

B"H

MERKOS ON CAMPUS
Today Is The Day...
SERVING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS ON CAMPUS

Week Ending: Friday, 20 August, 2010 - Shabbos Ki Teiseh, 11 Ellul 5770
Melbourne Shabbos begins: 5.30 pm - Shabbos ends: 6.29 pm

GREETINGS AND BLESSINGS

Imbibing Judaism

The Jewish calendar is unique; every month contains a special message and offers us its own energy to serve G-d.

Our current month Elul is known as the month of return - t'shuva. It is the month that we try to be truthful (especially to ourselves) and return everything (especially ourselves) to its proper spiritual place. Therefore it is a month of intense introspection and self-correction. And it is also a month of inventory and good resolutions for the future.

But just studying about this phenomena, even discussing it with friends, is not enough. It has to be imbibed, absorbed, internalized.

A story to illustrate:

Each year, a certain chasid would set out by foot at the beginning of the month of Elul to visit his Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel (the third Rebbe of Chabad, known as the Tzemach Tzedek) in order to be with the Rebbe for the High Holidays. Now this was no easy task, as the weather by that time was often freezing.

One year, the going was particularly slow, the offers for lifts were especially sparse, and the weather was unseasonably cold. A while into the journey the chasid had reached his last ounce of strength and was nearly ready to give up and sit down at the side of a lonely, snow-filled road. But suddenly he heard a wagon approaching.

It didn't take long before the open wagon, filled with large barrels, reached him.

"Want a ride?" The driver yelled. "Climb up and find a place." The chasid climbed into the wagon and wedged himself between the barrels.

Oy, was he grateful for the ride! But his gratitude did not keep him warm. After a few moments huddled between the barrels he was abruptly reminded that he was still freezing.

That was when he noticed a small spigot sticking out of one of the barrels.

"Perhaps it's vodka," he thought to himself. He craned his neck this way and that until he was able to read the markings on the barrel. It was vodka, all right!

"Ivan!" he yelled to the driver, "Do you mind if I sample a bit of your merchandise, I'm freezing out here!"

"Go ahead," shouted the driver.

Cupping a hand under the spigot, the chasid filled his other hand with vodka, recited the blessing, and drank a mouthful of the cold fire. A few more mouthfuls and he was warm, and happy! He was going to the Rebbe! And G-d had made a miracle for him personally by sending the wagon driver before he froze to death! The chasid began singing! In no time the driver was singing with him and the ten-hour drive passed like minutes.

Before they knew it they had reached the town of Lubavitch. The chasid walked straight to the Rebbe's synagogue where he began telling his fellow chasidim not only about his journey but about what he had learned from it, as well.

"The teachings of the Torah, even Chasidic teachings, can be likened to vodka. A person can be surrounded by barrels of Chasidic teachings, by a sea of Torah, and still be cold, even to the point of freezing to death.

"But, if just a little bit goes inside," he smiled to his friends, "then he becomes warm and alive!! In fact then, he can even warm up those around him as well!"

And that is the purpose of the month of Elul: To take Torah and Judaism to heart and experience how warm, alive and meaningful it is.

Adapted from an article by Rabbi Tuvia Bolton on ohrtmimim.org

Living with the Rebbe

This week's Torah portion, Ki Teitzei, contains a commandment involving safe-guarding one's roof lest someone fall from it: "When you build a new house, you must place a guard-rail around your roof. Do not allow a dangerous situation to remain in your house, since someone can fall from [an unenclosed roof]."

A guard-rail is placed around the roof not only for self-protection, but even more to protect others from falling from one's roof.

With the help of Chasidic philosophy, this commandment can be understood in spiritual terms also. A roof - the highest part of the house - is indicative of egoism and conceit. Placing a guard-rail around the roof means that one must confine and limit these undesirable traits. This needs to be done "since someone can fall [from an unenclosed roof]" - i.e., the trait of egoism and conceit is at the root of every spiritual downfall; all evil traits stem from them.

The "guard-rail" placed around egoism and conceit is important not only to protect the person, himself, from negative trait, but it is also important as it relates to a fellow Jew; it is necessary to assure that the person's own ego not bring about another Jew's spiritual downfall.

