

Esteemed colleagues,

The pamphlet you have before you is a tiny portion of a book entitled "Ani Yehudi" - "I Am a Jew," published on 11 *Nissan* 5778 in Hebrew. The book is currently being translated into English and, G-d willing, will be completed by 11 *Nissan* 5779.

Primarily, the book is intended to awaken in us all a strong sense of Jewish pride, that voice which rises from deep within a Jew's heart and, regardless of where he might find himself, unabashedly calls out: "**I am a Jew!**" It is this voice, coaxed and nurtured to its fullest expression, which can end the current scourge of intermarriage, which the Rebbe astutely likened to a Holocaust.

Unfortunately, many of the Rebbe's *shluchim* have encountered this problem, and perhaps, through the contents of this pamphlet\*, they will be able to help one Jewish boy, or one Jewish girl, or even more.

I am hopeful that together with this *sur mei'ra*, this shunning of evil, we will also effect for many, many Jews an *asei tov*, a tremendous doing of good as they come to perform the *mitzvos* with joy and fervor. As the Rambam writes: "Someone who does one *mitzvah* tips the scale, for both himself and the whole world, to the side of merit, bringing him and it salvation" (*Sefer Hamada, Hilchos Teshuvah*).

Sincerely, Ze'ev Ritterman

\*(available also at <https://torah-or-books.com> or by [ritterman770@gmail.com](mailto:ritterman770@gmail.com))

## The Merit and the Obligation to Battle Assimilation

Blessings and Greetings,

I'd like to confirm that I received your letter of April 5th.

I was glad to see that you agree with me regarding the necessity of doing away with what's commonly referred to as 'dialogue.'

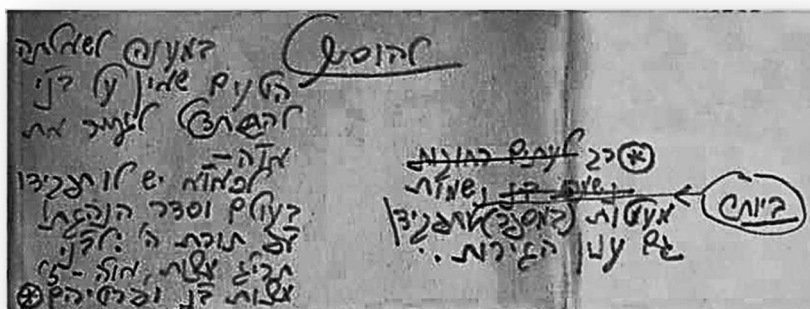
I trust that you will continue to fight against intermarriage, as you have for so many years. Needless to say, as much as has been accomplished in this area, it is not nearly enough to stop this evil. Even were we talking about just a single incident of intermarriage, one would be obliged to invest every possible effort to bring it to an end, since even an isolated case involves more than just one person; it affects his children and grandchildren, his relatives and his friends, as well. All the more so [are we thus obliged] in light of the ever-increasing number of incidents. Your efforts in battling this evil are a great merit, as well as an urgent obligation of the highest priority.

In our confused generation, it is unfortunately necessary to address the following additional matter: the popular yet unfounded opinion that the problem of intermarriage can be solved by conversion. In addition to the fact that this is not a creative solution by any means, the very possibility [that conversion can be manipulated toward this end] is itself even more destructive, from several angles. The only conversion that has any validity is one that follows the laws laid down in the *Shulchan Aruch*, the same source which forbids intermarriage in the strongest terms.

There is an additional baseless opinion which maintains that if we speak the whole truth in this matter, we are apt to chase

people away and thereby lose them. In actuality, however, the only ones who end up chasing people away are those who lack the courage to tell the truth, for people are always more deeply impressed when they hear the full, unadulterated truth.

(The letter was printed in *Kfar Chabad* magazine, issue 1777, and what appears here is a translation from a Hebrew version of the original letter).



