

The Jewish Weekly

A Home on Firm Foundations

By Rabbi Zushe Winner

Before my wife Esther and I got married, in 1976, we wrote to the Lubavitcher Rebbe to ask for his blessing. The custom was that, before getting engaged, the bride and groom each wrote their own letter, and the Rebbe's secretary would deliver both of them to him together.

After receiving our two letters, the Rebbe gave one response to the two of us, as well as an additional one that was just for me. To me, the Rebbe gave the instruction he generally gave to someone marrying the daughter of a kohen: The Talmud states that someone who marries a kohenet ought to be a Torah scholar, and in a Halachic responsa, the Tzemach Tzedek – the third Rebbe of Chabad – rules that the groom can be considered such, by studying a minimum of one tractate of the Talmud well. And so the Rebbe told me to “become proficient in one tractate.”

As it happened, I wasn't even aware that I was marrying the daughter of a kohen! I had just written my wife's name, along with her father's, “Esther the daughter of Reb Chaim Yisroel Sperlin,” without even realizing that he was a kohen.

The other message from the Rebbe, for both of us, was that he was giving us his blessing for the marriage since we “certainly decided together to establish their home on the foundations of Torah and mitzvot.”

Later on, this became a fairly standard blessing that the Rebbe would give to couples seeking to get engaged, but at that time, in the mid-1970s, he would often only say that it was “a good match” or an “appropriate match” and then add his blessing that the wedding take place at an auspicious time.

And so receiving this particular response, at a time when it was not common, made me think very seriously about what it meant, especially in the weeks before our wedding. The Rebbe was saying, it seemed to me, that the blessing for our marriage was dependent on our commitment to establish our home upon the precepts of the Torah.

Before the wedding, we had a private audience with the Rebbe. At first, the bride and I entered the Rebbe's office together with our parents and grandparents. My wife's grandmother, who comes from a Belzer chasidic family, had made a braided havdalah candle for the Rebbe, which she presented to him.

“May your mazel shine,” the Rebbe told her; a blessing for good fortune, with a nod to the candle.

Then the in-laws left the room, and my wife and I handed a note to the Rebbe that we had written earlier. In the note, in addition to requesting his blessings for our marriage, we told the Rebbe that we were prepared to go wherever the Rebbe would send us to serve as his emissaries.

Before the audience, I had asked my wife if she could also leave the room after the Rebbe finished giving us his blessings, because I had a question that I wanted to ask privately. It was about his message at the time of our engagement: How could I be sure that I made the decision to “establish our home on the foundations of Torah and mitzvot” in full sincerity?

The Rebbe answered me by referring to the Halachic ruling of Maimonides in his Mishneh Torah: Deep down, every Jew sincerely wishes to follow the Torah, Maimonides writes, even though at times “a person can be compelled by their own inclination” to do the wrong thing. So when a person resolves to follow the Torah, even if it may seem that it is not wholehearted or with all of the right motivations, ultimately this decision is considered – by Jewish law – to be sincere. Reflecting on this idea, the Rebbe added, would help me make this resolution and follow through on it in my own life.

Back then, the custom was for a groom to receive a bottle of vodka for the wedding from the Rebbe during a farbrengen. So on the Shabbat before our wedding, when it was my turn to come up to his table, the Rebbe opened the bottle, and poured into my cup: “L'chaim!”

The Rebbe told me to give out some of the spirits to people at the farbrengen, and to distribute the rest at the wedding. Then, as he handed me the bottle, he looked into my eyes and repeated the same words: “Establish your home on the foundations of Torah and mitzvot.”

Later, with the Rebbe's advice and blessing, my wife and I went to Caracas, Venezuela, where I was appointed to lead the newly established yeshivah. Once there, I began to have some concerns about the kosher meat in Venezuela, so I decided that I wanted to learn how to perform shechita (kosher slaughter) myself.

That summer I started studying the laws of shechita. The Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad, dedicates several chapters in his Code of Jewish Law to this topic, so I studied them in depth while writing notes on the Alter Rebbe's insights.

It Once Happened...

During my years as a student at the Tomchei Temimim yeshivah on Ocean Parkway, I recalled that the Rebbe had always urged people to study the Halachic and Talmudic teachings of the Rebbes of Chabad. Students were encouraged to present a Talmudic lecture called a pilpul, and beforehand, the subject of their talk, along with the sources they would be citing, would be posted on a bulletin board. On more than one occasion that I delivered a pilpul, Rabbi Tenenbaum, the director of the yeshivah, instructed me to include a source from one of the Rebbes of Chabad: If I didn't, he cautioned me, the Rebbe would comment that there was a relevant teaching from the Tzemach Tzedek or the Alter Rebbe when he saw the bulletin.

