offended party, G-d or Israel?

The Midrash Tanchuma explains: the Midianites caused the people of Israel to sin and worship the idol Pe'or, causing G-d to punish His people with a plague. So G-d tells Israel: "It is you who have an account to settle with them, for they caused Me to harm you." To which Moses responds: "Master of the Universe! If we had been uncircumcised, or idol-worshippers, or had denied the commandments, the Midianites would not have hated us. They only persecute us on account of the Torah and the precepts which You have given us. Consequently the vengeance is Yours..."

Rashi has a different take on the contradiction, and this theme is taken up by the Chassidic masters: G-d sees the war on Midian as avenging Israel, for G-d's foremost concern is for His people; the people of Israel see the war as avenging G-d, for they are concerned only with the honour of G-d.

Typical marital argument logic. Husband: "How could you do that to me? When you act that way, it makes me angry at you, and then I hurt you. I'll never forgive you for making me hurt someone I love!" Wife: "If you wouldn't have married me, we wouldn't be so special to each other, and it wouldn't hurt you so much when I act that way. So it's all *your* fault."

Or the flip-side of that argument, equally (il)logical: "I love you more than you love me!" "No! I love *you* more than *you* love me!"

We've been arguing that way for more than 3,300 years now.



A Shabbat Sacrifice

As told by Rabbi Shabtai Slavitsky

Some years ago, a man phoned me one evening and asked for an appointment to talk to me. "This is very important to me," he stated.

We arranged to meet the following afternoon in the Chabad House. He arrived punctually at the arranged hour.

Ten years previously, the Lubavitcher Rebbe had called for a campaign to "assemble assemblies on Shabbat." Since then I tried my best to recruit Jews for this purpose, and also endeavoured to influence them, in a pleasant, non-threatening friendly manner, to become Shabbat observant.

This Jew who had come to meet with me had started getting closer to Judaism several months before, and had begun to keep Shabbat privately, at home. He owned a successful jewellery business, and recently he began shutting his store on Saturdays too. He was an open-hearted, energetic person, whose liveliness was recognizable in every one of his movements.

Now, though, he sat with his eyes down. I sensed that he was embarrassed about something and this was causing him to feel uncomfortable. A tense silence filled the room until after a few long seconds he began to speak in a soft voice.

"I've fallen," he murmured. "I have to find a way to make up for what I've done..."

"What happened?" I asked.

He squirmed on his chair and started telling his story:

"Surely you remember that a couple of months ago I decided to close my shop on Shabbat. At first it was quite difficult for me, but after four weeks or so I got used to it. And I don't mean used to suffering, I mean I got used to enjoying it!

"It dawned on me after all these years that the only time I can be real with myself is on Shabbat. On Shabbat I began to encounter myself, and once one is able to get in touch with oneself, he can also begin to truly unite with his wife and children.

"All this has led to many changes for me. At first I thought that Shabbat was a time of limitation and enslavement. Then, suddenly, it became clear to me that Shabbat is the time of genuine freedom and liberation. Shabbat has taught me what true life really is. I've begun to know myself and live with myself - I now 'own' myself.

"I need to tell you what happened to me this past Shabbat 'The Great Shabbat'. On this day crowds of non-Jews from all over Belgium and Holland come to buy jewellery and presents for their holiday gifts, and they spend significant money. All the jewellery store owners turn huge profits.

"Of course, I am no longer a part of this scene on Shabbat. So after the Shabbat morning prayers, I decided to go for a pleasant walk. I ended up on Pelikent Street, where there are dozens of jewellery stores.

"I walked slowly until I came near my store. The shutters were down; the door and gate locked tight. All the stores in the area were packed with customers.

"Look at all those sales being made, while my store is sealed shut ' I thought to myself. By tomorrow this opportunity will be long gone and not happen again for another year.

"At that moment I felt chest pains around my heart. I noticed that the owner of one of the neighbouring shops was signalling me to enter his store. I went in.

"Hello, what's going on? Why is your store closed today?"

"Don't you know?" I replied. 'I decided to keep Shabbat.'

"Ah, that's right,' he said, nodding his head. 'I totally forgot. I didn't think you would go so far!'

"You know, this is the most important day of the year for our businesses. G-d has more than fifty other Shabbats in the rest of the year. Give him all of those and keep this one for yourself. Surely He will understand you.'