When a Jew involves his fellow Jews with Judaism and bringing them closer to G-d, he might be filled with conceit. Then, not only is he lacking in terms of his own spiritual service, but his conceit may cause the person whom he is trying to teach to wonder, "What can I learn from a person whose personal gain and self-gratification are foremost in his mind?" This person might actually become distanced from Judaism.

Therefore, an egotistical person might wonder how he can embark on encouraging another Jew in his Jewishness. "How do I know," he asks himself, "if I will be able to build a proper guard-rail around my ego, thereby forestalling my own, or my friend's spiritual downfall?" Maybe it would be better not to "build a new house" - encourage other Jews - at all!

This, though, is not the case. The command begins with a blessing and injunction, "You shall build a new house." A Jew can and must build a house to G-d by creating an environment of Judaism. He cannot rely on others but must build a "new house" - a house which is uniquely his. A guard-rail can and must be made.

The affirmative language assures us that we will be successful in this endeavor.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

ASK THE RABBI

Question of the Week:

I was not raised with Jewish traditions so I have never experienced a Jewish new year celebration. I always go to the dragon dance at Chinatown for Chinese new year, and I was in Times Square last year for new year's eve...I don't remember a thing, it was wild! I would love to see how Jews party. Can I join you for your new year celebrations?

Answer:

You are most welcome to come along, but let me warn you: nothing you have seen will prepare you for a Rosh Hashana service. The most exotic tribal dance, or the most outlandish new year's bash, will seem like a mild tea party in comparison.

It all starts off pretty tame. We gather in synagogue on the morning of Rosh Hashana to say the prayers. They are sung to powerful and moving tunes matching the flavour of the different prayers - melodic and up-beat songs for prayers of praise and celebration; deep and stirring songs for prayers of awe and introspection. The singing and praying

goes on for a couple of hours, and it all seems like a pretty standard prayer service.

But that's just the build up. After reading from the Torah, the tension in the room grows and there is a sense that something big is about to happen.

Then it does. What happens next, the climax of the new year service, is nothing short of bizarre.

A guy takes the stage, covers his head with his prayer shawl and produces a velvet bag. He places the bag on the table, and opens it to pull out...a ram's horn. And you won't believe what follows. He puts the horn to his mouth and blows. And he blows and blows and blows.

The sound that comes out of that ram's horn can't be described. It is an ancient wordless voice that only the soul understands. Its piercing cry turns us inside out - the layers blocking our hearts are torn away and our souls are exposed. The deepest and most elemental level of our being is suddenly awakened by a three thousand year old call. The blow of the ram's horn fans the hidden flame in our soul, and latent spiritual senses swim to the surface.

The Jewish new year starts not on the calendar but in our souls. Consciously or not, we have been revitalised, a new page is opened in our inner life. Whether we go with this spark ignited in our soul or let it fizzle out is up to us.

The Rosh Hashana experience can be pretty wild, and you won't want the party to end. Once you have had a taste of Jewish soul inspiration, you desperately crave for more. You will be left with a spiritual hangover - the only hangover where your mind is clear and you just want to get up and change the world, starting with yourself.

A SMALL STILL VOICE

Camp Experience Combines Best of All Worlds
by Barbara Boarnet

Early this morning, our seven-year-old twins bounded into our bedroom at the crack of dawn.

Jacob said, "Mommy, please, please wake up early, so that you can help me practice my davening [praying] before camp this morning." This was followed by Michela saying, "I need you to help me with the part that goes right after the Shema."

They have never before expressed such exuberance and excitement for learning and practicing prayers. Our experience at Jewish camp this summer has been so significant that I just have to write about it.

Because we go to a year-round school and only have a four-week summer break, we are limited in how much camp the kids can attend. With no travel plans this summer, it was a good time to sign up for camp. I

fell in love with the facility and program of Camp Silver Gan Israel in Huntington Beach when I researched and wrote a profile on Orange County Jewish summer camps for the February issue of OCJL and when I interviewed Rabbi Sender, director, for a cover story article on the Matzah Bakery in the April issue.

