

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi YY Jacobson

A Husband's Gift from Heaven

It was the seventh night of Chanukah, a time of light and joy, when a knock on the door brought devastating news that changed Hadas Lowenstern's life forever. Her husband, Elisha, just 38 years old, had fallen in battle in Gaza. He was killed December 13, 2023—Rosh Chodesh Teves, the first day of the month of Teves—just hours before the lighting of the Seventh candle.

Elisha, a father of six young children ranging 11 months to 12 years old, was in Gaza on a mission to rescue wounded soldiers when a Hamas-fired anti-tank missile struck, taking his life. He was a remarkable individual: a successful software engineer, a deeply learned Torah scholar, a pillar of his community in Charish, a devoted husband, and a man of unparalleled kindness and humility.

Hadas recalled how, during their 13 years of marriage, her husband gave her a gift every Rosh Chodesh, the first day of the Jewish month. She shared that the best way to honor his memory was to embrace kindness in small, meaningful ways, like sharing a cup of coffee with someone you love. Elisha embodied love and selflessness, writing in his journal that one should open their WhatsApp daily to see if someone needs help.

Though exempt from army service due to the size of his family, Elisha and Hadas believed it was his duty to serve, regardless of

the risks. The night before his death, during a conversation with his fellow officers, they suggested he write a farewell letter in case the worst should happen. Elisha declined, explaining that he lived his life ensuring that those close to him always knew how much he loved and cherished them.

Two months after his passing, Lilach and Sholom Goodman, Chabad Chassidim living in Crown Heights, New York, welcomed their first child, a baby boy. Sholom, a longtime editor at the Wall Street Journal, was deeply moved by Elisha Lowenstern's story. Though they had no personal connection to the Lowenstern family, the Goodmans decided to name their son Dovid Elisha, honoring the fallen hero and adding the name Dovid after King David, the quintessential Jewish warrior.

On Rosh Chodesh Adar I, Thursday, February 8, 2024, the Goodmans held the bris for their son, and I encouraged Sholom to share the news with Hadas. That evening, Sholom reached out to her and sent a photo of their newborn. This was Hadas' response: "I have no words, really. A huge hug to my Dovid Elisha. I'm looking forward to meeting him. I have no words to tell you how meaningful this is to me." Then she added, "This was the best Rosh Chodesh gift I could have received."

Left in the depths of pain and torment, Hadas found solace in the belief that this baby, whose name car-

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ried her husband's memory, was a Rosh Chodesh gift to her from her husband.

A few months later, the two fam-

ilies met in Israel. It was there that Hadas had the precious opportunity to hold and embrace her son, Dovid Elisha. In that moment, the legacy of

her husband—his love, courage, and unyielding kindness—lived on, connecting two families across the world in a shared story.

Rabbi Sruly Bornstein

Redemption and Reward

The Gemara (Chagiga 15b) tells us that R' Elisha ben Avuya, once a towering Torah giant, tragically strayed from the path and earned the moniker "Acher," the Other. After his passing, his neshama (soul) found itself in a unique and perplexing state of limbo. On the one hand, his aveiros barred him from entering Gan Eden; on the other, his immense Torah learning shielded him from immediate judgment in Gehinnom. The Heavenly court faced a dilemma: what could be done with such a soul?

Rav Meir, Acher's devoted student, grasped the gravity of his teacher's situation, and declared that he would ensure Acher's entry into Gehinnom. Rav Meir understood that the temporary suffering of Gehinnom would allow Acher's neshama to achieve the purification needed to eventually enter Gan Eden. As a sign of this process, Rav Meir foretold that smoke would rise

from Acher's grave when R' Meir's passed away, symbolizing his soul's presence in Gehinnom.

Years later, Rav Yochanan, upon learning of the ongoing smoke, asked, "Is this how a teacher is treated?" With this, Rav Yochanan took it upon himself to elevate Acher's soul from Gehinnom to Gan Eden, which was signified when Rav Yochanan passed away.

Reb Itzel of Peteburg (Kochvei Ohr) calculates that Acher's soul remained in Gehinnom for approximately 150 years. Reflecting on Rav Meir's actions, Reb Itzel highlights the staggering implications of this decision. Rav Meir, out of profound love and respect for his teacher, deemed 150 years of suffering in Gehinnom a worthwhile trade for Acher's eventual entry into Gan Eden. The reward of Olam Haba is so incomprehensibly great that even prolonged suffering in Gehinnom is insignificant by comparison.

