

Chabad of Venice & North Port

Shalom Times

SHAVUOT 5784

A LITTLE NOSH FOR THE SOUL

CELEBRATE SHAVUOT

JUNE 11-13

THE BRIDGE TO HEAVEN

THE GIRL WITH THE UNSTOPPABLE SMILE

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Join us for Reading of the Ten
Commandments at Chabad.
June 12th 5:30pm. RSVP:
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INSIDE:
INCREDIBLE
DIVINE GIFT! >>>

Shalom!



Shalom Times

is published by
Chabad of Venice & North Port
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TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

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Welcome to our Shavuot edition of the Sholom Times!

Filled with inspiring stories and lessons, these pages are sure to provide you with insight into the cornerstone holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot, the holiday that commemorates God's gift of the Torah on Mount Sinai, holds a special place in the hearts of the Jewish nation. It is a time when we reflect upon the unity and blessings that were bestowed upon us when we stood together as one people to receive the Torah. We have a strong, united community. From the record attendance at our Pesach Seder, our continued support and prayers for Israel and the IDF during these trying times, to our Hebrew School and summer camp programs, we embody the spirit of unity and togetherness. This unity is our strength, and it is especially significant as we prepare to celebrate Shavuot.

We are excitedly preparing for Shavuot here at Chabad, and we invite you to join us in celebrating this momentous occasion. **On Wednesday, June 12, at 5:30 pm**, we will be reading the Ten Commandments, a truly significant moment for our community. We encourage you to bring your loved ones—children, grandparents, and everyone in between—to join us in our shul. Let us come together as our ancestors did around Mount Sinai, while countless others around the world do the same in their synagogues. Following the Torah reading, we will enjoy a delightful spread of cheesecake, blintzes, and ice cream. This celebration is open to all, and it serves as a joyous opportunity for our community to strengthen our bonds and revel in the joy of receiving the Torah anew.

May this year's Shavuot be a source of profound spiritual growth, unity, and joy for all of us. May we only hear good news from the Holy Land.
Chag Sameach and Am Yisrael Chai!

Rabbi Sholom & Chaya Rivka Schmerling

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A SPRING OF CELEBRATION AND SOLIDARITY AT CHABAD OF VENICE

This spring, Chabad of Venice hosted two remarkable events that brought us close together as a community.

Our community Passover Seder was the biggest yet. In advance of the event, Volunteers distributed hundreds of artisan shmura matzah, spreading the spirit of Passover throughout the area. The evening itself featured delicious

food, the company of friends, visitors from Israel, as well as contributions from local Hebrew School children, who shared their insights from the Haggadah. It



was truly a special holiday.

A few weeks later, we welcomed Sergeant Bluming for a briefing on the current situation in Gaza. He shared poignant experiences from the front lines, offering a unique perspective on the challenges faced by the IDF on the front lines. His presentation resonated deeply, and the crowd of over 100 gave him a standing ovation for his speech and for his service. All proceeds from the event went directly to aid and support the IDF.

Looking back, these Spring events brought our community together in spirit and action, enhancing our connection to our beautiful heritage, to the land of Israel, and to one another.





Celebrating Milestones: C-TEEN AND HEBREW SCHOOL GRADUATIONS AT CHABAD OF VENICE

This year, Chabad of Venice joyously celebrated the graduations of our C-Teen and Hebrew School students, marking significant milestones in their educational and spiritual journeys. These events were filled with warmth, community spirit, and pride as we honored the achievements of our young members.

Our C-Teen program has been instrumental in fostering Jewish identity and community involvement among our youth. This year, our teens enjoyed exciting activities like axe throwing, designing cards for the IDF over smoothies, and teen barbeques. We proudly saw three of our C-Teen members, Dan,

Devin, and Gabriella, graduate with honors. Devin is set to attend the University of Florida, and Gabriella will be heading to the University of South Florida. To ensure they continue laying their Jewish roots in their new environments, we have connected them with the Chabad on Campus at their respective universities. As a parting gift, each graduate received a mezuzah to hang on the door of their new accommodations, symbolizing their ongoing connection to their faith and heritage.

The Hebrew School graduation was equally inspiring. Our students, ranging from kindergarten to 6th grade, showcased their knowledge and passion



for Jewish traditions. Throughout the year, they made challahs, learned the alef bet, and explored the story of the Exodus. Families gathered to celebrate the achievements of our young scholars, who now have a solid understanding of Jewish holidays, blessings, and most importantly, their Jewish roots.

These graduations are not just a celebration of academic achievements but a reinforcement of the strong foundation these young individuals have built at Chabad of Venice. As they step into the next phases of their lives, they carry with them the values and lessons that will guide them in their next steps, be it high school, college, and beyond.

We are incredibly proud of all our graduates and look forward to seeing the wonderful paths they will carve out for themselves. Mazel Tov to our students and their families for these well-deserved successes!

Enrollment for Hebrew School is now open for your kids and grandkids! Those in need of scholarships can let us know. We look forward to welcoming new students and continuing to build our vibrant community.



