

The Jewish Weekly

The Accidental Interpreter By Rabbi Natan Grunblatt

In the late '60s, my father served as the president of Achdut Israel, the German - Jewish community in Buenos Aires.

Together with my mother, he had a business working with the art departments of various advertising agencies in Argentina. In the days when artists still worked with ink and paper, annual collections showcasing the best advertisements of the previous year would be published in countries around the world, so that people in the industry could follow the latest trends and innovations. My parents used to get these imported books from Europe and then go from agency to agency, selling them to their art departments. Every morning, my father would load up those books and various design samples and models in the back of our car. He'd drive to the center of town, and stay with the car – there was never any parking available – while my mother went to meet with different art directors and designers.

Now, Argentina's economic and financial history has always been like a carousel, constantly going up and down. In 1971, the government was trying to fix its economic problems, when one day, they suddenly decided to stop importing all goods into the country. So the next day, my parents had nothing to sell.

They waited a little, but there still was no forecast for when imports would open up again. A few weeks passed, and still no change was on the horizon. And so, although he was not a chasid at the time, my father wrote to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, introducing himself, and explaining how he and my mother had found themselves with no livelihood.

Sometime before all of this happened, my parents had traveled to Israel. They had seen an apartment for sale in a building that also had a storefront available for rent on the ground floor. And so he wrote in his letter that maybe it was time for our family to move to Israel: "We'll buy the apartment, rent the store, and I'll put a grocery in there," he proposed. "I will be able to pray with a minyan three times a day, study Torah, and settle down."

He didn't realize that since he had mentioned his role as the Achdut Israel community president, there was no way that the Rebbe would approve of his plan to leave the country.

He sent the letter off. A month passed, then two, and then three – but there was no answer. Every so often, he would call the Rebbe's secretaries, yet six months passed and there was still no answer.

One day, the telephone rang. It was the Rebbe's secretary who said that the Rebbe had answered and that he would deliver the message over the phone. "No, not at this time," the Rebbe had said, adding that he would keep my father in his prayers.

The day after that phone call, Argentina opened its doors to imports once again. Apparently the Rebbe knew when to answer.

We came to learn something else about the Rebbe's attitude towards communal work: If you tell the Rebbe that you are an important part of the community, he will not agree for you to leave it.

In the mid-'70s, on a rare trip to New York, my parents had a private audience with the Rebbe. This was after I had already left Argentina to further my studies; first in the Lubavitcher yeshivah on Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, then in Morristown, New Jersey, and then in Jerusalem. Back in Argentina, various people had asked my mother to request the Rebbe's blessings on their behalf, so she had prepared a long note with the names of each person, and the question or issues each person wanted her to ask the Rebbe about.

These audiences were normally very short, as there were countless people who wanted to meet the Rebbe. When Rabbi Leibel Groner, the Rebbe's secretary, saw the size of her note, he didn't allow her to bring it in: "Just write their name, and nothing more," he instructed her. It would be too taxing on the Rebbe's time to go through so many issues.

Now, my mother was German, and so when she received an order, she followed it. She rewrote her note. When my parents went into the Rebbe's room, she asked if they could speak in German, to which the Rebbe agreed – "Sicher" he said – and she gave him the note.

The Rebbe took a look at the first name. "What's this person's story?" he asked.

My mother explained what the issue was, and then the Rebbe instructed her on how the person ought to deal with it.

Then he went on to the second name: "And what's with?"

By this time, the audience was taking longer than usual, and Rabbi Groner was getting nervous. He began turning the door handle as a signal to my parents, but of course they weren't going to get up and leave while the Rebbe was talking to them. Rabbi Groner opened the door and walked into the center of the room, but the Rebbe gestured for him to leave, continuing on to ask about each name, "What's with him? What's with her?" – until the Rebbe had asked about every single name on the list.

In 1980, my wife and I had only been married half a year when we had our first audience with the Rebbe. There was a huge crowd that traveled to spend the Tishrei holidays with the Rebbe that year, and the Rebbe had personal audiences with the visitors for three nights in a row.

On the second night, I was asked to go along and translate for a Sephardic lady from Argentina who was afraid that she wouldn't understand the Rebbe.

It Once Happened...

The woman wrote a note with a question about some medical issue, and at the bottom of the paper I wrote why I had come with her. The Rebbe read the note, and then spoke to me, in Yiddish, advising her to do so-and-so.