Reb Itzel further notes that this story emphasizes the unparalleled value of mitzvos. The Gemara teaches, "Schar mitzvah b'hai alma leka—The reward for mitzvos cannot be fully granted in this world" (Kiddushin 39b). The joy and fulfillment of Olam Haba transcend all earthly experiences. While in this world, we strive to avoid even minor discomfort, whereas in the Next World, the smallest measure of Olam Haba renders the most intense suffering worthwhile.

Rav Meir's held a deep understanding of this. His willingness to advocate for Acher's entry into Gehinnom, knowing it would ultimately lead to his tikkun, reflects the infinite worth of Torah, mitzvos, and Olam Haba. The potential for spiritual elevation is boundless, even for those who may seem beyond hope.

Such is the eternal value of mitzvos and the enduring possibility of redemption, no matter how far one has strayed.

Rabbi Joey Haber

George Washington's Chanukah

There are times in life when you deeply desire something, yet you question whether it's even realistic to hope for it. Perhaps you lack the knowledge, the background, or the connections to make it happen. Maybe someone wants to get married, but it feels like an unattainable dream. Chanukah reminds us that as Jews, our

mindset must shift during these eight days. It's a time to believe in the impossible because we live with the conviction that anything is possible.

Why is Chanukah celebrated for eight days? In Judaism, the number seven symbolizes the natural world. The world was created in seven days. The seventh year is the Shemittah, a sabbatical for the land.

We count seven weeks to Shavuot. Kosher animals are listed in sevens. Seven is the natural order. But eight? Eight is above nature. It represents the miraculous. That's why Chanukah lasts for eight days. It is to teach us that we can transcend the natural order.

This is also why Sukkot is seven days long, representing sacrifices for all nations, while Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day, is just for the Jewish people. It's our unique reminder that we don't merely live within the nat-

ural world; we live above it. That's why, when we say Refa'enu in prayer, we ask Hashem to heal us even when doctors say it's impossible. We believe in the power of the eighth, the miraculous.

Let me share with you a classic story often told around Chanukah. The source isn't fully known, but it appears to be true. During the Revolutionary War in 1777, General George Washington led the Continental Army through harsh conditions. One freezing winter night, in a camp in Valley Forge, Washington walked among his beleaguered soldiers. Many were shoeless, coatless, and starving, enduring unimaginable hardship. As he passed through the tents, he noticed one illuminated by flickering candles.

Inside, a Jewish soldier stood. Washington asked him about the candles. The soldier explained, "These are Chanukah candles. They commemorate a war our people fought thousands of years ago. Though we were outnumbered and had every reason to surrender, we believed in G-d, fought for what was just, and He granted us victory."

The soldier continued, "General, just as in those days, we are now fighting for freedom—freedom of religion and the right to live as we choose. Though we are outnumbered and under-resourced, our cause is just, and I believe G-d is with us. These candles remind us that with G-d's help, victory is possible."

Inspired, Washington left the tent that night with renewed strength. The Continental Army, as history tells us, went on to win the war and establish the United States.

The following Chanukah, this Jewish soldier, now living in New York, received a medallion engraved with the words: In honor of your faith that inspired me during the darkest times.

The message of Chanukah is clear: there is always light in the darkness. Those candles remind every one of us never to give up hope. No matter how insurmountable the odds may seem, we believe that Hashem is always on our side. And when He is with us, it doesn't matter what logic or numbers say.

Miracles are possible.

Rabbi Yehuda Zev Klein

The Professor with No Brain

We are all familiar with the famous question of the Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 670) regarding the duration of Chanukah. If the flask of oil found in the Beis Hamikdash was only enough to last one day, why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? The miracle of the oil, after all, only lasted seven days. This question has over 500 proposed answers, but despite all of them, the question remains perplexing.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l says something remarkable. No one ever stated that while there are many great arguments presented by the Beis Yosef for why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days, he personally doesn't find any of them very convincing. As

such, he will celebrate Chanukah for only seven days and only purchase a menorah with seven candle holders. Why is this? Because we have Emunas Chachamim. The Sages of the Talmud established Chanukah as an eight day holiday, and this tradition has been followed for thousands of years. Despite any questions or doubts that may arise, this is the practice we continue to uphold. We observe this mitzvah year after year, even as we ponder the question, because we follow the law laid down by the Sages, who have given us the framework to follow, regardless of whether we fully understand all the reasons behind it. We are committed to fulfilling the commandments as prescribed, remaining obedient to the laws handed down by our Cha-

chamim.

