

The Jewish Weekly

From Rolling Stones to Wrapping Tefillin

By Mr. Elliot Lasky

Several months after I returned from a concert tour with the Rolling Stones, I met the Rebbe and - because of him and despite me - I experienced an unexpected spiritual awakening.

My parents were both Holocaust survivors from Belorussia, and I had been born in a DP camp right after the war. I was raised Torah observant with Yiddish as my first language. After we came to the United States, I kept Shabbat, I went to yeshiva, and I put on tefillin.

But, after being exposed to a lot of inconsistency and some hypocrisy, I started to question it all, and by the mid-1960s, I stopped keeping Torah. After a time of experimenting with acting, I found myself at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Buffalo, studying law and dabbling in music promotion.

In my early twenties (in the late 60's), I found myself hanging out with some very famous people in the music and entertainment business - like Carly Simon and Chip Monck. Through Chip's efforts, I was invited to travel with the Rolling Stones on their 1972 summer tour, and I got to see more depraved human behavior than most people will ever see in a lifetime.

Several months after that tour, I had a talk with a Zen Buddhist friend who was not Jewish. The way he spoke about Zen Buddhism sounded very interesting and believable, so I wound up asking myself, "How can Judaism be right and the whole world wrong?" That was the question that kept percolating in my mind.

At the time I was staying in NYC, at Chip's house. Because of my years at SUNY in Buffalo, I had a close relationship with Rabbi Nussan Gurary, who was the Lubavitcher Rebbe's emissary there. So I called him and started asking him my questions. His answer to me was, "There's only one person who can help you - the Rebbe. You are in New York; go ask him!"

The concept of a Rebbe, who somehow understood your soul, was very alien to me, and yet, that very day, I took a taxi to the address that Rabbi Gurary gave me - 770 Eastern Parkway - thinking to myself, "If this guy is not where it's at, whatever little bit of Judaism I have left will be gone."

I recall that it was a bitter cold day in January of 1973. I went into the large shul where dozens of yeshiva students were loudly studying together in pairs. It sounded and looked foreign to me; I couldn't relate. However, almost immediately I was welcomed by Rabbi Yossi Hendel, Rabbi Gurary's brother-in-law, who had been told I would appear that day. It was easy for him to find me in the crowd; I certainly stuck out with my shoulder-length black hair and unconventional dress: tight jeans, custom-made snakeskin boots, and a leather jacket: "Mr. Rock & Roll."

He gave me a yarmulke (kippah) to put on my head and told me that I'd be able to approach the

Rebbe and speak with him briefly as he arrived from visiting the cemetery in Queens and walked into 770 before the afternoon Mincha prayers. So I went back outside and waited in the cold.

As I was standing there between the entrance steps and the sidewalk, shivering in the bitter cold, an old limousine pulled up and the Rebbe emerged. Since Yiddish was my first language, I felt this was appropriate to address him in it, so I said, "Anshuldig, binste der Lubavitcher Rebbe? - Excuse me, are you the Lubavitcher Rebbe?"

Our eyes locked. In my whole life I had never seen eyes like his. And suddenly, it felt to me like I had been transported to another dimension, above the burning mountain, with nothing around us and it was just the two of us in the whole world. This was an incredible spiritual experience for me. I will never forget that day for the rest of my life.

He didn't respond, "Yes, I am the Rebbe" or merely a simple "Yes" Or nod of the head. He just said, "What is your name and where are you from?" I gave him my name, 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 crying out from my heart, "Ich vays, ubber ah vu? - I know, but where?"

"Umetum," he repeated, but then added, "in alts; in ah boim, in a shtayn. - Everywhere, in everything; in every tree, in every stone."

But he perceived that 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 are asking."

That answer completely stunned me. In all the years I spent in yeshiva in my youth, I never grasped that G-d was in my heart.

At that point, I asked him if we could speak in English, because I could not ask in Yiddish all that I needed to know. He agreed.

I said, "When we say the Shema - 'Listen Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one' - do we mean that there is one G-d for all people - be they black, or Indian or Jew?"

He answered, "The essence of the black man is to be what he is as a black man, and the essence of the Indian is to be what he is as an Indian, and the essence of the Jew is tied to G-d through the Torah and its commandments."

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. At the end, he told 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 every day.

I resisted. I said that, given my lifestyle (as 'Mr. Rock & Roll.' which included a lot of spontaneous traveling), I didn't think I could put on tefillin

It Once Happened...

consistently. But he said, "You can and you will." He then blessed me and added that if I keep the Torah, it will be a source of blessing for me, but if I don't, it will go the other way - "it will lead to being downtrodden" is how he put it.

All this time, he was looking into my eyes directly - our eyes were locked - and I was the one who broke the eye contact first.