We have participated in many different camps in the last several years - other Jewish camps, sports camps at UCI, art camp, and Irvine city camps, just to name a few. They have all been good, and our children have had many wonderful experiences. But Camp Silver Gan Israel has been the best experience ever. It combines the best of all of the specialty camps in an overall comprehensive program, which takes place in a warm, nurturing, loving, and safe environment. As parents, we couldn't ask for anything more for our kids. Only one or two days into the two-week session we had signed up for, our kids begged us to let them go their whole summer break, so we extended it!

So, what specifically makes Camp Silver Gan Israel the best summer camp we have ever experienced? Everything!

Silver Gan is the epitome of the word "haymish." Everyone is warm, friendly, welcoming, caring, and down to earth. It is evident that Rabbi Sender cares very much about all of the kids and wants them to have a wonderful camp experience. Jacob didn't enjoy the first day, because the boys and girls are separated, and all of his good friends who were going are girls. We talked to Rabbi Sender that evening to make him aware of the issue and ask him to keep an eye on things. Rabbi Sender was very concerned and wanted to make sure Jacob's experience at camp was positive.

He called every evening for two or three days to talk to us and to Jacob about how each day was going. (The second day, Jacob came home saying it was "great" and has loved it ever since!) We were very impressed with how much Rabbi Sender cared.

The counselors are also wonderful, caring, diverse, outgoing, interesting, and very experienced. We love that Harrison's 5th/6th grade group has male counselors who are excellent role models. Dinnertime conversation these last two weeks has been frequented with remarks like "Izzy does..." and "Chaim says..."

The 11-acre facility in Huntington Beach is phenomenal. Highlights are the Junior Olympic-sized swimming pool, the incredible cyber lab with the most up-to-date technology and computer games, the game room with all of the current video games set on free play, the "rec room" with pool table, foosball, and air hockey tables, and the sports areas, which include a large gaga court, a roller hockey area, baseball fields, volleyball courts, soccer fields, basketball courts, and playground equipment.

The cafeteria is also excellent. Our kids love the food and buy lunch every day. There are many healthy and delicious choices for lunch, and the kids love to go to the "canteen" for their daily treats.

Learning about things and experiencing new activities is definitely a part of the Silver Gan curriculum, but the overriding emphasis is that a kids' summer should be fun, and it is! Sports, arts and crafts,

music, drama, games, and cooking are just a few of the many different activities the campers enjoy. Choosing names for their groups (called "bunks") and fun bunk competitions lets the kids all bond with each other and gives them a sense of identity. Exciting shows are brought to the camp, and twice a week they go to nearby fun attractions such as Nickel Nickel, Boomers, bowling, ice and roller skating, the mud park, Sea World, Legoland, and other such places.

While the campers are having fun, they are learning about being Jewish through daily prayers and activities. Shabbat is filled with songs, dancing, baking challah, and saying blessings. We are thrilled that our kids are getting this extra dose of Judaism. Even though they go to Hebrew school, and we are involved in our synagogue, this daily immersion in Jewish life with other Jewish kids has had a profound impact on them.

We will continue to say the Shema every morning and to incorporate other things they have learned into our daily life long after their session at camp is over.

Camp Silver Gan does an excellent job of communicating with the parents.

Weekly newsletters recap the week in detail and provide information about upcoming activities. (The camp is so organized!) The website is updated daily with hundreds of pictures of all of the kids, so we feel as if we are there with them. There are also many family events to enhance the camp experience.

The fun at Silver Gan doesn't stop when the summer ends. There are activities year round; there is a winter camp in December. Silver Gan families are invited to and encouraged to attend workshops during the year at the facility, such as the Shofar Factory, the Matzah Bakery, and others.

We have found our "camp home," and we look forward to an ongoing relationship and many more positive Jewish experiences at Silver Gan Israel.

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THE REBBE WRITES

Freely translated and adapted

18 Elul, 5744 [1984]
To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel, Everywhere
G-d bless you all!

Greeting and Blessing:

Bearing in mind that the last twelve days of Elul, beginning with Chai ((18) Elul, are days of introspections relating to the months of the outgoing year, each day corresponding to its respective month -

It is especially appropriate to extend to each of you, in the midst of all our Jewish people, the traditional and all inclusive blessing of "a good and sweet year" both materially and spiritually.

All the more so, since the said introspection, although it is a personal one, made by every Jew for himself, it is at the same time also an introspection which everyone makes as part of the whole Jewish people.