### The Rebbe's handwritten responsum:

"In answer to her question of why the Jewish people are not obligated in converting Gentiles: Each individual has a purpose in this world and a measured way [of reaching that purpose] in accord with Hashem's Torah. The Jewish people have the 613 *mitzvos*; Gentiles have the seven Noachide laws and their specifications. Yet [of the Gentiles] it is only an extremely small number of souls whose purpose is also conversion."

### The disastrous consequences of intermarriage

Blessings and Greetings,

I received your letter in which you bring up the subject of mixed marriages, may G-d protect us. Even though a great deal has already been said, written and published about the terrible

disaster of mixed marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew, and most of it is very clear and obvious; nevertheless, due to the seriousness of the matter, I will in short review a few of the most basic points.

I don't have to tell you that any matter involving a Jew needs to be examined first of all from the perspective of the Torah, since our Torah, which is a law of life, is the guide for the Jew in his life and also the source of his life, not only in this world but also in the world to come.

Nevertheless, since I don't know to what extent the person in question will understand the importance of the Torah's perspective, and since I have the impression that it would be more useful to speak in terms of general human terms rather than religious ones, I will take that approach.

1. Statistics have proven in sufficient measure that intermarriage is one of the biggest catastrophes among people, not only for the Jewish spouse, but also for the second side involved. Since the two individuals come from such different backgrounds, a mixed marriage can lead to constant quarrelling and heartache, and the tragedy is even greater if there are children to grow up in the future in a household that is torn apart by such frictions.

Moreover, the statistics show only the "tip of the iceberg," since many tragic cases go unreported and nor do they attract the attention of the public, since the sides involved are very much ashamed to admit that they made such a major mistake. This is especially true in cases when they were warned about the consequences, and they preferred to ignore the warnings.

2. The statistics are not that surprising. In fact, it would be very surprising if the results were otherwise, when

contemplating the fact that the two people come from origins and backgrounds that are not only different, as mentioned above, but also from antagonistic background, generations upon generations of persecution from one side, and victims from the other side.

3. One of most common arguments for defending the “justice” and the “freedom” concerning mixed marriages is that since both sides are adults, and they are prepared to accept the consequences etc., no one has a right to interfere and hinder them.

One single simple example is enough to show the error of this claim: consider a case in which a person is standing on a bridge and wants to jump off in order to end his life. He claims that he knows what he wants to do, and that no one has a right to interfere etc. It is obvious that in any civilized society, everyone in the vicinity would be obligated to try to stop that individual from carrying out his intentions. If necessary, the police department and the fire department would be summoned to prevent the possible suicide and use every possible means to save him from hurting himself.

4. If the two people involved have true feelings, not to mention a sense of simple fairness and honesty, then neither of them would want to get the other person involved in such a predicament, even if the risks were very slight. In fact, however, as already pointed out, the concerns are very realistic and it is practically unavoidable that the mixed marriages have to end in disaster, both in the material and spiritual sense. Even if there are a few couples like these who appear to be happy and satisfied etc., it is very likely that this is no more than an

external impression they wish to convey, because they do not want their inner discomfiture to be known to the public.

Much more could be said about all this, but I trust that this will definitely be sufficient.

I would just like to add that from a religious point of view, in terms of Jewish obligations and Jewish identity, intermarriage is one of the most serious sins, affecting the whole life.

Moreover, although everything we have said is relevant to all the generations, it is even more true and more important in our own time, since the Holocaust has left us with a special legacy: it places an obligation upon all the Jews who survived to ensure that such a thing will never happen again. There are two methods by which our enemies attempt to destroy the Jewish people. One is by physical annihilation, which is what the Nazis, may their names be obliterated, tried to do. The other method, which is more sophisticated but no less catastrophic, is through assimilation, and especially through mixed marriages, may G-d protect us.

If so, a Jewish man who marries a non-Jewish woman, in addition to the destruction he brings upon himself and his partner, he also brings destruction upon the descendants, because the children who are born to a non-Jewish mother are not Jewish.

With blessings,

(The letter was printed in *Kfar Chabad* magazine, issue 1210, and what appears here is a translation from a Hebrew version of the original letter).

