

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

THE PACKAGING MATTERS

by Tzipah Wertheimer

Come one day, everyone screams Mazal Tov, a baby is born and the soul is trapped within the confines of a body that aches for food, feels pain, confusion and must face the challenges of the real world.

This body/soul or soul/body package struggles to find meaning, make a positive impact, and after 120 years leave the world in a better state than the way it was found.

The Baal Shem Tov says that a soul might descend into the world for 70 or 80 years just to do a practical favor for another Jew. The soul lowers herself into the physical world in order to bring light to this often confusing, sometimes dark and unfortunately at times painful place. By doing such, she refines herself and can ultimately ascend to the Heavens as a stronger and greater soul for her efforts.

The first fruits are compared to the soul. The Jews are commanded to bring their first fruits to the Kohanim in the Temple. This was before Amazon Prime and the people migrated on foot to Jerusalem to present their initial and best harvest. There were no cardboard boxes, ziplock bags or reusable totes. The rich brought the fruits in a basket constructed of metal and the poor crafted baskets out of straw and rods.


The Kohen would accept the fruit and return the metal baskets to their owners. The cheaper straw baskets were not returned.



The Torah is certainly not teaching us that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer – there must be more going on in this exchange.

In fact it seems that the cheaper the basket the better! The organic basket of rods & straw was more connected to the mitzvah of the *bikurim* because of how basic it was. Because the packaging itself was so insignificant, the mitzvah of bringing the first fruits was actually more prominent. The poor man's mitzvah – his gift – was so great that the outer layer of packaging actually got absorbed into the holiness and became part of the overture. The kohen did not return the basket because it had become holy in its own right and had become part of the mitzvah. When the soul can truly shine, the body becomes holy as well.

The metal basket was useless once the fruits had been removed by the kohen, so it was returned to its original owner. The high-end packaging was totally distinct from its contents. The soul meditating on the mountain top might be fulfilling a spiritual desire, but it's having no impact on the body or the world around.

The Torah is not meant to be studied in isolation, it is a tool for bringing holiness into the environment. So the lower you go – the more practical and engaged in the world around the better. The vast majority of mitzvot involve physical actions like giving *tezdaka*, eating kosher food, *mezuzah*, lighting candles, building a *sukkah* and etc. 

Just Me שו"ת A Question

Q: Why did Yocheved & Amram merit to have Moshe as their son? What did they do that was so great?

A: Amram was the *Gadol HaDor*, the greatest person of his generation. In fact, a new mitzvah was given to Amram, the mitzvah of *Kiddushin* (marriage).

Yocheved was Amram's niece, and she was thus also connected to the family & energy of Amram.

The Zohar notes that his greatness is alluded to in his name. In Hebrew, if you split the name in half, you get **אמ** **רח**, a lofty nation, hinting to the great nation that would come forth from him.


(Sotah 12a; Rambam Hil. Melachim 9:1; Zohar Shemos 12a; Sichos Kodosh 5731 vol.1, p.374)

Q: Why has God created the universe so infinitely large? Is it so we can understand him in some sort of physical sense?

A: An infinite G-d created a finite world. This was possible via the kabbalistic idea known as *tzimtzum*.

Iyov wrote, "from my flesh, I see G-d." Indeed, the physical world is derived from a spiritual counterpart in the Upper worlds, and if I am able to properly understand the physical, I may come to know G-d. That's a succinct answer to a question that requires hundreds of pages or more to answer.

Q: Did the Lubavitcher Rebbe vote in elections?

A: Yes the Rebbe voted and encouraged others to vote as well. 

When my father reads....

98 Curses

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

The portion for this week, Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1 - 29:8), features the section referred to as "the Rebuke." It contains 98 frightening curses that will befall the Jewish people if they stray from the proper path.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Chabad Rebbe, was typically the one who would read from the Torah scroll at the public reading in his synagogue.

One year, for some reason, he was not present in synagogue on the Shabbat when Ki Tavo was read; another competent reader took his place.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman's young son and later successor, Dov Ber, sat in synagogue and listened to his father's temporary replacement read from the Torah. When the reader reached the rebuke, Dov Ber trembled with fear, experiencing distress.

His father arrived and found him in such a weakened state that he was unsure if he would be strong enough to fast on Yom Kippur, about two weeks later.

Someone asked Dov Ber: "Why did you all of a sudden fall weak at hearing the rebuke? It's not as if this is the first time you ever heard it!"

"When my father reads," he responded, "I don't hear curses."

Curses are curses. What did the precocious boy mean when he said that he didn't hear curses?




The Torah has two levels. The first is the way it is studied and appears in our world; the second, the way it speaks in the upper realms.

Both are true.

In our world, the rebuke is exactly as the name indicates. In the spiritual realms, however, there are no curses; everything is exposed only for its inner good.

When Rabbi Shneur Zalman read the rebuke, he perceived it as it appeared in the spiritual realms, and this came across to his son.

May we all be blessed with a sweet new year, filled with inner and revealed good! 

HAYOM YOM

19 Elul

When the Alter Rebbe was still in Vitebsk he once expounded on the verse "You stand..."

Taking *eitz* (wood) as an idiom of *eitza* (counsel), he interpreted "choppers of wood" to mean that one must chop out "the many thoughts (counsels) in the heart of man."

"Those who draw water," he interpreted - one must drain out the water that "makes all enjoyments grow."

Chassidic Story

(continued from last week)

R' Zelig Slonim and the other bochurim managed to gain the Rebbe, R' Shalom Dov Ber Schneerson's, brocha to travel by boat (instead of train) through Russia during World War I. The Rebbe was concerned about the boat's stop in Mariopol. Since his home was in Israel, R' Zelig also asked the for a brocha to return to the Holy Land & the Rebbe agreed.


Just before getting on the boat, R' Zelig saw a notice that all males 19-21 must report for military service - failure to do so could result in death. Though he was only 18, the papers he traveled with said he was 19.

With great fright, R' Zelig returned to the Rebbe and shared his predicament. The Rebbe once again blessed him and assured him that everything would be alright.

Finally aboard the boat the group made numerous stops including the port in Mariopol. Two cossaks boarded and ordered all males to disembark. "Get your documents ready," the cossaks hissed. All men ages 19-21 were being drafted on the spot.

"Name?," the cossak demanded and R' Zelig answered. "Age?" and now R' Zelig remained silent. The cossak reviewed his papers and said, "too young..." with knees shaking, R' Zelig was allowed to re-board the ship with the others. This was an open miracle! The man must have misread his birthdate.



The Black Sea ravaged as the journey continued and they were in great danger from the elements. Standing on deck with a life jacket, R' Zelig promised that if they survived the journey he would bring pure olive oil to the grave of the Rashbi in Meiron and make sure to eat Melava Malka each week. Finally the group reached their destination safely.

Later that year on 2 Nisan the Rebbe passed away and the bochurim held strongly onto the warmth of last Rosh Hashana they had spent together in Rostov. 

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