

B"H

**MERKOS ON CAMPUS**

***Today Is The Day...***

SERVING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON CAMPUS

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Week Ending: Friday, 31 December, 2010 - Shabbos Vaera, 25 Shevat 5771  
Melbourne Shabbos begins: 8.27 pm (DST) - Shabbos ends: 9.32 pm (DST)

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GREETINGS AND BLESSINGS

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**Searching For So Long**

A boy came running to his father in tears. He had been playing hide-and-peek with his friends and the boy who had been chosen to be "it" had played a trick on them. They had all hidden, but instead of going to find them, "it" simply went home. For a while, the children hiding felt very successful. After all, they had remained in hiding a long time without being found. But afterwards, they began to feel lonely and betrayed.

As the son was talking, he saw his father - the Maggid of Mezeritch - also break out in tears.

"Why are you crying?" the child asked his father.

"Because G-d has the same complaint that you do."

When He hides Himself, He is waiting for us to search for Him.

If you were G-d and You wanted people to be conscious of Your existence, what would You do?

Most of us would answer: Just say "Hello." Afterall, we aren't interested in games. If we want something, we go for it.

Why doesn't G-d do that? One of the reasons is that if He were to reveal Himself as He is, nothing else could exist. It would be like looking directly at the sun; the light would be too powerful. Were He not to withdraw and conceal Himself, we could not exist.

But if concealment is necessary to maintain our existence, how can He make Himself known? If it is necessary for Him to withdraw to create the world, how can He enter it again?

These questions lie at the core of the spiritual history of the world. The concealment of G-dliness creates the framework of our existence. On the other hand, the progress of civilization is directed towards one goal: that He make Himself known.

One of the tools that He uses to make Himself known is nature itself. The natural makeup of the world conceals G-dliness, creating the impression that the world exists independently with its own rules and on its own power. On the other hand, when a person probes more deeply, he or she comes to the awareness that nature cannot exist on its own.

There is too deep and encompassing a harmony. The ongoing, inner rhythm is too powerful to ignore. This is one way that man comes to appreciate G-d.

This way is, however, problematic. First of all, it requires contemplation and deeper thought. As such, not everyone will come to that awareness. Secondly, even when a person is capable of reaching such an understanding, it will not be his inherent reaction. Ingrained in his nature is the idea that the world exists for itself. The awareness of G-d always comes second, as a learned - and therefore a weaker - conception.

For this reason, from time to time, G-d performs revealed miracles, for example, the Ten Plagues visited upon the Egyptians, seven of which are described in this week's Torah reading.

Why did G-d bring the plagues? His purpose was not only to motivate Pharaoh to release the Jews.

The intent of the plagues is clearly stated in the Torah: "So that you tell... your son and your grandson that I made sport of Egypt... so that you may know that I am G-d."

The miracles of the Exodus made it plainly obvious that G-d exists. After all, water does not ordinarily turn to blood and frogs do not swarm over the land. Seeing these miracles, one after the other, made everyone - the Egyptians and the Jews - conscious of G-d.

On the other hand, miracles are not ordinary. Were that true, the concealment mentioned above would be broken. There would be too much revelation for this world. Also, there would be little point in man's service, for when G-dliness is obvious, is it a challenge to serve Him?

Our lives contain a fusion of the two. The prevailing paradigm is that of the natural order. Yet, from time to time, we are granted an appreciation of G-dliness that transcends nature to inspire us to deeper and more committed service.

From Keeping In Touch by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, published by Sichos In English

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Living with the Rebbe  
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We read in this week's Torah portion, Va'eira, of the specific instructions given to Moses by G-d prior to Moses' and Aaron's appearance before Pharaoh: When Pharaoh asked them for a sign to prove that the One who sent them was mighty, Aaron was to throw down his staff and it would turn into a serpent. When Aaron, in fact, threw down his staff, Pharaoh immediately called in his wise men and magicians, demanding that they duplicate the trick with their own staffs. They easily performed this feat. However, their staffs were all swallowed up by Aaron's staff.

The miracle which took place here was not that Aaron's staff turned into a serpent, for Pharaoh's magicians were also able to perform this feat. Rather, it was the fact that Aaron's staff (after having changed from a serpent back into a staff) swallowed the magicians' staffs.