## A Jewish Wedding in Sweden

Rabbi Alexander Namdar, the Rebbe's *shaliach* in Gothenburg, Sweden, was invited to speak to the city's Reformed Jewish community. He was cautioned, however, that should he accept, there was a list of sensitive subjects which could not be broached. Shabbos, for example, was a no-no. Mentioning all of those restrictions and limitations would only make people uncomfortable. Kashrus, too, was off-limits. The health benefits of Judaism's dietary laws notwithstanding, telling people what they can and cannot eat would only alienate. The list went on but, interestingly enough, made no mention of intermarriage, so the Rav accepted.

The event took place in the synagogue's beautiful, spacious social hall. From the podium, the president cordially introduced the evening's guest speaker and even thanked him for having graciously consented to keep his words of encouragement and inspiration within certain "appropriate guidelines."

Rabbi Namdar rose and approached the microphone with a smile and a respectful nod that seemed to say, "You are quite welcome." He scanned the audience with his warm, embracing eyes. Everyone sat, comfortably waiting, curiously taking in his black hat and very long, somewhat graying beard.

"Thank you so much for hosting me," he began. "And I would like to sincerely thank the president and the community for allowing me to address a particular topic which is truly of the utmost importance to us all as Jews. I would like to speak about intermarriage."

The smile fixed across the president's face vanished. A ripple of protest ran through the room. Some began reaching for their

coats. Others glared at the president threateningly. “Did he say intermarriage?” many wondered out loud, incredulous.

“It is absolutely forbidden,” Rabbi Namdar continued, undeterred, “for a Jewish man or a Jewish woman to marry a non-Jew...” People began heading for the exits.

“Under no circumstances whatsoever...” he went on, but his words were lost in the ruckus.



Rabbi Namdar at a Sefer Torah inauguration at the Chabad House in Gothenburg, *together with members of the Schijveschuurder family, who donated the Sefer Torah in memory of their parents and three siblings, who were killed in the 2001 Sbarro restaurant terror bombing in Jerusalem.*

Rabbi Namdar had made quite an impression upon Gothenburg’s Reformed community. Many were aghast. Many were resentful. And many couldn’t help but be struck by his courage and resolve. They knew that he was fully aware of the minefield he was walking into, but he stood there, looked everyone squarely in the eyes, and laid bare a very raw issue.



They were as impressed as they were unsettled, and they went home and told their children what they had seen and heard. And perhaps because they were not cynical, but excited, even disbelieving, like someone truly affected and moved, the rabbi's message struck a lasting cord within at least two of those young people as well.

Soon after the incident, a young man of Gothenburg sat, heavyhearted, with his new girlfriend. Though they had only recently met, he was very taken with her and had hoped that a special relationship would develop. Yet now, he had something to tell her. "I never thought that it would be an issue for me," he said, "but it's become an issue. Just recently." He paused and breathed deeply. "I'm Jewish, and I don't think I can be with someone who isn't Jewish."

"I honestly never thought that this would matter to me," he apologized, trying to console her, but then, he saw that she was smiling. And then laughing. And then laughing uncontrollably.

"This has got to be the craziest moment of my life," she said, trying to catch her breath. "I came here tonight to tell you the same thing!"

"What same thing?" he asked, struggling to make sense of the conversation.

"That I'm Jewish," she said, laughing again, "and that I don't think I should be with someone who isn't Jewish!"

Both had heard from their parents about Rabbi Namdar's speech that night, about what an absolute tumult it had caused in the community, and both had made the unlikely decision to take his words to heart. And here they now stood, ready to follow through with their new commitment and give

up something dear, yet finding instead something more precious than they could ever have imagined.

It did not take long for them to grow, together, in Jewish observance and, ultimately, stand beneath the *chuppah* as *chasan* and *kallah*... with, of course, Rabbi Namdar officiating.

## A Special League

*Rabbi Shmuel Lew and his wife are the Rebbe's shluchim in London. In an interview with JEM, the Chabad media company, Rabbi Lew spoke (among other topics) about their first steps as emissaries:*

There was a music student at the Royal College whom I met at various occasions. He began to visit me regularly. This was during the years when I focused mainly on students. We spent much time studying and talking about Judaism and we became close to each other.