CHABAD OF VENICE PROGRAMS

2024

TORAH STUDY

SATURDAYS: 9:30 AM

We'll examine the weekly Torah reading through the lens of contemporary commentary every Shabbat morning, and you'll be amazed at how topical and relevant the Parsha (weekly Torah reading) ideas and concepts really are. Both mystical and pragmatic, these sessions will truly elevate your spirits and refine your view of the world around you.

WEEKLY SHABBAT SERVICES

FRIDAYS: 7:30 PM
SATURDAYS: 10:30 AM

At Chabad the services are traditional and are conducted in a joyous, casual atmosphere. Many of those who attend cannot read Hebrew, yet everyone feels at home. The prayer book is bi-lingual and various English readings are included in the service. Song and commentary add meaning and participation to the prayers. Children are included and most welcome

SHMOOZE & JLI

TUESDAYS AT 12 PM

A weekly community social gathering with traditional Jewish food. An opportunity for the community to connect, make friends, and learn about Judaism.



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WEEKLY TEFILLIN CLUB

EVERY SUNDAY MORNING AT 9:00 AM

The sages teach us that the merit of this mitzvah serves as a shield against anti-Jewish threats, providing safety for the wearer, his family, and for all of Israel. Join Tefillin Club for an opportunity to learn how to wear tefillin, pray with them, and enjoy fresh brewed coffee and Torah Shmooze. Bring your own Tefillin, or use a set provided by us if you don't have your own.

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VENICE CELEBRATES JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH AT CHABAD OF VENICE

In a heartfelt ceremony, the City of Venice recently honored Jewish American Heritage Month, highlighting the rich contributions of the Jewish community to American society. This proclamation also acknowledges the resilience of the Jewish community in the face of historical challenges, including discrimination, persecution, and anti-Semitism.

This year, the event was held at Chabad of Venice, where Mayor Nick Pachota warmly presented the proclamation to Rabbi Sholom Schmerling. The atmosphere was filled with

a sense of unity and appreciation as Rabbi Sholom expressed his gratitude for the city's unwavering support and recognition of the Jewish community. He emphasized the importance of this acknowledgment in fostering a sense of pride and belonging among Jewish residents.

The proclamation serves as a testament to the enduring legacy and vital role of the Jewish community in the history of the United States, and the event at Chabad of Venice was a beautiful celebration of heritage and community spirit.

EXPANSION OF JEWISH CEMETERY: JERUSALEM GARDENS AT VENICE MEMORIAL GARDENS

Chabad of Venice is pleased to announce the expansion of our Jewish cemetery section, Jerusalem Gardens, located at Venice Memorial Gardens. Our community first established a dedicated Jewish section in 2018, and due to the heartfelt need and requests from our community, we are now able to offer additional burial spaces.



The initial section filled up quickly, reflecting the strong community need for a local Jewish cemetery. In response,

we have expanded Jerusalem Gardens to ensure that more families can plan for their final resting place in a truly serene and respectful environment.

One community member shared, "It's comforting to know that our final arrangements, for myself and my husband, are thoughtfully planned and all within our local Chabad community."

For more information or to discuss pre-planning arrangements, please contact Chabad of Venice at (941) 493-2770.



JERUSALEM GARDENS

Chabad of Venice now offers its very own cemetery, "Jerusalem Gardens," located at Venice Memorial Gardens, 1950 Center Rd. Venice

For Cemetery Burial Spaces & Jewish Burial Help call Chabad: (941) 493-2770

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Hannah, Jeff, Debbie, Robert, Susie and Jason

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Gerry Ronkin
Jewish Liaison

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Naomi Cole
On her Bas Mitzvah
May 10 2024

**Nechama Schmerling
and Srolik Sputz**
On their Wedding
May 26 2024




Mordechai
מרדכי שפיץ

WITH PRAISE AND GRATITUDE TO HASHEM
WE TAKE GREAT PLEASURE IN INVITING YOU
TO JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE BAR MITZVAH OF OUR DEAR SON

Mordechai

WHO WILL LEAD THE SERVICE
AND READ FROM THE TORAH
SHABBAT JUNE 22
SERVICES AT 10:00
READING OF THE TORAH AT 11:00
KIDDUSH LUNCHEON TO FOLLOW
CHABAD OF VENICE
21560 ANGELA LANE, VENICE
RABBI SHOLOM & CHAYA RIVKA SCHMERLING

BAR MITZVAH BOY Q&A

Q: What's the most exciting part of your Bar Mitzvah
A: Leading the Minyan and Laying Tefillin

Q: What's your favorite food?
A: Schnitzel

Q: What's your favorite sport?
A: Soccer, Frisbee, Football, and Basketball

Q: What do you want to be when you grow up?
A: A Rabbi, Chazan, and Artist

Q: What's your final message?
A: Everyone is invited to my bar mitzvah on June 22nd.
Hope you can come!

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CHABAD SHAVUOT GUIDE

Shavuot is the festival that marks the day G-d “gave” the Torah on Mount Sinai, which happened seven weeks after the Exodus. Shavuot literally means weeks.

SAY I DO!