Now, as I delved deeper into the laws of shechita, I found the field of study to be so rich, with ramifications for all sorts of general Talmudic principles, but I felt the yeshivah world wasn't doing justice to it.

When I mentioned my studies in a letter to the Rebbe, I also sent along some of my writings: Twenty or so pages of my notes on the first chapter of the Alter Rebbe's laws of shechita.

In reply, the Rebbe suggested that I ask a few Chabad Halachic authorities to weigh in on whether I should publish my notes. If those other rabbis I asked were evenly split on the question, the Rebbe added, he was in favor of doing it. Before the Rebbe offered this “suggestion” I had no plans of publishing my notes, so it took me by surprise.

By the time I finished the manuscript, we had moved back to New York, and while they were being prepared for print, I sent the galleys of the first chapter to the Rebbe, who acknowledged them and expressed his appreciation and anticipation for the complete book to be released.

Just knowing that the Rebbe had spent time looking at my work was very special to me, and of course when the book was ready, I sent a copy to the Rebbe. I've since heard that the index I made for the notes has helped other scholars develop a deeper understanding of the Alter Rebbe's view on numerous Talmudic topics. And the copy I sent to the Rebbe can still be seen in his office today; it is on one of the shelves behind his desk.

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

Editor's Note: Rabbi Zushe Winner is a Chabad emissary in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, as well as the rosh yeshivah at Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim - Chovevei Torah. He was interviewed in May 2021 and August 2023.

			
Shabbat Times – Parshat Ha'azinu			
	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:06	7:17	7:57
Tel Aviv	6:21	7:19	7:54
Haifa	6:12	7:18	7:56
Be'er Sheva	6:23	7:19	7:57



Scrolls and Poles By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

Physical suffering was the lot of the holy Rebbe of Zutchka, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Rosenbaum, son of the main Nodvorna Rebbe of the generation, Rabbi Issamar Rosenbaum. After surviving the Holocaust, he developed a leg ailment that frequently caused him great pain. He kept his suffering to himself. He always wore an expression of tranquility, even when he ought to have been screaming in agony.

After years of suffering, the condition of his legs deteriorated. Before, he had suffered from painful sores. Now they developed abscesses. After trying various treatments, the doctors informed the Rebbe and his family that only one option remained: to amputate both legs in order to save the Rebbe's life.

The Rebbe received the news without blinking an eye, as though they were not speaking about him at all. He lay in his bed in Ichilov Hospital, while around him preparations were being made for the difficult operation scheduled for the next day.

After Maariv, the Rebbe began to conduct a cheshbon nefesh - a [spiritual] accounting - with himself. Suddenly, he rose up from his bed. He had figured out why this terrible thing had befallen him! He put on his clothes and slipped out of the room and exited the hospital. Outside, he hailed a taxi to his Beis Medrash in the Yad Eliyahu neighborhood where he lived.

With an energetic step he entered the shul and went directly to the place where the bookbinder's tools stood. He pulled out a spool of thick thread and a needle, and then went over to the Aron Kodesh ('Holy Ark'), from which he removed one of the Torah scrolls and placed it on the table.

With a sudden unnatural strength, he unrolled it to its beginning. The stitches attaching the first panel of parchment to the wooden pole were extremely frayed, and the Rebbe took needle and thread in hand and re-sewed the stitches. He then rolled the Sefer Torah to the end of Devarim, and made the same repairs to the frayed stitches at the end. He returned the Sefer Torah to the Aron Kodesh and then returned to the hospital.

He quietly slipped back into his bed, unnoticed, even though earlier in the evening shortly after he had "escaped", the medical staff had been shocked to find his bed empty, and had conducted an unsuccessful search. The Rebbe had vanished!

The next morning, when the surgeon came to check on him shortly before the scheduled surgery, the Rebbe surprised him by saying, "I'd like you to check my legs again." The doctor felt it was an exercise in futility. The Rebbe responded firmly, "If you do not re-examine my legs, I will not agree to have this operation under any circumstances!"

The doctor took this as an affront to his professional reputation. The situation was saved by R' Nossan, one of the hospital administrators, a pious Jew who had been a chasid of the Rebbe's father. He convinced the surgeon to re-examine the Rebbe's legs.