The wonders and plagues that occurred in Egypt did not come about for the sole purpose of punishing the Egyptians, but rather to break down the resistance and opposition of the Egyptian people to G-d. Egyptian philosophy claimed that G-d has no power or influence in the world. According to them, after Creation the world was given over to the laws of nature and G-d relinquished any day-to-day supervision or attention.

The Ten Plagues served to disprove this ideology, each one of them illustrating a different error in their way of thinking. The miracle of the swallowing of the staffs was an introduction and precursor to the miracles that would follow. The general prelude to this refutation was the swallowing of the staffs.

The meeting between Aaron and Pharaoh was a confrontation between the forces of good and evil. Aaron's staff symbolized the G-dly force which comes from holiness. The serpent symbolized Egypt, as it says, "Egypt is a great serpent stretched out within its rivers." By turning the staff into a serpent, Aaron showed Pharaoh that Egypt itself owes its life-force to G-d. When Pharaoh's magicians were also able to turn their staffs into serpents, they were insisting that they have their own power. When their staffs were swallowed up by that of Aaron, it proved that the power of impurity and uncleanness is nothing in the face of the power and force of holiness, and can have no existence or duration.

Through this miracle, G-d showed Pharaoh and his wise men that they, too, were under His dominion, and that Pharaoh truly had no power of his own. This underscored the lesson that was to be learned by all of Egypt, and foreshadowed the Ten Plagues that were to come.

From this discussion about the confrontation between Pharaoh and Aaron, we can learn a general lesson in our treatment of and relationship with others. Aaron was described as one who "loved peace and pursued peace, loved all creatures and brought them closer to Torah." When we meet someone who behaves improperly or with offensive character flaws, we must approach him with the staff of Aaron - with true love, and we must remember that we are using the staff of Aaron, not the serpent; our interaction should be without anger or ill-feelings, without involving our own emotions, rather like a dry stick.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

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ASK THE RABBI

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**Question of the Week:**

As a believing Christian, I made a recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I was profoundly disturbed by the Jewish state and its criminal

occupation of the West Bank. How can you justify usurping land that belongs to others?

**Answer:**

You are entitled to your opinion on the matter. But I hope you are consistent in your beliefs. Being that you oppose a Jewish presence on the West Bank, I assume you will not be participating in any celebrations during the coming days. According to your view, there is no reason to be merry on December 25.

The Christian holidays celebrate an event that you have named a criminal act - the birth of a Jewish baby to a Jewish family living in the West Bank town of Bethlehem. Your views should not allow you to have any part in this cheer, for if you did you would be giving retroactive approval to a Jewish settlement on the West Bank that dates back more than two thousand years.

Perhaps you will be joined by the UN and other humanitarian organizations around the world condemning any celebrations this week that are connected with this controversial birth, as such events would be recognizing the rights of a Jewish family to live on what you see as occupied territory.

However I must warn you, by espousing this view and not celebrating, you will be vastly outnumbered. Not that it's so bad to be in the minority, I personally have been all my life. But keep in mind, while you accuse Israel of occupying land, there will be two billion Christians around the world celebrating the fact that the West Bank has always been the home of the Jewish people.

Good Shabbos,  
Rabbi Moss

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A SMALL STILL VOICE  
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**Z, My Name Is Zalman  
by Zalman Velvel**

They chose the last speaker at this dinner honoring Chabad of Southwest Florida for his wisdom and humor. Unfortunately, he got sick. Now you're stuck with me.

Tonight, I want to talk about names. One of the interesting things about Judaism is our Hebrew names - they tell a story about our families. My American name is Stu Silver, no big deal. But my Hebrew name is Zalman Velvel ben Israel Yaakov, and there is a story there.

The Velvel comes from my great-grandfather. He was born in Russia, and was an Orthodox rabbi. Velvel left Russia 100 years ago. He traveled to America with his three sons and wife.

At Ellis Island the Immigration official asked my great Gampa his last name. "Yussalovitch," Velvel replied. "Sounds like Silver," the official concluded. The logic? Who knows.