"I wanted to answer him but I didn't know how. I felt very confused and went back out to the street. My mind split down the middle and the conflict began. To open or not? To open just this one Shabbat, just for a few hours, and rake in a large profit. Afterwards I'd immediately close for the rest of Shabbat, and for every Shabbat thereafter.

"At that moment I suddenly felt that a spirit of holiness had entered me. I realized that everything that had happened was for a reason, and that this was a test for me - a ladder on which I could ascend. The only one to profit by my closing the shop was me! With this realization I felt the strength to tell myself strongly, 'I shall not open.' Then I went home.

"At home my wife and three children were waiting for me impatiently. 'Where were you? What happened?' they cried out together. 'Nothing,' I quickly responded. 'I just went for a little walk after *shul*.'

"The Shabbat table was set beautifully. My family took their places and awaited Kiddush.

"I certainly wanted to make Kiddush and start the meal then. I wanted very much to enter the World of Shabbat and forget everything I had gone through on the way home. I thought I had won this battle; I really did. But now it was painfully clear that I had been overconfident. The vision of the packed stores refused to leave my eyes. The thick

wads of money and the jewellery gracing the display tables danced before me.

Once again I was caught in an internal turmoil. My heart started pounding wildly again and my head was spinning.

"I stood next to the table, lost in thought. I saw nothing — nothing except money, jewellery and sales. I had lost control of myself again, and I felt afraid that I would weaken and go to open the store.

"I snatched up the bottle of vodka that was on the table and ran out of the room. I went into the bedroom and shut the door behind me. I poured myself a full cup of vodka and drank it, and then poured another... After only a few minutes I was sound asleep.

"Maybe it is hard for you to accept how I could do such a thing. But you have to understand that my entire past, my whole life until the last few weeks, was pulling me towards the store. It had become an irresistible and insatiable need. I was as addicted as any drug addict. All I could think in those moments was that the only way I could avoid transgressing Shabbat was to run away from myself. I decided my only hope was to give up the struggle and escape to another world.

"I have no idea how long I slept. But when I woke up I was completely at ease. A wonderful feeling engulfed me, a feeling of victory! He stopped speaking. Then, after a few moments of silence, he continued with great emotion.

"I know my family will forgive me for what I did to their Shabbat day. But what about G-d? How can I settle my account with him? I feel like I profaned the Shabbat even without opening the store. I've come to you so that you can tell how to fix this mess."

As he finished speaking he was shocked to notice that there were tears in my eyes. "What happened? Isn't there anything I can do to repair this?"

"It's just that I was reflected upon my own Shabbat. I sat at the table with all my family. I made Kiddush... Sang Shabbat songs..."

"While you were speaking I couldn't stop myself from thinking about what happened when G-d looked at my Shabbat and G-d looked at your Shabbat. About my Shabbat he surely said, yet another Shabbat.' How much did they have to sacrifice?"

"On the other hand, it is certain that your Shabbat raised a great storm in Heaven. Yours was the real Shabbat.

"No, my friend, you don't have to fix anything about this Shabbat. Those of us who have had a strong Torah education, yet have been observing Shabbat out of habit are the ones that require rectification."

Now that his story has ended, I sincerely hope that our story shall begin.

(Rabbi Slavitski is a Chabad emissary in Belgium.)

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ISSUE 992

MOSHIACH MATTERS

A person should always view himself and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin... If he performs one mitzvah, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to all. *(Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Teshuvah 3:4)*

INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



13th of Cheshvan, 5734 [1973]

Greeting and Blessing:

With further reference to our correspondence, I wish to emphasize here another point about the urgency and speed that should propel every activity for the strengthening of Yiddishkeit [Judaism] in general, and Torah Chinuch [education] in particular.

In normal times, steady, albeit slow, progress might be satisfactory, and sometimes steady progress and speed may not even be compatible. However, we live in "abnormal" times, when things move with whirlwind speed, and we must not lag behind the times in our method of tackling problems in the vital area of Torah and Chinuch. Indeed, in light of the Baal Shem Tov's teaching that a person must learn from everything around him how better to fulfill his purpose in life, especially in fundamental matters, the present jet age and supersonic speed should inspire the idea of time-saving in the spiritual realm. A distance that not so very long ago took days and weeks to cover, can now be spanned in a matter of hours, and a message that took as long to communicate can now be transmitted instantly.