Shavuot also marks our “receiving” of the Torah. In other words, we were not passive recipients of G-d’s gift. On the contrary, we actively prepared and counted the days. We famously shouted, “We will do and listen,” impressing G-d by committing to action even before hearing the details. So, Shavuot likewise celebrates our dedication to the Torah. Shavuot also means “oaths,” as we again promise to do and listen.

HEAR THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



On Shavuot, we gather young and old to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments.

IT’S HAPPENING AGAIN.



Getting the Torah is unlike getting a new bicycle or downloading a file. When G-d gave us the Torah, we were gifted the ability to interact with and touch the Divine. The Torah’s power to connect Heaven and Earth is a continuous process fresh every day. That’s why the giving of the Torah will never happen again because it’s still ongoing.

MOUNT SINAI



Mount Sinai, the platform for giving the Torah, was chosen from the other more impressive mountains for its humility. This mountain reminds us to stay humble and stand firm like a mountain. True humility is not weakness but a firm mountainlike faith that makes you the vessel for G-d’s gifts.

**REMEMBER WHEN I
GAVE YOU THE TORAH?
IT’S HAPPENING AGAIN.**

-G-D

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION.



When choosing the perfect location to serve as the backdrop to the extraordinary giving of the Torah, G-d chose the Sinai desert. The sages see this as G-d’s way of letting you know that you don’t need to be a sophisticated city person with all the amenities of a metropolis to observe the Torah. The message is that the Torah is for you no matter where you live.

ENGRAVED IN STONE



The Tablets were engraved in stone to tell you that your relationship with the Torah is unlike paper and ink, or even words written upon your heart. Instead, it’s engraved; it’s part of you and who you are.

The Hebrew word for engraved and the Hebrew word for freedom are very similar. That’s because the laws of the Torah don’t limit us; on the contrary, they free us. The Torah gave us true freedom as the chains that kept us earthbound were finally opened.


OXYGEN FOR YOUR SOUL

Years ago, when the Roman government ruled the Jews and forbade Torah study, the great Rabbi Akiva defied this decree and explained with a parable about a fox who tried to persuade fish to avoid the fisherman’s nets and leave the water and live on land with him. The fish refused, saying they could perhaps survive in the water but would surely die on dry land.

Similarly, Rabbi Akiva argued that studying Torah, our life and longevity, was necessary even in a time of danger and prohibition. Today, learning Torah is legal everywhere, meaning there’s plenty of oxygen for your soul. So, breathe freely and deeply.

EVE OF SHAVUOT - TUESDAY, JUNE 11


 **Decorate:** Some have the custom to decorate their homes (and synagogues) with flowers and sweet-smelling plants in advance of Shavuot. The Midrash tells us that the small mountain sprouted beautiful flowers to provide the perfect setting for the giving of the Torah. The branches also remind us that Shavuot is the time when judgment is rendered regarding the fruits of the field.


 **Light:** Women and girls light holiday candles to usher in the holiday on both the first and second evenings of the holidays.


On Tuesday evening (18 minutes before sunset) light candles and recite these blessings:


Ba-rooch Ah-tah Ah-doh-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu Meh-lech ha-oh-lam ah-sheer kee-deh-sha-nu beh-mitz-voh-tav veh-tzee-va-nu leh-had-lik neir shel yom tov.


Ba-rooch Ah-tah Ah-doh-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu Meh-lech ha-oh-lam sheh-heh-cheh-yah-nu veh-kee-yeh-mah-nu ve-hee-gee-ah-nu liz-man ha-zeh.

 **Rest:** As on other holidays, special meals are eaten, and no “work” may be performed.


 **Pray:** The evening service includes the *Amidah* for festivals. Recite the sections for Shavuot. The *Amidah* for festivals is found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 331.

 **Kiddush:** We hold a cup of wine in our right palm and we recite the Kiddush for Shavuot found on page 329 in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur.


 **Eat:** Enjoy your festive meal.


 **The All Nighter:** It is customary to stay up all night learning Torah on the first night of Shavuot.


FIRST DAY OF SHAVUOT - WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12


 **Pray:** The Shavuot service includes the *Amidah* for festivals. Recite the sections for Shavuot. The *Amidah* for festivals is found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 331.


The *Musaf* prayer for Shavuot is found in Chabad’s Kehot siddur on page 340. Insert sections for Shavuot.

 **Read:** The 10 Commandments. During the morning service all men, women and children should hear the reading of the 10 Commandments. The Torah reading for the first day of Shavuot is found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 520-522.

 **Kiddush:** The Shavuot lunch begins with a cup of wine as we recite the Kiddush found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 357.

 **Eat:** It is customary to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. Menus range from traditional cheese blintzes to quiches, casseroles and more. If you are allergic or lactose-free, kindly leave this custom for others to enjoy on your behalf.


 **Light:** Many have the custom to light a *yahrzeit* candle in honor of a loved one. The memorial prayer of *Yizkor* will be said on the 2nd day of Shavuot. Be sure to light the *Yahrzeit* candle from a pre-existing flame before sunset.


 **Light:** After nightfall women and girls light candles from a pre-existing flame and recite these blessings:


Ba-rooch Ah-tah Ah-doh-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu Meh-lech ha-oh-lam ah-sheer kee-deh-

sha-nu beh-mitz-voh-tav veh-tzee-va-nu leh-had-lik neir shel shabbos v’shel yom tov.