Next stop - the shtetl. Brooklyn. Life in Brooklyn wasn't so easy, either. Everyone had to work. When it was the middle son's turn to go out into the business world, Daveed ben Velvel, my grandfather, moved

to the real America - Astoria, Queens. He opened a ladies' sportswear store.

Daveed had a problem right away. There were Blue Laws that prohibited working on Sunday, and in the real America, a merchant did a whole week's business on Saturday, our Sabbath. Daveed maintained he was still an Orthodox Jew. He just cheated a little, he worked on Shabbos, to make a living for his family.

My father, Israel Yaakov ben Daveed, didn't follow in his father's footsteps, either. He became a dentist. And Israel Yaakov did what other successful men did - he moved to the suburbs. He joined a temple and he also worked on Shabbos. The difference was, he didn't feel guilty like his father.

The Zalman in my name came from my mother's father, my maternal grandfather. He is remembered for his lousy jokes, and eating too much. As you can see, I inherited his personality

Which bring us to me. I went to Gallus High School on Long Island. My Jewish education consisted solely of memorizing the phonetic words to my bar mitzva haftorah. What I remember most was how uncomfortable I was sitting through three incredibly long services every year - Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Passover. When I grew up, I stopped going to temple.

That is the story of my name, Zalman Velvel ben Israel Yaakov. It represents four generations, from Rabbi Velvel, F.F.B., Frum from Birth, to me, B.A.B.J. - Born American, Barely Jewish. I used my Hebrew name at my bar mitzva and then never again.

Though my name is not a typical name, the results are typical of what is happening to secular American Jews.

Now, my story took a sharp and interesting turn three years ago. I met Yitzhok Yaakov ben Lema, Rabbi Minkowicz, the Hasidic messenger from Crown Heights. Rabbi Minkowicz began calling me by my Hebrew name, even when not in temple. He made me realize that even with the material success my family achieved in America, I had a spiritual longing that was not being fulfilled. It was the call of Velvel, telling me, "Zalman, come home! Shabbos is starting and your dinner is getting cold!"

So with the Rabbi leading, I began my chuvah, my return, to my Jewish roots. I began reading the Bible, our Torah. The women in my family light candles on Friday night. My family started spending Shabbos together. I stopped working Saturdays. I grew a beard. I wore a yarmulka outside temple.

And then came the most difficult adjustment - I stopped eating spare ribs, shrimp, and lobster.

I want to close with an amazing revelation I had recently. A gentile friend whom I hadn't seen in years, saw me in the supermarket. He said he almost didn't recognize me, what with my yarmulka and beard. We engaged in some small talk, and then he asked me, "Are you happier being more Jewish?"

I said "yes," and he left shortly after that. But the question stayed with me, haunted me. "Am I happier being more Jewish?"

My first thought was, "What a silly question ! What does happiness have to do with being Jewish?" A Jew suffers. Your mother teaches you guilt, your father, fear, and then there's the indigestion.

But the more I thought about it, the more I became convinced it was a great question. I decided that the truest answer would come from the people closest to me. And I also decided I wasn't going to beg the answer, but make the question more general.

I started with my wife. I said, "Honey, since I've become more Jewish, have I changed?"

She looked at me, and answered, "To tell you the truth, you have become a little better husband, maybe a touch more considerate." And then she added, "But you still have a long way to go."

Then I went to my son and asked, "Since I've become more Jewish, have I changed?"

David studied me, and then answered, "Dad, to tell you the truth, I think you are a little better father now, a little more generous. Maybe, it's only with your time, but that's still something." And then he added, "But you still have a long way to go."

I finished with Rabbi Minkowicz. "Rabbi, since I've become more Jewish, have I changed?"

The Rabbi stroked his beard, and then answered. "Zalman, you're becoming a real mensch, a human being, but ..." No, he didn't say it. He's too nice to say it. What he did say was, "We shouldn't stop studying together just yet."

Now I am forced to the conclusion that since I've become more Jewish, I'm on the road to becoming a better person, but I still have long way to go.

I want to thank Rabbi Minkowicz, Nechami, and their children for coming to Fort Myers and creating Chabad of Southwest Florida. I want to thank them for teaching us B.A.B.Js that at the heart and soul of Judaism is becoming better people, and making other people's lives better in the process. Thank you, and good night.