The doctor was astounded. A slight improvement was clearly evident. The infection was receding. Amputation was no longer urgent. Conservative treatment using ointments and bandages was recommended instead. Several days later, the Rebbe was released from the hospital - walking on his own two feet!

The Rebbe later told his stunned family, "Why are you surprised? When I made a cheshbon nefesh, I remembered that I had known that the parchment panels of one of the Sifrei Torah in the Beis Medrash had been detached from the wooden poles for some time. I wanted to deal with this at once, but because of my busy schedule, I did not manage to get around to it.

"I thought to myself: G-D deals with us measure for measure. I neglected to attach the Sefer Torah to its 'feet' - so I, the one responsible, was struck with an appropriate consequence. It was as though the Heavenly Judgment was crying out, 'Just as you did not attach the atzei chayim poles, so, too, will your legs be detached from your body!' So I hurried over to quickly make the repairs. And, indeed, when the end parchments were properly attached to the Torah, my legs were no longer in danger of being cut off!"

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האזינו

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The Jewish Weekly

A Note From the Editor

Dear Readers,

As I proudly prepare to embark on a new and somewhat crazy chapter in my life, joining the Israeli army shortly after the Chagim, I'm not yet sure when the next edition of The Jewish Weekly will be released.

In the meantime, I invite you to browse through our archives and revisit past editions at thejewishweekly.org.

Thank you, as always, for reading, supporting, and being part of The Jewish Weekly community over the last eight years. Your support and readership have meant a great deal to me.

Wishing you and your families a גמר חתימה טובה, a wonderful Tishrei with all the Chagim, and only good news ahead.

Yossi Fraenkel
Editor, The Jewish Weekly



This coming Shabbat in Parshat Ha'azinu which we will read on Shabbat Shuva, the Torah will declare to us: "כי חלק ה' - עמו יעקב חבל נחלתו" - "for the portion of the Lord is His people, Jacob is the measure of His inheritance".

The word 'measure' in Hebrew is 'חבל' which actually literally means a rope and that's because in ancient times the rope was used for measuring purposes. There was a standardized length of a rope, so if for example, you were to say the circumference of my field is 2000 ropes, people would understand exactly what you meant. There is, however, a far deeper message in these words. The Jewish people here are being compared by the Almighty to a rope.

You see, a rope is made up of quite a number of different cords which are twisted together to produce the rope. Each strand by itself is weak and can be broken very easily, but once they are fused together within the rope it's simply unbreakable. The Almighty wants us to know that if we are factionalized to the extent that we have so many splinter groups within our people, we will end up being a very weak nation.

The way forward for the Jewish people must be to have a rope styled existence, and this is a key sentiment that we are expressing now during our High Holy Days: "ויצטו כולם - אנודה אחת לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם" - may the Jewish people produce one single bonded entity in order to perform Your will with a full heart."

We come together over these High Holy Days like one person with one heart to express the importance of the united Jewish people. Similarly, this is a message which will be conveyed through the key practice of the festival of Sukkot. We take the מ"ג, four very different kinds, and you can only make the brachah over them if they are bound together as one in our hands, symbolizing the unity of the Jewish people.

The past year 5786 has been a painful one for many reasons, one of which sadly has been the totally unacceptable level of friction within Jewish circles. Such disunity has made us weak. Let's guarantee that the new year, 5787, will be for all of us the 'year of the rope'.

Let's try to be the best we can, by joining all of us together as a rope, by praying with all our hearts, for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevre Kadisha members worldwide, 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.

For the coming year, I want to give you and your family a Bracha for a year that is sweet and good. May it be a year full of health and success spiritually, physically, psychologically, and emotionally. May you have success in all your endeavors and enjoy a year rich in sweet growth.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 0

Some count the mitzvah of Yayin Nesech (Sacramental wine) from this Parsha.

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 52

NUMBER OF WORDS: 614

NUMBER OF LETTERS: 2326

HAFTORA:

"שובה ישראל" - Hoshea: 14:2-10; then we conclude with Yoel 2:11-27 (some add verses 7:18-20 from Micah).

The Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is called שבת שובה (Lit. 'Shabbat of Return') because the Haftarah which is read on this Shabbat begins with the words שובה ישראל. Others call it Shabbat Teshuva, as it falls in the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. It is customary for the Rabbi of the Congregation to give a sermon on this Shabbat which includes the basic laws of Yom Kippur and Sukkot, and devoted to the theme of Teshuva and hopefully awaken and inspire people to correct their ways with Teshuva.

Yom Kippur starts Sunday Eve, September 20.
Sukkot starts Friday Eve, September 25.