Ba-rooch Ah-tah Ah-doh-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu Meh-lech ha-oh-lam sheh-heh-cheh-yah-nu veh-kee-yeh-mah-nu ve-hee-gee-ah-nu liz-man ha-zeh.

 **Pray:** The evening service includes the *Amidah* for festivals. Recite the sections for Shavuot (and insert the sections for Shabbat). The *Amidah* for festivals is found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 331.


 **Kiddush:** We hold a cup of wine in our right palm and we recite the Kiddush for Shavuot found on page 329 in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur.


 **Eat:** Enjoy your festive meal.

SECOND DAY OF SHAVUOT - THURSDAY, JUNE 13


 **Pray:** The Shavuot service includes the *Amidah* for festivals. Recite the sections for Shavuot. The *Amidah* for festivals is found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 331.


The *Musaf* prayer for Shavuot is found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 340. Insert sections for Shavuot.

 **Yizkor:** On the second day of Shavuot, the *Yizkor* memorial service is recited. *Yizkor* is found in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur on page 337.

 **Read:** Some communities read the Book of Ruth publicly, as King David—whose passing occurred on this day—was a descendant of Ruth the Moabite.

 **Kiddush:** Recite the Kiddush for Shavuot on page 357 in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur.

 **Eat:** Enjoy your festive meal.

 **Havdalah:** At nightfall recite the Havdalah over a cup of wine, spices and Havdalah candle. The blessings are found in page 297 in Chabad’s Kehot Siddur.

G-D SAID: LADIES FIRST

By Shira Gold

“G-d instructed Moses at Mount Sinai to “Speak to the house of Jacob (the women), and (then) tell the sons of Israel” -Exodus 19:3

The Passover narrative begins a more significant seven-week journey to Mount Sinai, where, on Shavuot, the Jews received the Torah. One could say that the Exodus was our birth or the day we became G-d's nation, and Shavuot was the day we found out why.

So, why did G-d create the world? Why does G-d need a holy nation? Why am I here?

In short, according to Jewish tradition, transforming this world into a sanctuary for G-d is the ultimate aim of creation. To complete this process of an “abode for the Divine in the lower worlds,” we need two components: 1) A holy people and 2) The Torah. So, G-d took us out of Egypt, made us His holy nation, and gave us His Torah.

The Torah is more than a book of laws; it's our indispensable tool for making this world a dwelling place for G-d. This stopover at Mount Sinai on our way to the Promised Land was the crucial launching site of the destiny of all humanity. So it's

important to note that when G-d instructs Moses to share the Torah with the Jews, G-d tells him to “first convey the Torah to the women.”

Why do we need to prioritize women

It's not about bringing holiness to an unholy world; instead, the goal is to reveal the holiness buried deep inside the physical world.

when discussing the purpose of creation and humanity's ultimate destiny?

According to Chabad's philosophy, men and women represent two spiritual modalities, and both are essential to the Creator's design. For example, our life's purpose involves bringing G-d into the world (masculine) and cultivating the world as a dwelling place for G-d (feminine). We each navigate life through these two modalities

as we simultaneously overcome darkness (masculine) and reveal the inherent light within that darkness (feminine).