**Rabbi Shmuel Lew**

At one point he got involved with a non-Jewish girl and a strong connection developed between them. She was a devout Christian and she tried to influence him in religious matters.

When he visited me, he would ask certain questions without telling me what lay behind them, and I tried to answer him. In the end he decided to reveal everything and he told me that he was deeply involved with this relationship. At that time I was

not too familiar with dealing with such cases, but I did have some experience. So I asked him to come to my house to talk about it.

When he arrived, I told him, “Dave, you belong to a special league. More religious, less religious, we are working on it; all of the Torah’s commands are infinite. But now you want to take a critical step away from the Jewish religion, and to have children who are not Jewish, so you owe yourself a clarification of what you know and what you do not know.” “I added: Look, there are hundreds of books in this room, maybe a thousand, fifteen hundred. Can you read a single line in one of these books?”

He said: ‘No.’

Finally I told him he should go to the Lubavitcher Rebbe for the forthcoming festival of Purim and meet the Rebbe in a private audience.

He went to New York and saw the Rebbe. Before entering the Rebbe’s room, it was customary to write a note as short as possible, containing the main points about what they wanted to talk about. The Rebbe would read the note and then discuss the topics accordingly. In his note, the student wrote out all of his theological questions but he did not mention anything about the girl.

The Rebbe read the note quickly and said: “Mixed marriages are something harmful. It will hurt you; it will hurt the young woman; and worst of all – it will hurt the innocent children born in these marriages.”

The student who knew that no one had reported to the Rebbe about his connection with the non-Jewish girl realized that this

was a clear case of prophetic vision. However, he was not the shy type and he said to the Rebbe: "This question is not listed in the note."

The Rebbe replied: "That's the key to the questions."

He asked: "What do you suggest I should do?"

The Rebbe replied: "Go and learn in a *Yeshivah*."

He said: "Rabbi Lew told me to learn six weeks in a *Yeshivah*." The Rebbe replied: "Six weeks – it's not enough. Go for six months!"

"And what about my career and everything else?"

The Rebbe replied: "A *Yeshivah* is not a prison. Go, and if you feel it's good for you, stay".

And he went to the *Yeshivah*, studied there and later married. He now lives in Israel, has children and grandchildren, and lives according to the Torah and its commandments.

This young man was an only child who came from the provinces in northern England. When he returned from his stay with the Rebbe, his father phoned me and said: "Thank you for returning my son to me!"

## “I Was Born a Jew, and I shall die a Jew.”

### the story of Sulikah “Sul” Chajuel

The Jews of Islamic nations, like their European brethren, bravely clung to their religious beliefs despite powerful national pressure to forsake their traditions. Of the many stories bearing testimony to their struggles is the tale of Sulikah Chajuel, a young Jewish woman who readily gave up her life rather than abandon her faith.

Sulikah “Sul” Chajuel (1817-1834) was a Moroccan Jewish girl whose father Chaim, a merchant and Torah scholar, cultivated within her a firm Jewish identity and an unshakable faith in Hashem.



She was extraordinarily beautiful, and according to the research of Israel Yosef Binyamin, a Jewish traveler who visited Morocco in the mid 1900's, her Muslim neighbors regarded her as a stunning “pearl.” “What a shame that such a pearl is to be found amongst the Jews!” they would say. “How wrong it would be to allow such a jewel to remain with them!” And indeed, according to one community member’s diary account, Sulikah was friends with a young and very devout Muslim girl who claimed to have finally won her over to Islam and convinced her to convert.

That friend’s claim, though fantasy at best, and the community’s sentiment that she was too precious to remain with the Jews reflected a pervasive environment of religious

coercion, one amidst which the regional governor eventually ordered her arrest on the basis of a single, fabricated testimony that she had “rebelled” against Islam.