If this could be accomplished in the physical and material world, surely the same should be true in the spiritual realm, whether in the area of personal achievement, or in the area of effecting a change in the environment. To be satisfied with less in the realm of the spirit would be like arguing to return to the era of the horse and buggy on the ground that this was satisfactory in olden days, all the more so since spiritual matters have never been subject to the limitations of time and space.

If anyone may entertain any doubt about his ability to meet a challenge which Divine Providence has thrown into his lap, suffice it to remember that G-d does not act despotically or capriciously, and most certainly provides the necessary capacity to meet the challenge, and to do so joyously, which is the way of all Divine service, as it is written, "Serve G-d with joy," and which, incidentally, is a basic tenet of the Chasidic approach to all matters.

With all good wishes, and
With blessing.

A WORD from the Director

We are currently in the period of the Jewish calendar known as the "Three Weeks" when we mourn the destruction of the first and second Holy Temples.

Jewish teachings explain that G-d obligates Himself to the same commandments that He gives the Jewish people. How can we explain the destruction of the Holy Temple, in light of the Torah's prohibition against wanton destruction? According to the Torah, it is forbidden to needlessly ruin a garment, vessel or any other object. Destroying the Temple would certainly involve an even greater transgression, as it is prohibited to "demolish a stone of the altar or any part of the Temple." If damaging a small part of the Holy Temple is prohibited, how could G-d have allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the Holy Temple in its entirety? Did G-d transgress His own commandment? And if the Jewish people weren't worthy of having the Temple, why didn't G-d take it away from them in some other manner instead of razing it completely?

The answer to this question is that under certain circumstances, the Torah does allow for the act of destruction, but only when the objective is to build anew. For example, Jewish law permits an existing synagogue to be torn down in order to build a larger and more magnificent one.

G-d wanted the Holy Temple to be even more majestic than it was and to endure forever. To that end He was allowed to destroy it - temporarily - creating the exile and all it entails, for the sole purpose of one day restoring His Divine Presence and establishing His dwelling place forever.

This also explains the cryptic statement of the Midrash, "The lion rose up under the Mazal [astrological constellation] of the lion and destroyed Ariel [literally "lion of G-d"] - in order for the lion to come, under the Mazal of the lion, and to rebuild Ariel." Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty Babylonian king, destroyed the Holy Temple (called Ariel) in the month of Av (whose astrological constellation is the lion), in order for G-d to rebuild the Holy Temple, transforming the month of mourning into a month of joy and celebration.

May it happen at once!

J.I. Gutnick

A full three weeks of our year—the three weeks "between the strictures" of Tammuz 17 and Av 9—are designated as a time of mourning over the destruction of the Holy Temple and the resultant galut—physical exile and spiritual displacement—in which we still find ourselves.

Shabbat in 'the three weeks'

All the laws of mourning are suspended on Shabbat. (This includes the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av themselves—when they fall on Shabbat, the fast days are postponed until Sunday, and the Shabbat is joyously celebrated. The Rebbe stated on numerous occasions that on these Shabbats we must increase our joy, and add an extra tasty dish to our meals, to emphasize that we are not in a state of mourning.)

Why is all mourning suspended on Shabbat?

Though these days and weeks heralded an exile rife with persecution and spiritual estrangement, it is our belief that ultimately this is for the good. Very soon, with the coming of Moshiach, we will understand that all the suffering was necessary in order to reach the ultimate good. At that time, the prophets foretell, these sorrowful days will be transformed into days of joy

Every Shabbat constitutes a foretaste of the Messianic Era. As such, on Shabbat we only focus on the positive element of this period.

CUSTOMS CORNER

It Happened Once...



If he had his way, the vizier thought to himself countless number of times, there would be no Jews in Morocco. He hated the Jews, but, although he was very powerful, he could do nothing. How could he? The sultan showed favour towards his Jewish subjects and would not let the wicked vizier harm them.

The cruel viceroy bided his time. And then the opportunity arose. The sultan decided to travel to the distant provinces of his land, leaving his viceroy in charge of affairs. The vizier prepared a trumped-up charge against the Jews of the capital and incited the Moslem populace to attack the Jewish quarter. The bloodthirsty Arabs did not need much of an excuse.

The sultan had, meanwhile, reached the city of Meknes where R' Chaim ibn Atar, the *Or HaChaim HaKadosh*, lived. The Or HaChaim was aware of the danger threatening his brethren and wished to avert it. He went to the palace where the sultan was staying and asked for an audience. He was refused.