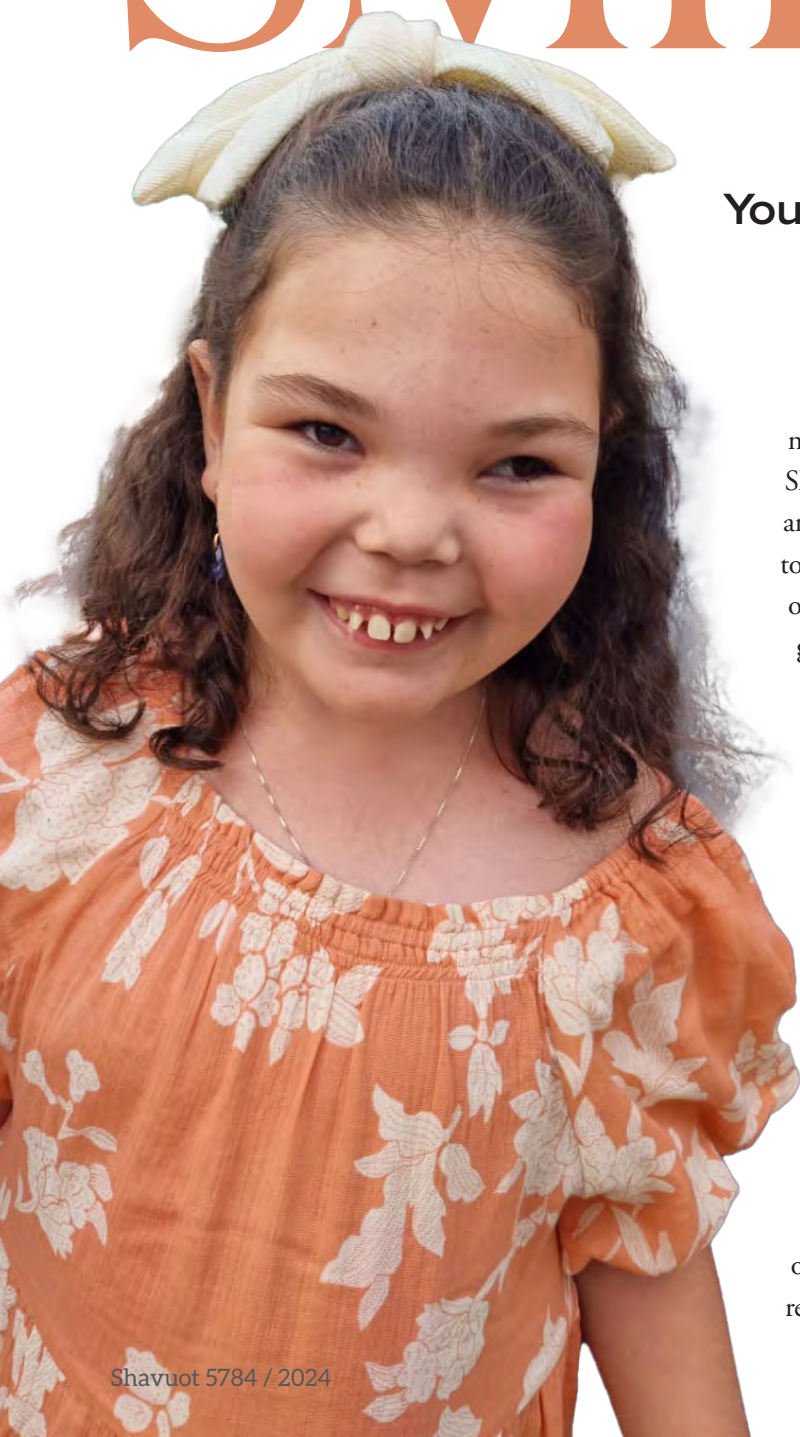
That's why G-d told Moses first to convey the Torah to the women. While battles persist and the road from Sinai to the ultimate redemption is long and complex, fundamentally, we must remember that the world is already imbued with G-dliness. The purpose of creation is actualized not only by the masculine power to forcefully bring Heaven down to earth; it's primarily our feminine ability to reveal the inherent Divinity that's already here.

So, as we set out to change the world, remember it's not about bringing holiness to an unholy world; instead, the goal is to reveal the holiness buried deep inside the physical world. So says the L-rd: Ladies first. •

>> Shira Gold is a staff writer at Chabad Magazine. She lives in Southern California with her husband and children.

THE GIRL WITH THE UNSTOPPABLE SMILE

By Rabbi Ari Shishler



You (don't) need to know your limits.

Our eight-year-old Shaina was at the door of her ICU room the moment her doctor discharged her. She had no time to wait for the wheelchair the nurses had called for. Shaina yanked the handle of her portable oxygen compressor and marched out of the ward. My wife and the ICU sister tried to slow her long enough for her wheels to arrive, but she motored on. We met the wheelchair midway out of the hospital, where she graciously agreed to hop aboard for the ride to the car. Nobody had told her she wasn't yet strong enough to walk unaided.

Rewind one month to when the doctor first ordered twenty-four-hour oxygen for Shaina. I had taken her for a follow-up appointment to check on the chest and double ear infection that had flared up earlier that week. Shaina danced and whirled through school that day, as she does. She had arrived home tired, which we attributed to the lingering after-effects of those infections. Two hours later, at the doctor, we discovered that her oxygen saturation levels were dangerously low. The doctor wanted to admit her but compromised on full-time oxygen. Nobody had told her that morning that she wasn't getting enough air to dance. So, she danced.

Shaina regularly reminds us that what limits us most are our perceived limitations. Not knowing her limits has been the refrain of her rare disease journey. Nobody told her she is not



a regular kid who should be careful climbing the jungle gym (she always clambers to the top). When the professionals tried to convince her of her limitations, she ignored them. We and the pros eventually came around, and she is now flourishing in a regular school, surrounded by typical kids, pushing the limits of her potential.

Nobody has told her she is two years older than her peers and almost double their size. She integrates seamlessly and plays with everyone. Nobody warned her that, because she barely speaks, she should expect the other kids not to understand her. She communicates clearly and happily, using her unique blend of gestures, one-word instructions, and trusty take-you-by-the-hand-where-she-wants-you method.

We didn't prime her for the day her friends would graduate to the next class and leave her behind- that they might forget her and move on socially. Thankfully, her old classmates greet her when they see her with enthusiastic waves and shouts of "Shaina!"

Nobody defined the classical school rules for her. She believes all classrooms are hers and every teacher is on her staff. She wanders into other classrooms for spontaneous dance sessions.

Nobody outlined the hierarchy of adults and kids or appropriate decorum for public places. She marches around Shul, insisting that engineers and CEOs high-five her during the service. She managed to get the formal crowd at Cape Town's oldest Shul to clap along with the cantor when we were there for the summer holidays.

Nobody has pointed out that she shouldn't expect strangers to join her games or applaud whenever she takes her meds. She has people playing with her and clapping wherever she goes.