The governor assured her that should she agree to convert, she would be well protected from her parents and community and even generously rewarded with gold and fine silks. Yet if she would resist abandoning her faith and, as such, incur the wrath of the Prophet Muhammed, he promised that she would be bound in chains, imprisoned in a pitch-black dungeon, starved, and publically executed, her remains to be discarded and eaten by wild animals.

Sulikah was defiant. “I would gladly bear the weight of chains,” she told him, “and I don’t care if I never again see the light of day. Let me be starved, killed, and devoured. And as for your prophet’s wrath, since both he and yourself seem powerless to compel a mere girl of seventeen, I doubt that I’ll have much to worry about in the hereafter.”

Sulikah’s neck, hands, and feet were then bound in heavy irons, and she was imprisoned in a windowless cell. Her parents desperately sought the aid of the Spanish consulate general, who exhausted every effort to free her, but to no avail. The governor decided to send her to the city of Fez, where the sultan would determine her fate. There, the leader and his advisors tried convincing her to convert. The sultan’s son, taken by her beauty, urged her to embrace Islam. Even the rabbinate of Fez’s Jewish community pleaded with her to at least outwardly convert so that she might escape such a violent and tragic death. She refused them all, insisting, “I was born a Jew, and I shall die a Jew.”

The sultan commanded that Sulikah be decapitated in the public square of Fez. One account describes the atmosphere in the square that day as being filled with both anticipation, as the Islamic fanatics eagerly awaited the spectacle, and profound dread and despair, as the city's Jews helplessly looked on.

The sultan instructed his executioner to slowly inflict pain upon the girl before delivering the final blow in the hopes that her resolve might finally break and she would submit to conversion, but Sulikah bore it all, declaring even in her agony that she would never forsake the Torah of Moshe and Israel. "Don't detain me," she challenged her torturer. "Cut off my head now, in one blow! For in as much as I shall die free of wrongdoing and guilt, the God of Avraham will surely avenge my death!"

After her death, Sulikah became known amongst the Jews as "Sul the righteous woman," and amongst the Arabs, themselves ultimately affected by her martyrdom, she was called "Sulikah the holy woman." Her grave became a place of worship, and Jews would pilgrimage there from great distances in order to pour out their hearts to Hashem at the holy site. Her epitaph reads in French: "Here lies Mademoiselle Sulikah Chajuel. Born in Tangier in 1817, she refused to adopt the Islamic religion, and the Arabs killed her, torn from her family, in Fez in 1834. The entire world mourns her death."

## **The Jewish "Chain"**

Here is an excerpt from a report that I (the author) wrote to "*Ohr Lechayal*" regarding *Mivtza* Tefillin in the summer of 5775:

When we reached the *Amitai* base next to Rafiach in the afternoon, I met a soldier who was sitting next to his room, playing a guitar. We spoke about melodies, etc. and I taught him the *nigun* of Reb *Michele* of *Zloczow*. He liked the melody, and he also put on tefillin.

Afterwards, he said, "Can I ask you a question?" "Of course," I answered.

"What do you think of messianic Jews?" From my experience, these questions don't usually come out of nowhere. I wondered why he was asking, and he told me that his girlfriend was connected to such a cult and was pressuring him to join. Her mother, a Dutch gentile, had undergone an orthodox conversion, but she is very active in this cult, and she had also dragged her father, an Israeli, into it.

We sat together for a long time. I told him that Christianity had, among other things, led to the Holocaust. I explained that his girlfriend was not Jewish because her mother was not a Jew. (apparently, in spite of the orthodox conversion, and even more so for those who convert through the army), and he, who came from dozens of generations of Jews, should be particularly careful not to break the chain.

He asked why he had been given such a difficult test, and I answered with the famous story about the *shliach* Rabbi Shabtai Slavaticki of Antwerp. (This is a similar story about a man who wanted to marry a non-Jewish woman, and Reb Shabtai brought him to the Rebbe. The Rebbe told this Jew, "if you have such a test, it means that you have the strength to overcome it." After that, the Jew cried a lot and then decided to leave his non-Jewish girlfriend).