I had intended to translate after the audience, but instead the Rebbe stopped and looked at me expectantly: "Presumably you're going to translate..."

I hadn't dreamed that I would be translating the Rebbe's words right in front of him, so I tried to think of a clever way to get out of this stressful situation. "Now or later?" I queried.

"Now!" replied the Rebbe, raising both hands.

I had no choice. Shielding my mouth with my hand, I turned to the lady and told her that the Rebbe had said to do so-and-so.

But she was of a different opinion. "No," she said. "What about this-and-that?"

"My G-d," I thought. Now I had to turn around and tell this to the Rebbe.

"I've never heard of such a thing," replied the Rebbe, once I had translated, and then he repeated his advice.

Once again, I put up my hand to my mouth, and translated, before adding – and stop arguing!"

Once the Rebbe saw that everything was quiet, he took a dollar out of his drawer and gave it to the woman for her to give to charity after traveling home, and then he gave another one to me.

The next day, I came back, together with my wife, for our audience. The Rebbe gave us a beautiful blessing but before that, as we came into the room, he looked at us and asked: "Do both of you understand Yiddish?"

Later on, I thought about this question: Obviously he hadn't forgotten that I know the language – I served as the translator just the day before. He wanted to know whether my wife spoke Yiddish. But since asking her directly might make her feel uncomfortable, he asked whether we both understood.

Reprinted from Reprinted from Here's My Story, www.myencounterblog.com.

Editor's Note: Rabbi Noson Grunblatt is the director of Editorial Kehot Lubavitch Sudamericana, the Chabad publishing house in Argentina for Spanish-language material, and he has worked as a translator and publisher of Jewish literature for over 40 years. He was interviewed in November 2025.



YF GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Eikev

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	7:01	8:16	8:53
Tel Aviv	7:16	8:18	8:51
Haifa	7:09	8:19	8:54
Be'er Sheva	7:18	8:17	8:52



Building Toward Redemption

By Rabbi Yisroel Dov Levanoni

Although I was raised in a chasidic family – we belonged to the Zidichov community in pre-war Czechoslovakia – I knew nothing about Lubavitch which was then based in Russia. Only in 1959 when I came to America – after my family was liberated from an internment camp in Hungary and after settling in Israel – did I learn of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and became his follower.

My family name was originally Weiss. But while I was in Israel, the British – who controlled the Holy Land at the time – were pursuing me as a member of HaHaganah, the Jewish underground force, so I changed my last name to hide from them. I chose the name Levanoni because the Talmud says that the word “Levanon” refers to the Temple (Beit Hamikdash) that stood in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, before it was destroyed by the Romans. The name comes from the Hebrew word lavan, meaning “white,” and the Talmud says that the Temple was called “Levanon” because it whitened sins.

I have been fascinated by the Temple since I was a child, when I saw diagrams in Tractate Middot of the Mishnah, which my father was studying. This lifelong fascination led me, after I retired and was living in Israel, to build a scale model of it and write a book about it.

I started to prepare for this work in 1987 by first immersing myself in the writings of Maimonides (also known as the Rambam) on the subject. After that, I worked for about three years – 10 to 12 hours a day – until I constructed my first miniature model of the Second Temple. To do so, I used a caliper which can measure up to 10 micrometers or one thousandth of an inch. But I was not satisfied with the end result, so I destroyed it and built a second model. When I finished it, in 1992, I was very excited and I wanted to show it to the Rebbe.

I made an appointment to visit the Rebbe, but then I got a high fever and could not go. Just before the second appointment I made, I got sick again, but this time, despite 102 fever, I went and, as it turned out, it was a good thing I did.

I brought in my model, which was mounted on a little table. When I showed it to the Rebbe, I removed the roof, so that he could see all the parts.

The Rebbe glanced at it and immediately asked me, “Where is the ramp?” He was referring to the ramp going up to the altar where animal sacrifices were offered. I pointed it out. The Rebbe had a sharp eye, and in that quick moment, he detected a problem. “It must be much bigger,” he remarked. I responded that the model was built to a scale of 1/200. The Rebbe didn’t question the proportions further; he just said, “Well, you probably measured it.” He then gave me a blessing for success and said, “May G-d grant you the merit to see the Third Temple.”