"Tell the king that I have brought him a gift for his birthday, but that I insist on giving it to him personally."

The sultan, his curiosity aroused, gave instructions for the Jew to be brought before him.

R' Chaim bowed deferentially and took out a small mirror from his case. "This is my gift to Your Majesty. It is a mirror with special powers. Just look into it, and tell me what you see."

The sultan gazed into the small looking glass and his eyes grew round with wonder. There was the capital, his palace, his throne — and the vizier was sitting on it as if he were sultan! A heavy scowl suffused his features as he ordered his servants to prepare for his immediate return home.

The sultan arrived just in time to prevent a massacre. In a fit of fury, he slew his rebellious vizier. And the Jews of Morocco breathed freely, once more, thanking G-d for the great miracle.

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael of Cherkass once visited one of his chasidim, Velvel, who was a farmer, and asked to be shown his estate and its holdings. Velvel was honoured to comply with this request. When they came to the stable, R' Yaakov Yisrael inquired about one of the horses there, a small one standing in a corner.

"It would give me great pleasure if you would give me this little horse as a present," he told Velvel. The farmer was taken aback.

"Rebbe... this is a small horse. It won't be of use to you. I'll give you a big strong horse to draw your wagon; that would be a worthwhile gift."

But the Rebbe insisted that he wanted only this particular horse.

Velvel persisted in his refusal, explaining, "Rebbe, this is the best horse I have! It works hard all day and night; I have no other like it. Take any other horse, but not this one, please!"

When Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael saw that Velvel could not be persuaded to relinquish the horse, he steered the conversation in a different direction.

After that, when they had gone into the house and sat down, the Rebbe asked Velvel whether he had lent anyone money that was still outstanding.

Surprised at the Rebbe's interest, he replied in the affirmative. He did in fact have a list of loans that had not as yet been repaid.

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael asked to be shown the list, and immediately picked out one loan, which had been taken by another of his chasidim, and inquired about it.

Velvel explained that this particular debt was hopeless, as the borrower was now deceased. The Rebbe asked Velvel to give him the loan as a gift.

The farmer was perplexed; why would the Rebbe want a worthless debt? He tried to explain this to the Rebbe, but R' Yaakov Yisrael was adamant that he wanted this and nothing else. Finally, Velvel agreed to grant him this debt, and gave him the promissory note, which the Rebbe promptly tore up.

Shortly after that, one of Velvel's workers rushed in and agitatedly informed their master that the hard-working little horse had died! The farmer was distressed at the news, but Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael did not seem a bit surprised.

He told Velvel, "No more debt, no more horse!" and proceeded to explain.

The horse had been a *gilgul* (reincarnation) of the soul of the debtor, who had been forced to come back to the world in that form in order to repay his debt. Now that Velvel had formally relinquished payment, the debtor's soul could return in peace to the Next World.

Lamplighter

Issue 1,000

With G-d's help, we will be publishing our
1,000th issue of the Lamplighter.

We are preparing a special expanded edition. We would be pleased to receive from you, our dear readers, your feelings, greetings and thoughts about our publication, which will be included in that special edition. Please write how you use this publication and how it may have influenced you in your spiritual journey. Please include any anecdotes in which the Lamplighter has played a role in changing the lives of your friends and acquaintances.

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CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

PARSHAS MATOT • 21 TAMMUZ • 23 JULY

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING: MINCHA: KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	5:06 PM 5:15 PM 5:50 PM
SHABBOS:	SHACHARIS: LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA: MINCHA: SHABBOS ENDS:	10:00 AM 9:57 AM 5:00 PM 6:07 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS SUN-FRI MINCHA: MAARIV:	9:15 AM 5:15 PM 6:05 PM

CANDLE LIGHTING: 22 JULY 2011

Begins	Ends
5:06 MELBOURNE	6:07
5:08 ADELAIDE	6:07
4:56 BRISBANE	5:51
6:20 DARWIN	7:11
4:53 GOLD COAST	5:49
5:16 PERTH	6:11
4:50 SYDNEY	5:48
4:55 CANBERRA	5:54
4:48 LAUNCESTON	5:51
5:09 AUCKLAND	6:09
4:58 WELLINGTON	6:01

Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

צוקללה"ה נב"מ ז"ע

May he succeed in imploring the Almighty
to redeem His people speedily in our days.