This adherence to tradition stands in stark contrast to the philosophy of the Greeks, whose primary goal was the spread of Hellenism. The Greeks sought to impose their culture, ideology, and worldview on the Jewish people, urging them to embrace their way of thinking. Central to Greek philosophy, explains the Ramban, was the belief that only what the eyes could physically see and what the senses could detect was real. They held that the intellect could only understand that which could be logically comprehended, and anything beyond that was dismissed as non-existent. If it couldn't be seen, heard, or touched, they claimed, it simply didn't exist.

In contrast, we, as Jews, believe in a higher reality beyond the physical world. We acknowledge the existence of a supernatural power, even



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if we cannot physically perceive it with our senses. This belief is central to our emunah, such that we live our lives grounded in the conviction that there is a reality beyond the limits of our sensory experience. As Rav Hutter notes, the term Yehudim means to admit and acknowledge, underscoring that we recognize there to be a reality beyond our senses, and we live our lives in accordance with that belief. This ideology was intolerable to the Greeks.

The story is told of a philosophy professor at a prestigious university—Harvard or Columbia—who engaged his class in a discussion about the existence of G-d. The professor posed several questions: "Has anyone here ever seen G-d?" Silence. "Has anyone ever heard from G-d?" Silence. "Has anyone ever touched G-d?" Silence. Concluding that there was no evidence of G-d, the professor claimed that G-d could not exist. At this point, one student raised his

hand and asked to respond. The student approached the professor, stood beside him, and turned to his classmates. "Has anyone here ever seen our professor's brain?" Silence. "Has anyone ever touched our professor's brain?" Silence. "Has anyone ever heard our professor's brain?" Silence. The student then concluded, "According to our professor's logic, it must be that our professor has no brain."

This exchange encapsulates the fundamental difference between Jewish and Greek philosophy. The Greeks, bound by their belief in only the physical world, could not comprehend the idea of G-d. In contrast, we, as Jews, understand that there are realities beyond what our senses can perceive.

The miracle of Chanukah, particularly the burning of the oil, serves as a powerful reminder of this distinction. The oil did not burn because of any scientific explanation—because it was flammable or combustible—but because Hashem decreed that it should

burn. As the Gemara tells us, "The One who decrees oil should burn says vinegar should burn" (Taanis 25a). This is why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days: to symbolize our belief that there is more to reality than what we can see or touch.

The famous adage, "A miracle begins where logic ends" reflects this idea. We are not allowed to derive personal benefit from the light of the Chanukah candles because their purpose is to reveal something beyond the physical realm. They are a reminder that Hashem is at work in the world, beyond the laws of nature. Just as Hashem performed miracles for our ancestors, so too will He perform miracles for us, now and in the future. This is the enduring message of Chanukah, and it is one that we carry with us, year after year, as we light the Menorah and reflect on the miraculous nature of our faith.

Rabbi Eliyahu Maksumov

Wheels of the World

Rabbi Abraham Twerski zt"l shares the story about a group of tourists. In Yellowstone National Park, there are geysers, natural phenomena where water erupts from the ground in spectacular bursts. Tourists from all over the world come to witness these geysers, paying money for the privilege of watching the eruptions.

On one occasion, a group of pranksters decided to pull off a stunt. They went to a junkyard and found an old steering wheel from a city bus. The pranksters then went to the geyser site, hiding behind the bushes, waiting for the perfect moment to execute their plan. They attached the wheel to the ground in

such a way that it seemed to control the eruption of the geyser.

The narrative they aimed to create was that the geyser's eruptions were not natural, but rather controlled by an underground mechanism connected to the steering wheel. With precision, they had calculated the exact moment the geyser would erupt, and at that time, as tourists gathered to witness the phenomenon, the pranksters would cause a commotion behind the bushes. The tourists, puzzled, would look on as the pranksters seemingly turned the wheel, making the water burst forth from the ground.