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THE REBBE WRITES  
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16 Cheshvan 5734 [1974]  
Blessings and Greetings:

This is to confirm receipt of your correspondence. In the meantime, you no doubt received my previous letter.

With reference to you writing about the idea of settling in Eretz Yisroel [the Land of Israel] in the near future, about which you ask my opinion.

I have often emphasized, as you may be aware, that a Jew considering emigration from any part of the world to any other, must not take a narrow view, but should consider it in broader terms. What I mean is that Jews are, of course, a minority in terms of the nations of the world, and must therefore always think in terms of self-preservation. Wherever Jews are they must consider themselves in a state of perpetual mobilization to protect their independence, not only insofar as they themselves are concerned, but also insofar as the Jewish people as a whole is concerned. This applies to all places, but the situation varies, for there are some places where the percentage of Jews is relatively smaller, and hence more vulnerable. And among the Jews themselves, there are places where those who are active in the strengthening of Torah and Mitzvot [commandments], the very foundation of Jewish existence, are very few. This increases their responsibility all the more, especially those who have been active and successful, whose departure would leave an irreparable void.

And as already mentioned, this is a question of survival not only for the local communities, but for the Jewish people in general. Clearly, one's first responsibility is toward the community where one has been brought up, and to which one can contribute effectively.

Now, let us consider South Africa, where Jews originally came mostly from Lithuania and similar places, where Jewish life was flourishing. I do not have to tell you what the situation is in the Republic of S. A. in terms of true Yiddishkeit [Judaism], even in Johannesburg, which has the largest Jewish community in S. A.

Consequently, you and your husband occupy a very special place in the community, and must consider yourselves in the forefront of a far-reaching endeavor to strengthen the true religious foundation of Jewish life in your community and in the country at large.

One can well understand the motivation and desire to help Eretz Yisroel. But it is sometimes overlooked that such help can often be more effective when those who are responsible for their posts on the local front remain at their posts. If in the past this point might have been debatable, recent events have shown how important has been the help of the Jews in the Diaspora, through their contacts in the world's capitals, and otherwise, although it is premature to reveal the full extent of such help. Obviously it is such Jews who are deeply concerned for the survival of the Jewish people who have provided this vital help.

I am sure there is no need to elaborate to you further on the above.

With blessing,

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16 Cheshvan, 5734 [1974]  
Blessing and Greeting:

Thank you very much for your recent correspondence about all the family. May G-d grant that you and your esteemed husband should have true Yiddish Nachas [Jewish pride] from each and all of them in every respect.

I was particularly glad to receive the good news about your youngest married daughter. May G-d grant that she should have a normal and complete pregnancy, and normal and easy delivery of a healthy offspring, in a good and auspicious hour.

The Zechus [merit] of your and your husband's activities in spreading Yiddishkeit, and particularly helping our brethren from behind the Iron Curtain, will additionally stand you all in good stead for Hatslocho [success] in a growing measure....

With blessing,

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RAMBAM THIS WEEK  
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**Prohibition 306: It is forbidden to take a mother bird with her young from the nest**

This mitzva is based on the verse (Deut. 22:6) "You shall not take the mother bird together with her young" This mitzva teaches us the proper way of taking eggs or young birds from a nest. We must first send the mother bird away because we are not allowed to take the young while the mother bird is still in its nest. We are also not allowed to take the mother bird at the same time we take the young.

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THOUGHTS THAT COUNT  
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And I appeared (va'eira) to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 6:3)  
The word va'eira means both "And I appeared" and "And I will appear."  
This shows us that the G-dly revelation to the Patriarchs can be found, now, within every Jew. For, within the soul of every Jew there is Abraham (who epitomized love of G-d), Isaac (awe of G-d) and Jacob (mercy and compassion). When these traits are revealed, it is similar to G-d's revelation to the Patriarchs.