Thank G-d nobody gave her the stats on the recovery time from Status Epilepticus or the risks of stridor breathing. Not knowing any better, she pulled through each time and made remarkable recoveries. We remain optimistic because nobody has told her what her BPAN diagnosis entails. Even if someone did, she'd ignore them.

“WHEN THE PROFESSIONALS TRIED TO CONVINCE HER OF HER LIMITATIONS, SHE IGNORED THEM.”

I'd love to adopt Shaina's attitude. Rather than fret over the challenges that may lie ahead, we could dance with confidence and optimism. When you don't focus on your limitations, you end up living beyond them. •

>> Rabbi Ari Shishler is the Rabbi of Chabad of Strathavon in South Africa. He is a popular speaker and writer. You can follow Shaina's story on shainasbrocha.org.

SAY CHEESE!

The custom of eating dairy foods on Shavuot carries deep symbolic significance rooted in Kabbalistic teachings. One explanation is linked to the realization of the Jewish people upon receiving the Torah that their utensils were not kosher, leading them to consume dairy products instead. Additionally, Kabbalistic symbolism associates Pesach with the blood of birth, while Shavuot is connected to the Torah, likened to milk. This reflects the transformation and progression from birth to maturation, culminating in the reception of the nourishing words of Torah on Shavuot.





Artwork by Yehuda Lang. View the Lang gallery online at www.yehudalang.com

THE TORAH: UNSCROLLED.

By Rabbi Shmuel Marcus

The Torah (literally means “instruction”), provides us with guidance, and you could say it’s G-d’s “user’s manual” for the world. At the core of the laws and stories, it’s primarily a holy, multi-layered book that can change your world.

So, if it’s not all about what I can and can’t do, what exactly is the Torah? What are those many layers and dimensions that make the Torah our national treasure?

THE BRIDGE TO HEAVEN

You can pick up many books at the library, but only one book – the Torah – picks you up and elevates your life.

For generations, people struggled to bridge the gap between creation and the Creator, as the distance seemed insurmountable. Finally, on Shavuot, through the Torah, G-d bridged the gap between Heaven and Earth.

The Torah is more like a bridge than a mere source of information; it connects Heaven and Earth and your body and soul. In this way, Shavuot is the holiday that makes all other Jewish celebrations possible. It commemorates the arrival of the Torah and the breaking down of the natural barriers between the earthly and the Divine, enabling us to transform our world into a more sacred and Heavenly place.

A SLICE OF HEAVEN

Worldly possessions and pleasures cannot quench the thirst of our otherworldly souls, so we subconsciously yearn for the authenticity of the Torah. The pages in a Torah book are like slices of Heaven you can hold in your hand.

While G-d's wisdom is present throughout creation, the Torah is different in that it embodies G-d's wisdom and remains inseparable from it, continuing to exist as the "Creator" even after entering creation. This pure holiness makes the Torah impervious to impurity, as Jeremiah 23:29 says, "Behold, my words are fire." Even after the Torah descends to earth and is handed to you, it remains a pure flame of Heavenly divinity that can warm and invigorate your thirsty soul like nothing else.

YOUR ULTIMATE TOOL

If you plan on changing the world, you will need this tool: The Torah.

The Torah is like an outsider who can serve as a business consultant or therapist. The Torah's transcendent nature is the key to transforming the physical world into a heavenly dwelling place. Sure, the Torah contains superior wisdom, but its genuine power lies in its ability to sanctify the world around us.

For example, the Torah enables us to transform parchment and ink into a holy scroll or turn wool scraps into a holy tallit with tzitzit. That's why Shavuot is considered the day we were given the tools to make this world a holy place.



IT'S YOURS!

The first thing you should know is the Torah is rightfully yours, as it states in Deuteronomy 33:4, "The Torah is the inheritance of every Jew."

Inheritance differs from a purchase or gift in that it's not acquired through external means, but rather belongs to you inherently because of who you are. In fact, according to the Zohar, your connection to the Torah is intrinsic to your being, as it proclaims that G-d, your soul, and the Torah are indeed one. Therefore, as you delve into the power and significance of the Torah, it is essential to remember that it is your story and that you already share a deep connection with the Torah. Therefore, this Shavuot, as we celebrate the giving of the Torah, go ahead and claim what is rightfully yours. •

>> Rabbi Shmuel Marcus is the editor of Chabad Magazine

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TORAH: LIFE'S MANUAL

By Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson & Rabbi Zalman Abraham

The word bible is of Greek origin, possibly referencing Biblia, a historic port city in modern-day Lebanon that was widely known in ancient times for the superb paper it exported to many parts of the world, including Greece. Bible, then, refers to the medium of the book itself, a static form initially designed to function as a record of the past rather than as a living guide for the present.

Torah, the Hebrew word for the Bible, comes from the word *horaah*, which means to instruct, implying a more dynamic sense of contemporary relevance. Understood as such, the Torah serves not only as a book of ancient history, but, more importantly, as an instruction manual for life.