The tourists, initially amazed, eventually realized that the wheel was not connected to anything that

could influence the geyser. It was all just a prank. As the pranksters fled, the tourists were left to see that the eruption was not caused by any physical effort, but rather by the natural forces at play.

The lesson here, Rabbi Twerski explained, is that we often work hard, turning our own metaphorical wheels in life, believing that our efforts directly bring about the results we seek. However, much like the pranksters, our efforts alone are not responsible for the outcomes. The blessings we receive come from Hashem, not from our own actions. While we must do our part and put in the effort, we must recognize that the true source of our success and prosperity is not our own hands, but the will of Hashem, Who orchestrates everything. This mindset reminds us that, while we may turn the wheel, it is Hashem who causes the blessings to flow.

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 2 Tevet)

שמות חיילים פצועים לרפואה שלמה

אביתר מנחם חיים בן זהבה
אברהם מרדכי בן יעל
אהרן בן שרה הנדל
אופק בו אלינור
אורי אברהם בן הדסה
אייל אליעזר בן חנה
איתן אשר בן דבורה
אלון בן מרים
אלחנן יאיר בן דבורה
אליה בן רות
אלישע יהודה בן רות
אלעד בן שרית
אמיר בן אלה
בנימין בן ריינה
בנימין יצחק בן שרה
בר בן נורית
גלעד איתי בן אפרת
דוד בן זיוה
הראל בן חנה
חיים מרדכי בן שרה איטה
טל גרשון בן שרה
יאיר יונה בן דרורה צפורה מלכה
יהודה אהרון בן מרים אסתר
יהונתן יאשיהו בן כרמית
יהונתן יוסף בן שירה
יואל בן אילה
יוחאי יהודה בן סיגל חוה
ירין אליהו בן סיגל
כפיר חיים בן מירה מרים
מיכאל בן פריידל
מישל בת אנג'ליקה
מנחם דוד חי בן מרים
משה אהרן בן לאה בילא
משה צבי בן עירית
מתן בן דבורה
נועם אברהם בן עטרה שלומית
ניר בן אורנה
עדי מנחם בן מורן מירה
עודד אפרים בן וויאן
עוז חי בן סמדר
עידן בן טובה
עמיחי בן סיגלית רחל
עמית יהונתן בן מאיה
רואי בן עופרה
רון בן אבישג
רון בן שרון
רועי חיים בן מירב
תום שאול בן דניאל
תומר בן צפורה

אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)
אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
אגם בת מירב (ברגר)
אוהד בן אסתר (בן עמי)
אוהד בן קרן (יהלומי)
אור בן גאולה (לוי)
איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
אלון בן עידית (אהל)
אליה בן סיגלית (כהן)
אליהו בן חנה (שרעבי)
אלכסנדר ששה בן ילנה לאה (טרופנוב)
אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס (דמארי)
ארבל בת יעל (יהוד)
אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
אריאל בן שירי (ביבס)
בר אברהם בן גיוליה (קופרשטיין)
גד משה בן שרה (מוזס)
גיא בן מירב (גלבע דלאל)
גלי בן טליה (ברמן)
דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
דורון בת סימונה שרה (שטיינברכר)
דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבע)
זיו בן טליה (ברמן)
טל בן ניצה (שוהם קורנגולד)
יאיר בן רות אידית (הורן)
יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)
יצחק בן אנטה חנה (אלגרט)
יצחק בן דבורה (עידן)
ירדן בן פנינה (ביבס)
כפיר בן שירי (ביבס)
לירי רבקה בת שירה (אלבג)
מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)
מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט)
מתן בן ירדנה עינב (צנגאוקר)
נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)
נעמה בת איילת (לוי)
עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ)
עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט)
עומר בן שלי (שם טוב)
עופר בן כוכבה (קלדרון)
עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר)
עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן)
קית' שמואל בן גלדיס חוה (סיגל)
קרינה בת אירנה (ארייב)
רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי)
רומי בת מירב (גונן)
שגב בן גלית (כלפון)
שגיא בן נעמית (חן דקל)
שירי בת מרגיט (ביבס)
שלמה בן מרסל (מנצור)
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 2 Tevet)