(Ohr HaTorah)

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I will take you out...and I will release you...and I will redeem you...and I will take you...and I will bring you into the land (Ex. 6:6-8)

The first four expressions of redemption allude to our redemption from Egypt, whereas the fifth expression, "I will bring you," alludes to the future redemption, the final one which we are now awaiting. Why is this mentioned, then, when foretelling our departure from Egypt? To teach us that ever since the time that we left Egypt, we have been slowly but surely approaching the Final Redemption.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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These are Aaron and Moses...These are Moses and Aaron (Ex. 6:26, 27)

Aaron, the first priest, embodied the proper worship of G-d, and by extension, symbolizes prayer in general. The job of the priests was to offer the sacrifices in the Holy Temple; in our days, prayer takes the place of these sacrifices. Moses symbolized Torah study. The repetition of the two names in the reverse order teaches us that there are times in our daily lives when one aspect takes precedence over the other. Sometimes we stress prayer as a preparation for performing mitzvot and Torah study, and sometimes we study first in order to pray more effectively.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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And G-d said..."Behold I will smite... the waters which are in the river and they shall be turned into blood." (Ex. 7:17)

The icy waters of a river are a symbol of coldness. Blood is symbolic of warmth and vitality. The first plague with which G-d smote the Egyptians - the preface to the Exodus from Egypt - was changing water to blood. This is similar to a Jew's spiritual service. A Jew asks G-d to take him out of his own Egypt - physical or spiritual limitations. But first it is necessary to turn the water - coldness toward Torah and mitzvot, into blood - warmth and excitement toward holy things.

(Likutei Sichot)

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**ESSAY**

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**Of Snakes and Sticks**

Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh, and they did as G-d had commanded: Aaron threw his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it turned into a serpent. Pharaoh summoned also [his] wise men and sorcerers... each cast his staff, and they turned into serpents; but Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.

Exodus 7:10-12

The Torah emphasizes that it was Aaron's staff that consumed the serpent-staffs of the Egyptian sorcerers. Our sages explain that since it is natural that a snake swallow another snake, G-d made that Aaron's staff should swallow the others after it had reverted to its original, inanimate form, thereby demonstrating the impotence of Egypt's idols in a manifestly miraculous way.[1]

But the miracle of the swallowing stick is more than a sign and warning to Pharaoh; there is also a lesson here, to each and every one of us, on how to confront the various "Pharaohs" we must deal with in the course of our lives. The Torah's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace"[2]—our mission is to create light, not to battle darkness. Nevertheless, there are times when we are forced to resort to battle, when we must vanquish those who seek to vanquish us. Thus Moses, the gentle shepherd of Israel,[3] and Aaron, the epitomic man of peace,[4] found themselves in the role of "judge and chastiser of Pharaoh"[5] and the Egyptians, crushing their might and obliterating, one after another, their icons and myths.

But even when he wages war, the Jew is not a warrior. Even when he consumes the serpents of the enemy, he is not a serpent himself, spewing poison and hate. His instrument of vengeance is as devoid of vengeful feeling as the stoic staff, as cold to the rage of war as a lifeless stick.

Based on an address by the Rebbe, Shabbat Va'era 5742 (January 23, 1982)[6]

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**IT ONCE HAPPENED**

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The saintly Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk once recovered from a life-threatening illness. When his recovery was complete, his closest disciples mustered their courage to ask him what he had seen while hovering between life and death.

The Rebbe said that he would tell one thing he learned:

As I walked in the Garden of Eden, I saw among the most honored souls a familiar face. He looked very much like Mottel the Bookbinder. To be sure, Mottel was a G-d-fearing Jew, an honest, hard-working bookbinder,

but he was otherwise an undistinguished ordinary Jew, not even much of a Torah scholar.

"Is it truly you, Reb Mottel?" I asked the soul as I approached him.

"Yes, it is I," called out Reb Mottel happily.

"But how did you get to this exalted place?" I asked Reb Mottel quite innocently.

"When I was brought before the Heavenly Court, I was asked the usual questions. I had to admit that, regrettably, I had studied very little Torah. I didn't have much of a head for it. Besides, we were very poor, so I had to find a way of earning money to help my parents support the family. I was apprenticed, at an early age, to a bookbinder, I explained to the Court...

"They began the weighing of my mitzvot and sins. On the right side of the scale, angels began putting all my good deeds. Then they pushed the scale down to make it weightier, saying this was for the joy and sincerity with which I performed the mitzvot.