The purpose of the said introspection, an honest self-appraisal, is that it should determine most resolutely one's correct behaviour in the everyday life of the coming year. This is also indicated and emphasized in the name of the festival - Rosh Hashana - meaning that in addition to being the "beginning" of the year, it is also, and essentially, the "head" of the year: Just as the head directs all the organs of the body, and it is only in this way that each organ carries out its purpose in the fullest measure, also as an organ per se - so should Rosh Hashana direct and animate each and every day of the year, in all particulars of the daily life, in order that the person should attain his or her fulfilment according to the design of the Creator.

Through the fulfilment of the human being, also the entire created order in all its four divisions: domem, (inanimate), tzomeyach (vegetable), chai (animal), and medabber (man, the "speaker") - attains its fulfilment, both individually and collectively .

This is also underscored by the fact that Rosh Hashana has been designated to take place not on the first day of Creation, but on the sixth - the day when the first man, Adam, was created; and with his creation, the entire created order was concluded and completed, and through man's fulfilment all of Creation is fulfilled.

Because the order and purpose of Creation is that the inanimate (mineral), in addition to its task of serving its own end, should sustain (and be absorbed into) plant life, and thereby be elevated to the "world" of the vegetable; and the latter should sustain, and thereby be elevated to, the animal world; and all three - animal, vegetable and mineral - should support and serve mankind, and thereby become part of, and be elevated to, the world of man, "the chosen one of all creatures."

And through man's serving the Creator, man and (through him) all the said four divisions of Creation attain their complete and perfect fulfilment.

Indeed, as our Sages of blessed memory declare, this was attained in the very same day that the first man was created, when Adam immediately called upon all creatures, himself included: "Come, let us worship, bow down, and kneel, before G-d our Maker."

The said concept, namely, that the central point and original purpose of the whole created order is that it should attain perfect fulfilment - as it was attained when the Creator completed His creative work of the Six Days of Creation, in preparation for, and then by, the creation of man (Adam), and also that this fulfilment should be attained every

day, year after year, through man's conduct in compliance with the teachings of the Torah -

[Can be actualized in] man's everyday service to his Creator:

After awakening from sleep, during which a person, with his intellect, abilities, knowledge, etc., is like an inanimate - yet it is the time when all forces of the soul and body should be refreshed and invigorated for serving G-d - one must rise from one's sleep, "immediately, with alacrity, to serve the Creator." Then one begins to grow ever higher through the fulfilment of the Creator's commandments, such as washing the hands, reciting the Morning blessings, etc., in preparation for the Morning Prayer; then one goes on to carry out the Divine edict, "and conquer (the world)," going about one's worldly affairs in the manner of "All your actions shall be for the sake of Heaven" - actions that involve all four categories of Creation (inanimate, vegetable, animal and man), the world all around, which one accomplishes with the aid of one's nefesh habehamis ("animal soul"). Thus, one attains the complete fulfilment expected of the "chosen creature" by "creating an abode for Him, blessed be He, in this lowest world," which is the ultimate purpose and fulfilment of the whole created order.

All this also brings closer the true and complete Redemption through Moshiach Tzidkeinu,

With esteem and blessing for success in all above, and that you be written and sealed for a good and sweet year, both materially and spiritually,

RAMBAM THIS WEEK

Positive Mitzvah 94: Keeping a Vow

Deuteronomy 23:24 "The statements of your lips you shall keep and perform"

Chani promised to take her younger sisters out to the park one Sunday afternoon. Later, her friend called and invited her to come over. She told her sisters that she would take them out the following week.

"But you promised," complained Mimi.

"You said you would," argued Bassie.

"You have to keep your word," Rina told Chani angrily.

Keeping our word is not just a good thing to do. The Torah commands us to fulfill obligations we have taken upon ourselves.

Whether a promise, a vow, or a plan to bring a sacrifice - we must make sure that it gets done.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

If a man will have a sin worthy of death and he will be put to death,
You shall hang him on a tree (Deut. 21:22)

In the eulogy which the Holy Ari delivered on the passing of Rabbi Moshe Kordevero he translated this verse slightly differently. The word for "sin" is properly translated as "lacking." So, he said, "When you see a person who is lacking any reason that he should have been put to death and nevertheless he dies, hang it (his death) on the tree," - on the decree following the sin of the tree of knowledge that even the most righteous will not live forever.