I looked around, and that's when I realized that a large crowd - at least a hundred! - of young chasidim were standing around us with questioning expressions, as if asking, "Who is this meshuggener (crazy guy) who had the audacity to stop the Rebbe and whom the Rebbe is speaking to for so long and delaying Mincha?"

At that point, as the Rebbe went in for the afternoon prayer service, I started crying. It was a very emotional moment for me.

I walked away understanding one thing - that I had just met a man of total truth, of total sincerity. Who gave me hope. Who helped me realize that my dismissing everything years ago was maybe a mistake.

Still, it took some time for his words to sink in. I'd say about three months. That's when I started putting on tefillin, something I had not done for 6 - 7 years. From that day till today I have never missed.

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 foods that are forbidden?" So, bit by bit, I started keeping kosher. I also started learning the 'Kitzur Shulchan Aruch' just as the Rebbe instructed me to.

Two years later, when I was again at the university in Buffalo, studying in law school and dabbling in real estate on the side, The Rolling Stones came to town. Their manager at the time, Patrick Stansfield, was actually staying in my house. He wanted very much for me to attend. "Come on, Elliot. There will be over 80,000 people there at Rich Stadium. You can be back stage with me and all the guys - you are one of the boys!"

It was tempting. But one little problem. The concert would be on Friday night. I wasn't yet fully Shabbos observant, but still...

Finally, I said to myself, "Who are the Rolling Stones, that they will take me from my house on Shabbat? No way!"

And so, over the years I continued to grow and develop. Today (2013), I have a wife and four beautiful children, all of whom are Torah observant. And I do believe that everything has turned out like this because of that fateful meeting with the Lubavitcher Rebbe on a cold winter morning in 1973.

Because of him, my life was forever changed...and so were many other lives that I affected. All for good. All for blessing.

Reprinted from my encounter with the Rebbe, www.myencounterblog.com.



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Tazria - Metzora

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:36	7:51	8:30
Tel Aviv	6:52	7:53	8:27
Haifa	6:44	7:54	8:30
Be'er Sheva	6:53	7:53	8:29



More than Eighty Thousand Welcoming Souls

By Rabbi S. Y. Zevin

One day in 1850 a chassid called on Rebbe Meir of Premishlan and, as often before, handed him a kvitl note. The Tzaddik took the note on which the man's requests were noted, leaned his head on his arms, and was soon deep in thought.

Then he said: "You should know that you stand in serious danger, and are in need of the mercies of Heaven. But I have a way in which you may be saved. Every year I send to our needy brethren in the Holy Land, 702 rubles - the numerical value of the letters that make up the word Shabbat. Half of this sum I send before Pesach, and half before Rosh HaShana. Now Pesach is already approaching, and I haven't a single penny. Provide me with the 351 gold rubles that are needed now, and you will be spared from all evil."

The man trembled in awe.

"Rebbe, of course I want to fulfill your wish," he said, "but I haven't got that amount with me. Let me therefore journey to Lvov to borrow the sum, and I will bring it to you."

"If you haven't got the money," replied the Tzaddik, "then your redemption will come through another means. Take a message from me to the Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin, who lives in Sadigora, and you will have no need to give me that sum of money."

The chassid agreed at once. In fact he was quite delighted with the opportunity of not only visiting the Tzaddik of Ruzhin, but of passing on to him a message from his own Rebbe as well.

In fact, Reb Meir of Premishlan and Reb Yisrael of Ruzhin were dear friends, although they lived shockingly different lifestyles. The Premishlaner's household, furniture and all, was a picture of dire poverty. No penny was ever allowed to spend the night in his tumbledown cottage: all the large sums that people used to give him he would immediately give away in charity. The Ruzhiner household, on the other hand, was conducted in a manner befitting royalty.

Reb Meir used to make the following comment: "What is the difference between the Tzaddik of Ruzhin and me? To him one may apply the words of the Psalmist: 'Treasure and wealth are in his house; his righteousness (or charity) endures forever'. To me the other verse applies: 'He distributed alms freely to the poor; his righteousness (or charity) endures forever'."

"Very well," said Reb Meir. "Travel straight from here to Sadigora. As soon as you arrive there go directly to the household of Reb Yisrael, and tell his attendants that you have a message from me. You will arrive there on Friday morning, and when you enter the Tzaddik's study you shall address him in these words: 'Meir has given you the following order. Our passports have already been signed, giving us free passage through all

the borders. It is true that eighty thousand souls are waiting to welcome you, but for Meir many more are waiting - except that Meir's passport expires before yours."

The chassid went pale with terror. He begged to be excused, and tried to explain to his Rebbe that he could not undertake a mission such as this. He would be prepared to contribute the sum needed for the poor folk in Israel - so long as he would be freed of this mission. Nothing helped. The Tzaddik entreated and directed him to carry out his mission in full.