"But then other angels came forward and began to load my sins and misdeeds on the left scale. I watched with horror as my sins were added up. Most of the sins were truly not serious, and they happened because of my ignorance. But, though they were small, they were adding up dangerously, till they tipped the scale.

"As I stood there before the Heavenly Court, trembling and ashamed, an angel suddenly appeared with a worn-out prayer book in his hand. Behind him was a line of wagons loaded with sacks.

"I am the angel in charge of stray pages from holy books. I go to every Jewish home, every shul and every Jewish school. I look to see the condition of the holy books. Whenever I see a worn out book, with crumpled pages and loose covers it gives me tremendous pleasure, for this is a sign that the books are in constant use. But when I see that some of these books are tattered beyond repair, I am troubled, for every holy book has a holy soul, and every page has a soul, which must be treated with care and respect.

"In the course of my travels I met this man here on trial. Ever since he was a child, Mottel loved his little prayer book and would often caress and kiss it before closing it.

"When it came time for Mottel to be apprenticed, he told his father that there was nothing he would like more than to be a bookbinder.

"I have never seen a book-binder like Mottel," continued the angel in my defense. 'He never got any pages mixed up, never missed a stitch, and always used the best materials. From time to time, he would go to the shuls in his town and collect holy books that cried out for attention. He took them home and worked late into the night to restore them, bind them and give them new life. He never charged for this and never even told anyone about it.

"I respectfully request that the Heavenly Court permit me to unload all the sacks of worn-out holy books to which Mottel the Bookbinder has given a second life, and put them on the scale with all his other mitzvot and good deeds.

"The Heavenly Court agreed. Long before the wagons were half unloaded, the scale with the mitzvot clearly outweighed the other side.

"Believe me, dear Rebbe," Mottel concluded, "I was as astonished at what happened before my eyes as you were at seeing me in this place of honor."

"I wanted to ask Mottel a few more questions," explained Rebbe Elimelech, "but at just that moment I began to recover. Reb Mottel's story speaks for itself. But let us also remember," Reb Elimelech enjoined his disciples, "that G-d never fails to give credit and reward for any good deed, even for such a seemingly trivial act as smoothing out a crumpled corner of a well worn page in a holy book.

Reprinted from Talks and Tales.

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CONCLUDING WORD  
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On Tuesday (the 24th of Tevet) we commemorate(d) the yahrzeit of the "Alter Rebbe," Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chasidut and the Chabad-Lubavitch Dynasty.

We have discussed many times the significance of the Alter Rebbe's name and that "Shneur" indicates the two lights ("shnei ohr") of Chasidut and the "revealed" Torah that the Alter Rebbe brought into the world.

The Alter Rebbe was considered one of the great luminaries of his and future generations. It is no coincidence, then, that he was born on a Wednesday -- the fourth day of creation -- the day on which G-d placed the two luminaries (the sun and the moon) in the sky.

The Rebbe once explained the significance of a momentous event occurring on a Wednesday:

"This provides every Jew with a twofold lesson in his service of G-d. Firstly, he must appreciate that he is a 'luminary,' that he can and he must, shine forth and provide others with light. Secondly, the mention of the two luminaries, the sun and the moon, teaches one that he must be both a great luminary and a small luminary.

"Being a 'great luminary' implies that a person realizes that he possesses important potential which he wants to use in a contributory fashion.

"Being a 'small luminary' implies that a person must appreciate and radiate to others that other individuals can contribute to him as our Sages comment, 'Who is a wise man? One who learns from every person.' As a small luminary, one reflects the positive virtues that others possess.

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"A person must know how to express both of these dimensions in his life and must have the sensitivity to appreciate which quality is demanded at each particular time."

On the occasion of the Alter Rebbe's yahrzeit, may we all experience the insight and sensitivity necessary to accomplish the above.

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**Best Wishes Gut Shabbos**

***Yankel Rapp***

**Rabbi Dr. Yankel A. Rapp - Campus Rabbi**

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**Please Note: One cannot read this Newsletter in the bathroom as it contains words of Torah. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 85:2. Please do not deface or discard hard copies of this Newsletter.**

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