* * *

You shall not see your brothers ox or lamb wandering and hide from them.

You shall surely return them to your brother (Deut. 22:1)

In this verse we are commanded to return a lost article. If we are instructed to be so careful not to ignore our neighbour's monetary loss, how much more the loss of his soul. We surely have a double duty to attend to the welfare of a Jew who has wandered from the path of Torah and return him to his creator.

(Shaloh)

* * *

If a bird's nest chances to be before you...you shall not take the mother with the young ones. You shall send away the mother, and then you may take the young ones. (22:1,2)

We learn from this that we should have mercy on people. If G-d commanded that we show pity to birds, how much more must we have pity on people.

(Tzena Ur'ena)

ESSAY

**Planet of the Apes
By Dr. Yaakov Brawer**

"Dr. Teitelbaum! Excuse me Dr. Teitelbaum but you must help me! I'm supposed to graduate in November and I've just been notified that McGill won't credit me with Marketing Management II that I took last summer at U.B.C. and I won't have enough credits with out it and ..." I looked at the teary-eyed, agitated undergraduate and said nothing. Long

experience has taught me that there is no point in explaining that I am not Dr. Teitelbaum until they calm down.

Although Avraham Dovid Teitlebaum (a fellow chassid) and I resemble each other only slightly, McGill students seem incapable of seeing beyond the beard, yarmulke and tzitzit, and I am forever being mistaken for the former Associate Dean of the Faculty of Management. Presently, the student stopped for a breath and I pointed out her error. However, it didn't register. Rejuvenated by a lung full of fresh air, she pressed her suit with renewed vigor. I identified myself again. She ignored me and continued pleading. I interrupted her and once more indicated that she had the wrong person. She frowned impatiently, clearly annoyed that I wasn't giving her proper attention, and without breaking stride, continued her presentation. As she paused to marshal her thoughts for the final assault, I took advantage of the lull and insisted slowly, distinctly, and emphatically that I was not Dr. Teitlebaum. She scrutinized me for a few moments and suddenly her face lit up with the wonder of discovery. Her eyes grew wide and she exclaimed, "Oh my gosh! there are two of you!"

There are indeed two of me. What my flustered friend probably doesn't realize, however, is that there are also two of her. There is shel who operates on the instinctive level and who equates appearance with reality, and there is she2 who is capable of recording, analyzing and weighing information and arriving at a reasoned conclusion, appearances notwithstanding. As far as shel was concerned, I had to be Dr. Teitlebaum simply because it was counter-intuitive that there could be two people on a university faculty with the exotic appearance of Dr. Teitlebaum. She2, who emerged only after shel had been repeatedly challenged, correctly interpreted the available evidence and surmised that there were, in truth, two faculty members at McGill who shared the same unconventional features.

The fact that there are two of everyone is unsettling. The idea that our consciousness is not the unitary expression of a single self but rather a composite of independent components seems absurd for the simple reason that no one feels like more than one person. Nonetheless, such is the case and it can be convincingly demonstrated using the diagram depicted below (taken from *The Self and Its Brain* by Karl Popper and John Eccles, 1977, Springer International. p.63)

The diagonal line in the center of the picture is divided into two segments A-B and B-C by the middle vertical line. If you had to determine which of these segments is longer, without measuring them, your inclination would be to select segment A-B because it looks longer than B-C. If you were then told that the three vertical lines are parallel and equidistant, you would have to conclude, on the basis of basic high school geometry, that segments A-B and B-C must be of equal length, regardless of appearance. You thus have 2 different answers produced by your two different "selves". The instinctive, unreflective, and uncritical self simply takes appearances at face value. The other self, who is intellectual and analytical, assesses the data and arrives at conclusions based on abstract reasoning and logic.

How is it that most of us spend our lives blithely unaware that two such incompatible individuals room together in our heads? The answer is that usually only one self is active at any particular time, and it

is most often the intuitive, non-intellective self. Intellectual processes, whether creative or analytical, require effort. It is much easier and far more natural to simply accept things the way they appear to be. Thus, the instinctive self represents the default mode, and we, therefore, sail through life, oblivious to the appalling fact that our navigator is, distressingly often, a shallow simpleton. Worse, since we regard ourselves as intelligent beings, and since the "ourselves" that most often runs our brains is the shallow simpleton, we celebrate its fallacious, foolish, insubstantial fancies as wisdom.