The Rebbe’s comment about the size of the ramp bothered me, so I remeasured everything, and I found that the Rebbe was right – I had made the ramp to the altar 3 millimeters too short! That miniscule difference on the model translated to 60 centimeters, or just under 24 inches.

What was my mistake? I knew that the recorded length of the ramp was thirty cubits, but I had made my calculations at the wrong place. Instead of measuring the Temple floorspace that the ramp spanned, I had measured the top surface of the ramp itself, which would have made the ramp about two feet shorter in reality. Once I realized the source of my error, I didn’t try to fix it so that I could show the model to people and tell them the story of how the Rebbe picked up a tiny discrepancy in my model.

I ended up selling that model and with the money I got for it, I was able to pay off my mortgage, and then I built a new model – a more accurate one this time.

That meeting with the Rebbe happened by Divine Providence, because the day after I had visited him, he suffered a devastating stroke, and after that it was impossible to see him. So, if I had waited any longer, I would never have been able to bring it to the Rebbe and learn about my mistake.

Since then, I have also built a scale model of the Third Temple. This was a very difficult project because the prophecies about it are hard to understand. Even Maimonides says so. Yet, I persevered, and I do believe I succeeded because the Rebbe had given me a blessing to have the merit to see the Third Temple. I was able to see it in my mind’s eye and faithfully construct a model of what Ezekiel prophesied. This model has been on display in Kfar Chabad and in Jerusalem, and thousands of people have come to view it.

May Mashiach come soon, and may we all merit to behold the Third Temple in actuality.

Reprinted from Reprinted from Here's My Story, www.mycounterblog.com.

Editor's Note: Rabbi Yisroel Dov Levanoni (1921-2019), the author of The Temple in Jerusalem: A Description of the Second Temple, was a dentist and model maker, who lived in Jerusalem. He was interviewed there in April 2007.

Who has an easier time, a singer or a Rabbi?

I’ve noticed that when singers perform, the audience wants to hear the melodies and the songs that they’re familiar with. In fact, if a renowned singer were to miss out from a performance one of their most popular songs, the audience would be angry because they have come to hear what they’ve heard dozens of times before. They love it, they love the repetition! But, when a Rabbi is preparing a sermon, a speech or a shiur, he is under pressure to provide fresh insights, to deliver new ideas. People in his congregation are likely to be disappointed if they hear something that they have heard before.

There’s a very relevant commentary of Rashi at the commencement of the second paragraph of the Shema which we read in Parshat Eikev. The Torah says: “והיה אם – שמעו השמע” – “and it shall come to pass when you hear what you have heard before”. Rashi tells us that when it comes to the teaching of Torah, it’s important that we do hear what we have heard before.

Historically there were two different customs with regard to public Torah reading. There was the triennial system – where it took three years to go through the whole Torah and then there was the annual system where parsha after parsha were read within one year, with Simchat Torah at the end – which is what we do nowadays. But why did our Rabbis choose the latter over the former? Shul services would have been quicker with a triennial system because we would only be reading a third of what we read right now from the Torah! But the answer is that repetition is so important. We need to constantly be aware of Torah and so year after year we read the same portions, we hear the same ideas. Of course, we should recognize that “שבעים פנים לתורה” – “there are 70 angles to the Torah” but whilst we need to gain fresh depths, the material remains the same.

Mitzvah number 613 is “ויעתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת” – “we must write this song”. This mitzvah is about writing a Torah but we refer to Torah as a song. Because the song of Torah is such that we should constantly want to hear it again and again. Therefore, Rabbis have an advantage over singers because we have both repetition and fresh insights! As a result, may we continuously always succeed in uplifting our communities and may the Jewish nation only go from strength to strength.

One way to uplift our communities is by praying with all our hearts, for all those suffering, as well as for the recovery of all the sick, our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, and sweet Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 8
MITZVOT ASEH: 6
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 2

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 111
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1747
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6865

HAFTORA:

Yeshayahu 49:14- 51:3 (ותאמר ציון) (this is the second of seven Haftorot, [the Seven Haftorot of Consolation] that precede Rosh Hashanah).

This week we study Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot.

פרשת עקב

This week is sponsored
In honor of the wedding
of
Uri Fraenkel
&
Danit Schusterman
On
Tu B'Av
and
לע"נ

ר' ראובן בן הרב משה אליעזר הלוי
ע"ה רבינוביץ
נפטר י"ז מנחם אב תשנ"ב