Much against his will the chassid set out for Sadigora. When he arrived on Friday morning the attendant on duty refused him entry: this was not one of the times at which the Tzaddik received callers. But as soon as he said who had dispatched him, the attendant asked his Rebbe, who asked that he be admitted at once.

The chassid approached the Ruzhiner with a kvitl in hand.

"This is not the time for receiving kvitlach," said the Tzaddik. "Tell me, therefore, what mission brings you here."

"Before I do that," said the chassid, "I would like to receive your blessing, for my holy master in Premishlan had told me that he sees ominous things destined for me. For this reason I would request you to accept my kvitl and to give me your blessing."

Rebbe Yisrael blessed him, and the chassid faithfully passed on Rebbe Meir's message, word for word. All this while the Tzaddik of Ruzhin sat motionless in his place, as if the message in question did not involve himself at all.

One Thursday some months later Rebbe Meir said to all the Chassidim who were with him: "Whoever does not want a disturbed Shabbat had better make the journey home."

Though no one understood what he could be alluding to, they all went home. One man only - a Tzaddik by the name of Reb Yisrael of Kalisz - requested the permission of Rebbe Meir to stay on for Shabbat.

"If you want to be here," answered the Rebbe, "you may do so. But just remember that Shabbat is - Shabbat."

And on that Shabbat he departed This World.

On Motzei Shabbat, when the Day of Rest was over, and Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin was sitting at his table on which stood two lighted candlesticks, one candle suddenly went out. Someone lit it again, but the other one went out.

"There is great darkness in the world," said the Tzaddik. And the next day the bitter tidings from Premishlan reached them.

Five months later Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin also passed away.

Reprinted from A Treasury of Chassidic Tales (Artsroll).



Torah Compilations With Yossi Parshat Tazria - Metzora

The second Parsha of this double Parsha, Parshat Metzora introduces us to the fascinating subject of צרעת הבית, 'Leprosy of the House'. The Bnei Yisrael were informed that upon entry into the Land of Canaan, there could be a possibility that their houses could become leprous. If there was discoloration of the walls, that could spell the ultimate scenario in which a house would have to be raised to the ground.

As can be expected, the Midrash Tanchuma explains that this would come as a punishment for a serious sin that the householder would have committed. The Gemara in Masechet Erchin identifies that sin as dishonesty.

The Midrash Rabbah tells us that actually this would come as a punishment for somebody who was wealthy and yet acted in a miserly way, always claiming that he had nothing to give to charity. As part of the process of צרעת הבית, he would need to take all of his possessions outside his front door, and therefore everybody would see how wealthy he actually was.

Fascinatingly, the Midrash in Vayikra Rabbah tells us that צרעת הבית comes as a reward. Now how can this be possible? You lose your home and it's a reward? Explains the Midrash. When the Canaanites were fleeing from the Holy Land, they hoped that one day they would return to their homes. And so they hid their most valuable possessions inside the walls of those homes. And so Hashem identified those homes by placing the discoloration on the walls.

Consequently, once the homes were raised to the ground, the owners were able to find that hidden treasure.

'Sometimes the greatest of treasures in life come through difficulty and travail.'

I believe that there is a powerful message here for all of life. Sometimes things go wrong, and we cry out to Hashem and we say: 'Why have you cursed us in this fashion?' Little do we realize that actually we are taking a few steps backwards in order to move hundreds of steps forwards. Sometimes the greatest of treasures in life come through difficulty and travail. This is how the Gemara in Masechet Brachot puts it, כל מאן דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד, 'Whatever G-d does, He does for the good.'

So let's try to see everything for the good and let's pray with all our hearts for all those who are sick as well as praying for our soldiers who go out to protect us and 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, sweet and happy Shabbat and Chodesh Tov.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

Parshat Tazria	Parshat Metzora
NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 7	NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 11
MITZVOT ASEH: 5	MITZVOT ASEH: 11
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 2	MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 0
NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 67	NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 90
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1010	NUMBER OF WORDS: 1274
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 3667	NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4697

This year, (5783 / 2023) Shabbat Parshat Tazria-Metzora is the Second day Rosh Chodesh Iyar. The Maftir is read from the second Torah from Parshat Pinchas - (Bamidbar 28:9-15) the two paragraphs "Uvayom Hashabbat" and "Uvrashei Chadshechem."

HAFTORA: The special Haftorah for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh - Yeshayahu 66:1 -24 repeating verse 23 at the end.

This Shabbat we study Chapter 2 of "Pirkei Avot."

תזריע - מצורע

This week is dedicated in memory of all the fallen soldiers and civilians who perished in terror attacks while protecting us

The Jewish Weekly staff salute you

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