In Chassidic terminology, the two disparate cognitive dimensions described above are defined as *hergesh* (instinct) and *sechel* (intelligence). Whereas *hergesh* is a trait common to all mammals, *sechel*, embodying abstract creative or analytical intelligence, is uniquely human. Consequently the description of man, by anthropologists, as an "intelligent ape" is singularly appropriate (albeit for reasons very different from those that led to the creation of the expression). Although *hergesh* is an attribute that we do indeed share with apes, we are also endowed with *sechel*, which would elevate us above all other members of the animal kingdom were we to make use of it. Since, however, this sublime quality is only sporadically engaged, the ape is alive and well, and very much in charge.

It is *hergesh*, not *sechel*, that generates the materialistic/naturalistic assumptions underlying modern secular man's view of the world and of himself. A mere glance out the window is sufficient to create a powerful impression of a multifarious world made out of variety of independent and self-sufficient things, held together by a few simple laws of nature. A brief perusal of the morning paper is all that one needs to conclude that earthly life is governed by random, chaotic, impersonal forces; natural, social, and economic. It is intuitively obvious that all forms of life evolved from simpler antecedent forms because, in our experience, everything comes from a prior something, and all animals do share common biological features. A glimpse at a corpse is proof enough that nothing survives bodily death. G-d and G-dliness are nowhere to be seen, and since, as far as *hergesh* is concerned, seeing is believing, they do not exist.

The common feature of all of these intuitive inferences (*hergeshim*) is that they are drawn from the perception of "things". *Hergesh* is not a function of the mind, but rather of the senses and as such, it does not deal in ideas or abstractions. Since *hergesh* can identify only "things" as real, it comes as no surprise that the values and goals of a *hergesh*-based society are centered on acquisition and power. Success in life is measured by the number of things that one is able to amass and the number of people (living things) over whom one has control.

One may well ask how it is possible that such a highly educated society should entertain an ape's-eye view of existence, and pursue such crass, shallow aspirations? The answer is that much of what the educational institutions impart is not *sechel* but rather *hergesh* disguised as *sechel*. The University is, after all, an instrument of society, and society runs on *hergesh*. The language, conventions, and styles are those of *sechel*, but the ideological content of a university education is based on *hergesh*. The curricula are contaminated with the germs of amoral, relativistic, materialistic, and secular bias and it is the rare student who emerges from the educational experience un-infected.

There is no joy on the planet of the apes. There are no lofty goals. There is no transcendent purpose, no meaning, no ultimate truth. There is prozac. There is also a burgeoning entertainment industry that keeps us anesthetized and oblivious to the painful realization that a hergesh-based life leads nowhere. There is also a way out. We can choose to stop being apes. We can think. We can break our addiction to hergesh and actively engage sechel, and if we do so, we will discover that the world is a very different place than it appears at first glance.

Revolutionary observations in physics, beginning in the early twentieth century, indicate that the "things" that constitute our world are shockingly ethereal. The discovery that mass is not a unique definitive physical property but rather a variant form of energy, that the electron described in high school physics as a little negatively charged BB can also be accurately characterized as an immaterial wave, and that subatomic particles/processes understand and obey abstract rules indicate that "being" is not a static, inanimate state but rather a dynamic, active process. The upshot of this is that a palpable, inert, "thing" such as a rock is, at its core, an incorporeal spiritual entity, pulsating with life, purpose and intelligence. Indeed, on the subatomic level, the rock has more in common with thoughts than with things. Moreover, the appearance of physical autonomy is an illusion. The recent experimental verifications of Bell's Theorem demonstrate a non-locality or "connectedness" underlying physical processes. In other words, at the subatomic level, the "things" that constitute our universe "know" each other and behave as different manifestations of a single, unified reality.