INJURED SOLDIERS

Evyatar Menachem Chaim ben Zehava
Avraham Mordechai ben Yael
Aharon ben Sarah Hendel
Ofek ben Elinor
Ori Avraham ben Hadassah
Eyal Eliezer ben Chana
Eitan Asher ben Devora
Alon ben Miriam
Elchanan Yair ben Devorah
Eliya ben Ravit
Elisha Yehudah ben Rut
Elad ben Sarit
Amir ben Ella
Binyamin ben Reina
Binyamin Yitzchak ben Sarah
Bar ben Nurit
Gilad Itai ben Efrat
David ben Ziva
Harel ben Chana
Chaim Mordechai ben Sarah Itta
Tal Gershon ben Sarah
Yair Yonah ben Drora Tzipporah Malka
Yehuda Aharon ben Miriam Esther
Yehonatan Yoshiyahu ben Carmit
Yehonatan Yosef ben Shira
Yoel ben Ayala
Yochai Yehudah ben Sigal Chava
Yarin Eliyahu ben Sigal
Kfir Chaim ben Mira Miriam
Michael ben Freidel
Michelle bat Angelika
Menachem David Chai ben Miriam
Moshe Aharon ben Leah Beila
Moshe Tzi ben Irit
Matan ben Devorah
Nir ben Orna
Noam Avraham ben Atara Shlomit
Adi Menachem ben Moran Mira
Oded Efraim ben Vivian
Oz Chai ben Smadar
Idan ben Tova
Amichai ben Sigalit Rachel
Amit Yehonatan ben Maya
Roi ben Ofra
Ron ben Avishag
Ron ben Sharon
Roi Chaim ben Meirav
Tom Shaul ben Danielle
Tomer ben Tzipporah

Avinatan ben Ditzza Tirtza (Ohr)
Evyatar ben Galya (David)
Agam bat Meirav (Berger)
Ohad ben Esther (Ben-Ami)
Ohad ben Keren (Yahalomi)
Ohr ben Geula (Levi)
Eitan ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Eitan Avraham ben Efrat (Mor)
Alon ben Idit (Ohel)
Eliya ben Sigalit (Cohen)
Eliyahu ben Chana (Sharabi)
Alexander Sasha ben Yelena Leah
(Tropanov)
Elkana ben Ruchama (Buchbut)
Emily Tehilla bat Amanda Francis
(Damari)
Arbel bat Yael (Yehud)
Ariel ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Ariel ben Shiri (Bibas)
Bar Avraham ben Julia (Cooperstein)
Gad Moshe ben Sarah (Mozes)
Guy ben Meirav (Gilboa Dalal)
Gali ben Talya (Berman)
David ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Doron bat Simona Sarah (Steinbrecher)
Daniella bat Orli (Gilboa)
Ziv ben Talya (Berman)
Tal ben Nitza (Shoham-Corngold)
Yair ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Yosef Chaim ben Miriam (Ochana)
Yitzchak ben Aneta Chana (Elgarat)
Yarden ben Penina (Bibas)
Kfir ben Shiri (Bibas)
Liri Rivka bat Shira (Elbag)
Maxim ben Talleh (Herkin)
Matan ben Anat (Angrest)
Matan ben Yardena Einav (Tzangauker)
Nimrod ben Viki (Cohen)
Naama bat Ayelet (Levi)
Oded ben Bilhah (Lifschitz)
Omer ben Niva (Venkrat)
Omer ben Shelley (Shemtov)
Ofer ben Cochava (Kalderon)
Idan ben Yael (Alexander)
Omri ben Esther Veronica (Miran)
Yitzchak ben Devorah (Idan)
Keith Shmuel ben Gladis Chava (Segal)
Karina bat Irena (Ariav)
Rom ben Tamar Noa (Brasalevsky)
Romi bat Meirav (Gonen)
Segev ben Galit (Chalfon)
Sagi ben Naamit (Chen-Dekel)
Shiri bat Margit (Bibas)
Shlomo ben Marcelle (Mansour)
Tamir ben Cheirut (Nimrodi)