Though it was very hard for this soldier to accept all of this, he did not want to leave me and he sat with me in my car afterwards and I gave him a booklet to read. I hope and believe that as we are *shluchim* of the Rebbe, even when it doesn't seem that we have had any immediate success, in any case we act with the power of the *meshalayach*... (Until here, this is what I wrote in my report to “*Ohr Lechayal*”. [Translation from Hebrew])

Afterwards, I called Rabbi Yoav Ze'ev Robinson, manager of intermarriage department in “*Yad Lachim*”, and after much effort, persuasion, and reading material, and a Shabbat invitation from Rabbi Yoav, the soldier left his non-Jewish girlfriend.

Rabbi Yoav told me that the soldier composed a sad song about the whole story. I hope that soon he will compose a happy song for good and happy reasons.



# Geon Yaakov – Jewish pride

## The power of the spirit<sup>1</sup>

...This brings us to another point. Every Jewish man and woman has the ability to elevate themselves beyond the limitations of space and time, and this ability reminds us of the truth that the Jewish people is eternal, for the Jewish people is one single people that exists throughout all the generations, starting from the time when all the souls of Israel stood at Mt. Sinai, and extending to the end of all generations.

This also explains the strength of the eternal Jewish people, even though it is the smallest among the nations. For the Jewish people is small only at a particular place and a particular time. But the truth is that all the Jews of all the generations, from the event at Mt. Sinai until the end of all generations are responsible for one another. They become one single entity and one single nation, which also in terms of quantity is great and powerful in comparison with the other nations.

This brings us to another conclusion: the reason for the ability to transcend the limits of space and time is because it is part of the qualities of the Jewish people to make spiritual matters rule the physical matters and to make quality govern quantity.

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1. Part of a talk that the Rebbe gave in Hebrew in the summer of 5736 to a group of Israeli soldiers, who became disabled at war. The source of this translation is a transcript made from a tape recording of the talk.

Thus, despite the fact that they are one people, the smallest of all the nations, nevertheless they adamantly refused to assimilate, even though this in certain times required literal self-sacrifice.

This is also the reason why Jews have refused to conform and assimilate among the nations even during times of prosperity, when the non-Jews invited them and pressured them to eliminate the barriers separating Jew from gentile by living their lives just like all the other citizens of the country. The Jews tenaciously adhered to the principle that they were members of a special, unique nation, despite the fact that in terms of quantity they were a minority, but in terms of quality, they made quality overcome quantity until they illuminated the quantity, refined it, and elevated it to the level of quality.



Included in this is a special point: If, for whatever reason, a Jew is lacking in terms of quantity, this is no reason and explanation at all for him, Heaven forbid, to feel downcast. On the contrary, since he is missing in quantity, in physical matters, not due to any fault of his own, but rather because he did something good to the extent of self-sacrifice by defending the

Jewish people in a particular place or defending a particular piece of land, and especially in the Holy Land - this is proof that G-d, Who is the Creator of man, has endowed him or her with special strengths and extraordinary spiritual powers. It means that it is within his or her capability to overcome a condition that to human eyes might appear as a deficiency in the physical and the corporeal sense. On the contrary, he should show that he is not merely the equal of the people around him, but that he also possesses a degree of spiritual superiority. He is able to overcome his physical deficiency that is noticeable to the physical eyes and prove that he is able to attain a position and ascend in important matters, high-quality matters, with achievements above those of an ordinary person, of a person in the regular way.

For this reason, I am uncomfortable with the terms “disabled” or “crippled”, which suggest inferiority or decline. On the contrary, it has to be emphasized in this matter that such an individual is extraordinary and has been singled out by the Creator of man, Who has endowed him with special powers- powers that are not given to an ordinary person - and that is the reason why he is able to overcome difficulties and impediments that an ordinary person would not be able to cope with.

I would therefore suggest - in line with the Jewish practice of making suggestions even in areas that are not one's own - to change the name so that they are called “the distinguished of Israel”, either if they have been distinguished by war or for any other reason.