On another front, recent developments in the relatively new field of Cosmology show the universe to be far more improbable than any one ever imagined. In fact, a universe such as ours, designed to sustain intelligent life, is so improbable as to be virtually impossible. There are simply too many meaningful coincidences for it to have happened by chance. Intelligence and purpose permeate the cosmos. Remarkably, the only explanation as to why the myriad of diverse and seemingly unrelated physical constants and other parameters should converge to produce the universe in which we live is our presence. If any of these values were other than what they are, we could not exist. This realization has given rise to the Anthropic Cosmological Principle, the strong formulation of which concludes that man is the cornerstone of the universe, i.e. it was designed and implemented specifically with us in mind.

Similar advances in molecular and cell biology have inspired a biological version of the Anthropic Principle. It has become increasingly evident that the biochemical and molecular processes essential to the life of cells are far too complex and interdependent to have developed in response to natural forces and chance events. The irreducible complexity in fundamental biological systems and the expanding evidence of intelligent, purposeful design have rendered evolutionary explanations for the origin of life untenable.

Near death experiences have recently become a major focus of scientific exploration. Because of the subjective nature of these phenomena, they

are very difficult to interpret, much less to explain. Research in this area has, nevertheless, produced powerful objective (corroborateable) evidence that awareness can exist independent of the brain and that the essence of human consciousness is spiritual.

A critical, impartial examination of a large body of hard evidence, readily available to anyone, does not support the materialist/reductionist view of reality with which we are so innately comfortable. One of the most delicious ironies in the history of science is that the very technology that was supposed to deliver mankind from the "higher superstition" (religion), has led it straight to G-d's door. Thus, counter-intuitively, sechel is a portal to faith, not an exit.

How, then, do we deal with hergesh? Do we view it as a pathology, an unfortunate but inescapable aberrant dimension of consciousness that must be constantly suppressed, the ape within? Hergesh is, in fact, a priceless gift, which if properly utilized, complements and perfects sechel. Finely honed and properly directed, intuition elevates the intellect and takes the mind beyond the structured logic of sechel. It is a unique source of insight that is unrestrained by the rules of language and mathematics. What about the ape? The ape is not hergesh, but rather hergesh abused. Hergesh functions properly only in concert with sechel. When it is focused on the intellection, the ideas, engendered by sechel, it illuminates the conceptual crannies inaccessible to formal thought and it imparts color to the black and white cogitations of the rationale mind. However, when sechel is inactive, hergesh is left without a mind, and its subsequent undisciplined, undiscerning and uncritical activity, directed toward things rather than ideas, produces the shallow, distorted world view and empty values so common in contemporary society.

Our challenge, then, is to be whole, to use all of our G-d-given faculties in pursuit of truth. King David perceived the hand of G-d in everything and encountered Divinity everywhere. "Yours is the heaven, Yours also the earth. The world and all it contains, You have established them" (Psalm 89, verse 12). The same Divine Providence that has designed the universe to meet our every need, has also imbued us with the intellectual attributes, sechel and hergesh, necessary to recognize the power of the creator in creation. It only remains for us to utilize them toward this end.

Dr. Yaakov Brawer is Professor of Anatomy and Cell Biology at McGill University Faculty of Medicine. He is the author of two books of Chassidic philosophy, *Something From Nothing* and *Eyes That See*

IT ONCE HAPPENED

A woman once came to the Baal Shem Tov and begged him to bless her with a child. The Baal Shem Tov was unwilling at first, but when pressed, he finally assured her that within a year she would bear a son.

A son was born to the woman and her husband that year. The little child was a source of great joy to them. When her son was two years old, the

woman brought him back to the Baal Shem Tov to receive a blessing from the tzadik. The Baal Shem Tov held the baby and kissed him before returning him to his mother. As soon as the woman returned home, however, the baby became sick and, within a few days, passed away.

The woman returned to the Baal Shem Tov and asked bitterly, "Why did you bless me with a child who would only live for two years?"

The Baal Shem Tov answered her: "Listen carefully to the story I am about to tell you."

"A childless king once asked his wisest advisor how he could solve the dilemma of not having an heir.

" 'No one can help you except for the Jews,' said the advisor. 'You must tell the Jews that if within a year your wife does not give bear a son, they will be expelled from your kingdom. They will then pray that you beget a son.'

"The king issued the advisor's decree. The Jews gathered to pray, recite Psalms and fast. They entreated G-d to save them from this decree and their voices reached the heavens.