The Zohar, one of the foundational texts of the Kabbalah, teaches that while the Torah was formally given at Sinai, it predates that revelatory event and even precedes the creation of the world:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and used it as a blueprint to create the universe.” As such, the Torah provides a metaphysical template for understanding the properties and purpose of the world and human existence. By studying it, one is brought into direct contact with the foundational elements of creation.

The Torah is thus not a mere piece of literature; instead, it is a guide meant to be studied accordingly. In the same way that a person would not attempt to operate complex machinery without first consulting the user's manual, the journey of life and human existence in an infinitely complex world requires its instructions for optimal experience.

Following this line of thought, one may rightly ask: If the Torah is an instruction manual for life, why does it include so many stories and accounts of history? Why not just provide a list of commandments, instructing us what to do and what not to do, what to eat and what not to eat?

**“G-D LOOKED INTO THE
TORAH AND USED IT AS
A BLUEPRINT TO CREATE
THE UNIVERSE.”**

The Sages have provided numerous answers to this question, one of which is that these stories are not just tales of bygone characters or events. They, too, are meant to be instructional. When read accordingly, they offer profound insights and poignant life wisdom to illuminate our paths and help us navigate our lives. Simply put, the stories of Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Moses, etc., represent the stories of our lives. They were explicitly included because of their universal and archetypal resonance and because they so powerfully express and encapsulate the essence of human experience across the ages.

Accordingly, the Torah is not intended to be studied as an academic exercise. As informative as critical scholarship is, reading Torah only in this way would circumvent its primary function, which is to be a guiding force in our lives, not just a fossil of antiquity.

Conventional thinking is that you can analyze, understand, and even teach a particular body of wisdom without practicing it yourself. Thus, you can be a

respected academic, considered an expert in a particular field, without ever actually being a practitioner. Torah is different. Torah is a guidebook, not a purely theoretical treatise meant only for academic study. Its primary wisdom is not in amassing ideas but guiding day-to-day behavior, life, and practice.

The Talmud teaches: “One who says, ‘I have only Torah’ (meaning learning without action) lacks even Torah.” Without integrating the Torah's wisdom into your life and actions, without, in effect, taking it personally, you may have learned something, but you have not learned Torah.

The Mishnah compares one whose Torah study exceeds their good deeds to a tree “whose branches are many but whose roots are few.” Such a tree will undoubtedly be uprooted by the first passing wind, making it vulnerable and unlikely to sustain itself long enough to bear fruit.

The Torah's wisdom is designed to center the person, both body and soul, within a confusing and often contradictory world of moral uncertainty. If taken purely as knowledge and theory, Torah will not have its intended effect, which is to anchor us in a life of spirit while we navigate a material world. After all, it isn't knowledge that makes us better people but how and when we act upon and actualize that knowledge. This is the secret of the Tree of Life. •

Excerpt from People of the Word, available at www.kehhot.com

>> Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson is the rabbi of Beit Baruch and executive director of Chabad of Belgravia, London, where he lives with his wife, Chana, and children.

Rabbi Zalman Abraham is the director of The Wellness Institute—a division of JLI dedicated to youth mental health. Zalman lives with his wife, Leah, and children in Brooklyn, New York.

MY STORY:



From the Rolling Stones to Wrapping Tefillin

By Elliot Lasky

In 1972, Chip Monck, the Tony Award-nominated lighting designer who most famously served as the MC at Woodstock, invited me to join the Rolling Stones summer tour. In my early twenties, I had studied law at SUNY in Buffalo while dabbling in music promotion. By the mid-1960s, I got to see more depraved human behavior than most people will ever see in a lifetime.

After the tour, I spoke with a Zen-Buddhist friend who was not Jewish. He talked about Zen Buddhism, which sounded very interesting, and I asked, “How can Judaism be right and the whole world wrong?” That question kept percolating in my mind.

I was still closely connected with Rabbi Noson Gurary, the Rebbe's emissary to SUNY in Buffalo. So I called him and started asking him my questions. He answered, "There's only one person who can help you—the Rebbe."

The concept of a Rebbe, who somehow understood your soul, was very alien to me, and yet, that very day, I went to the address that Rabbi Gurary gave me — 770 Eastern

Parkway. I recall that it was a bitterly cold day in January of 1973.

I waited outside "770" in the cold, wearing my snakeskin boots, tight jeans, and leather jacket. With my shoulder-length hair and unconventional dress, I was a sight.

As I was waiting, an old Cadillac pulled up, and the Rebbe emerged. Since Yiddish was my first language, I said, "*Anshuldig, binste der Lubavitcher Rebbe?*" — Excuse me, are you the Lubavitcher Rebbe?"

Our eyes locked. I had never seen eyes like that in my whole life. Suddenly, I felt like I had been transported to another dimension. There was nothing around us; it was just the two of us in the whole world.

He didn't respond, "Yes, I am the Rebbe," or "No, I am not." He said, "What is your name, and where are you from?" I gave him my name and told him where I was from and where my parents were from.

"I have a question," I said. "Ask," he responded.

"*Ah vu iz G-t? — Where is G-d?*"

"*Umetum*—Everywhere," he answered me. But I persisted: "*Ich vays, ubber ah vu?*" I know, but where?"

"*Umetum, in alts; in ah boim, in a shtayn*—everywhere, in everything; in every tree, in every stone."