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"A very lofty soul in heaven heard the outcry and told the Almighty that it would be willing to be sent to the world below and live as the king's son. In this way it would save the Jewish people from being expelled from their homes and their land.

"Within the year, the queen gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. At a young age the prince's genius was evident. Everything that he was taught he grasped immediately.

"One day, the prince told his father, 'I have learned all I can from the teachers in this kingdom. Please find me a new teacher with whom I can study something in which I can delight!'

"A call for a unique tutor went throughout the king's empire and beyond.

Soon after, a wise and saintly looking scholar approached the king and offered to teach the prince. 'I have only one condition,' demanded the scholar. 'When I am alone in my study no one, not even the prince, is to enter.' The king readily agreed, caring only to please his beloved son.

"The prince was enchanted with his new teacher. Day and night he studied with the scholar, always thirsting for more. The prince was only separated from his teacher while he slept and at those times that his teacher insisted on being alone in his study.

"One day the prince succumbed to his curiosity and entered his teachers' quarters. He opened the study door and was astounded to see his teacher swaying back and forth, covered with a white and black cloth, and leather straps around arm. He gasped and the teacher turned around to see his shocked disciple.

" 'You were not to enter,' the teacher said firmly. The prince just nodded mutely. 'Now that you know my secret, I must leave the kingdom,' said the scholar sadly.

" 'But I know nothing,' cried the prince, for he had never seen a Jew in talit and tefilin.

" 'I am a Jew,' explained the scholar.

" 'Then I too will be a Jew,' said the prince.

"Try as he did, to dissuade the prince, the scholar was unsuccessful. Eventually he agreed to teach the prince Torah. As soon as they began studying, the prince realized that he had found that which had seemed to elude him his entire life. Years flew by, with the prince always at the scholar's side. He drank in the words of Torah, never tiring of it.

" 'It is time for me to become a Jew," said the prince, now a young man, to his teacher.

" 'You can not remain prince if you were to become a Jew,' warned the scholar. 'Is it not better for you to stay here and eventually become a benevolent and just ruler?'

"The prince was adamant. He told the king that he needed to learn first-hand about his father's vast country. With the king's reluctant permission, the prince and scholar travelled away from the palace toward the border of the kingdom. The prince crossed the border, converted and settled down to a fully observant Jewish life.

"When the prince died, his soul ascended to the World Above and not a single count could be charged against him. What could be said about a soul that had the self-sacrifice to descend to the world in order to save a Jewish community from a terrible decree, and who had rejected the royal crown to become a Jew?

"But then, one angel said, 'For his first two years he was nursed by a non-Jew.' It was decreed that this soul, being so lofty, would need to descend into this world once again and be nursed by a Jewess."

The Baal Shem Tov said to the woman compassionately, "You need not be sad that you merited, for two years, to nurture this lofty soul."

CONCLUDING WORD

An individual's birthday has a very special meaning for that person. The birthday of a tzadik (righteous individual) has deep significance for everyone who attempts to live according to the tzadik's teachings.

A tzadik's birthday is, in some ways like the spiritual birthday of his followers.

The birthdays of two great tzadikim are this coming Thursday, the 18th of Elul (corresponding this year to September 22).

On 18 ("Chai") Elul, the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement, and Rabbi Shneur Zalman, disciple of the the Baal Shem Tov's successor and founder of Chabad Chasidism, were born.

These great men dedicated their lives to teach the value of every single Jew. Ahavat Yisrael - unconditional love of each Jew - was at the forefront of their philosophy.

Today, nearly two centuries later, we benefit from the guidance and teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Shneur Zalman. The date of their birth, then, is not only their birthday - it is also our birthday.

On one's birthday it is fitting to take time out to reflect on one's achievements of the past year and one's goals for the future. It is fitting that on the birthday of these tzadikim, we reflect on how well we have followed and benefited from them and their teachings. This will help us make our resolutions for the New Year.

We will, in their merit, be blessed with a Chativa Vachatima Tova, a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

Kesivoh ve Chasimoh Toivoh L' Shonoh Toivoh U Mesukoh

May you be written and sealed for a good and sweet year

Best Wishes Gut Shabbos

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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.