But I still wasn't satisfied with this answer so he said, "*in dayn hartz, oib dos iz vi du fregst* — He is in your heart, if this is how you're asking."

That answer completely stunned me. In all my years of searching, I never grasped that G-d was in my heart. These were very, very powerful words to me.

Altogether, we spoke for approximately fifteen minutes on the steps of 770 on a very bitter cold day in January, and, in the end, he gave me two things to do. One was to learn the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (the Abbreviated Code of Jewish Law) in English, and the other was to put on tefillin daily.

I objected. I didn't think I could consistently wear tefillin. But he said, "You can, and you will."

He then explained that keeping the Torah would be a blessing for me. At that point, I started crying as the Rebbe went in for the afternoon prayer service. It was a very emotional moment for me.

I walked away, understanding one thing—that I had just met

a man of total truth and sincerity. But it took some time for his words to sink in—about three months. That's when I started putting on tefillin, which I had not done for many years.

One day, I asked myself, "How can the lips that utter prayers, the praises of the L-rd, eat forbidden foods?"
So, bit by bit, I started keeping kosher.

From that day till today, I have never missed a mitzvah, and, as they say, "one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah."

Bit by bit, I started adding to my prayers. Then, one day, I asked myself, "How can the lips that utter prayers, the praises of the L-rd, eat forbidden foods?" So, bit by bit, I started keeping kosher.

Then, I started learning the Code of Jewish Law, just as the Rebbe instructed me to. Over the years, my observance grew and developed.

Today, I have four beautiful children, all Torah-observant. Everything has turned out like this because of that fateful meeting with the Rebbe on a cold winter morning in 1973. Because of the Rebbe, my life was forever changed, and so were many other lives I affected—all for good. All for blessing. •

This story has been adapted with permission from JEM's My Encounter with the Rebbe oral history project, which is dedicated to recording first-person testimonies documenting the life and guidance of the Rebbe.

>> Elliot Lasky is a real estate developer who resides in Monsey, New York.



THE KOSHER SYMBOL

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ROCKET SCIENCE

One of Israel's Iron Dome engineers shares his Elevator Pitch for G-d.



Disclaimer: I do not believe that it is possible to prove that G-d exists, no matter how many words I use. I do believe that it is possible to explain why I believe in G-d in a way that my fellow passengers on the elevator will not find incongruous with my thirty-year history as a rocket scientist.

We must first explain the meaning of the word “belief.” We often hear statements like “scientists believe that computers will become smarter than humans in our lifetime.” This “belief” is synonymous with the word “estimate.”

Given the speed with which technology is advancing, scientists estimate that there is a high probability that computers will eclipse human intelligence. My “belief” in G-d is something more deep-seated.

Kurt Gödel, a twentieth century mathematician, published his “Incompleteness Theorem” in 1931. I can incompletely summarize this theorem as follows: Any system complex enough to be useful must rely upon unprovable axioms, defined as “statements or propositions that are regarded as being established, accepted, or self-evidently true.”

One example is Euclidean geometry in a two-dimensional plane. Everyone who rides elevators “knows” that the shortest distance between two points is

a straight line. Anyone who suggested that the shortest distance from the first floor to the second floor goes through the third floor would be laughed at. And yet, this statement is unprovable. There might exist some singular case in which the shortest distance between two points

Accepting this belief grants me access to the wonderful edifice of Judaism that infuses my life with meaning and purpose.

is some fantastically curved line. We do not know for a fact that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line – we believe this to be true and unchanging.

By accepting this belief, we can access the wonderful edifice of geometry that allows us to build bridges and shoot down rockets. I believe that G-d created the universe and gave the Torah at Mount Sinai to the Jewish People.

Accepting this belief grants me access to the wonderful edifice of Judaism that infuses my life with meaning and purpose. Once we accept the axiom of the existence of G-d as the source of belief, we can supercharge that belief with the “Confirmation Bias,” which

the psychologist, Peter Wason, first described in 1960.

In a nutshell, the Confirmation Bias asserts that humans have a tendency to interpret facts in a way that confirms their pre-existing views or beliefs. People who support gun-control see every shooting as proof positive that firearms need to be regulated, while opponents look at the same shooting and suggest that had there been more gun-carrying citizens in the vicinity of the shooting, they would have neutralized the shooter earlier. My beliefs enable me to see the world through the lens of G-d's existence. When I see a missile defense system intercept 4,000 rockets at a success rate of greater than 90%, I see the Hand of G-d.

Others see intelligent engineers and robust planning. Neither hypothesis can be proved or disproved. But I guarantee that the first one is infinitely more fulfilling. ●

>> Ari Sacher is a rocket scientist with senior engineering roles in ground-breaking anti-missile programs including the Iron Dome and David's Sling. He has briefed hundreds of U.S. lawmakers on Israeli Missile Defense and Israeli-U.S. Ari is a highly requested speaker, enabling even the layman to understand the intricacies of “rocket science.”

Excerpt from Elevator Pitches for G-d: 70 One-Page Essays by Thought Leaders on Why They Believe, edited by Bruce Licht and Ron Kardos. Available at EP4G.com.

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