This will also remind us about the saying of our Sages, of blessed memory, when our people, the people of Israel, was in

its first exile in the land of Egypt. The Torah<sup>2</sup> writes that “they became a great nation there, powerful and numerous,” and our Sages explained that the people of Israel was “distinguished” in Egypt.

This is not merely a change of name, but also a clarification of the situation as it truly is. The name itself emphasizes that they possess something special and outstanding, and this is the reason why they now have the merit to offer the world a living example with self-confidence, that every Jewish man or woman, no matter his or her material or physical condition, has a soul that is an “actual part of Divinity,”<sup>3</sup> to use the words of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Chassidus. And that “part of Divinity,” which is present in every Jewish man and woman, will ultimately triumph over the body until the body will behave and live in accordance with the Divine soul that exists in the body and resides within it and rules over it and controls it.

This will also lead to the emphasis of a fundamental principle in the Torah about the people of Israel in general and Chassidic teachings in particular. It says in the book of *Tehillim* that “you should serve G-d with joy,” and a person’s entire life is meant to be one extended act of service to G-d, Who is our Creator and guide. Since a person finds himself in such a situation all his lifetime, this is clear proof that it is possible for a person to be joyful, and that G-d has given him the power to be joyful throughout his entire life.

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2. *Devarim* 26:5.

3. *Tanya* chap. 2.

Hence, when a person encounters problems in life or some unpleasantness - or even something much more difficult - it awakens the hidden powers within him, and these powers are revealed and put into action. He will also demonstrate to others that he is in a happy mood and fulfills his function in the world, which is to bring additional light and spirituality and holiness into the world, so that ultimately "the eyes of all flesh will see" that G-d is the King over the entire world. And this will come about because G-d is the G-d of Israel, and the Jewish people are His messengers to bring His commandments, and the way of life that is in accordance with His will, to all the inhabitants of the world, and this must be done, as said before, with joy.

## **The Jewish Underground in Krakow**

The Jewish Underground in Krakow would often engage in joint operations with the Polish Underground against the Nazis. One of their more famous shared missions was the bombing of a Krakow café frequented by German officers which successfully eliminated scores of enemy personnel.

The men of the Jewish Underground preferred to appear non-distinct from their Gentile allies with whom they worked to undermine the German occupation. They simply wanted to deemphasize any subgroup allegiance before the primary goal of killing Nazis. Yet in their unparalleled dedication, their bravery and readiness to take on even the most dangerous of missions, they earned special distinction among the network of partisan fighters nonetheless.

There was, however, a time when at least one of their members apparently wished to be known as a Jew.

Laban Leibowitz, an Underground leader, his brother David, and comrades had been captured and imprisoned by the Gestapo in Krakow's Montelupich Prison. When taken out and lined up for execution, they suddenly rushed the firing squad with their bare hands, and there they died, fighters until the end, at their killers' feet.<sup>4</sup>

David, however, had been slated for slave labor and, though bearing witness to their deaths, was not amongst them. He was now charged with removing and sorting the men's clothing for sanitation. He bent to his grim task and began pulling off the bloodied garments. As he struggled to remove his brother's arm from a jacket sleeve, he noticed a small white patch with carefully inked words sewn to the inner lining, like a concealed emblem intended for unknown eyes. Surprised, he looked closer and read the Polish words: "*Jestem Zydem* – I am a Jew."

He grinned and swelled with admiration for his dear brother. He knew instantly for whom this final message was intended. If ever killed, his brother had wanted the enemy to know that the man who had just wreaked untold havoc and given them the fight of their lives in this his final fight was none other than a Yid, someone whom they thought they could obliterate and wipe away yet who, in reality, battled measure for measure and, even now, charges forward and upward, undeterred by death itself. I am a Jew!

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4. *The Partisans*, vol. 2, p. 149.

## **Jewish Pride in Life's Final Moments**

Daniel Pearl, a journalist for the *Wall Street Journal*, was kidnapped by terrorists outside his hotel in Pakistan in 2002. His videotaped captivity and execution shocked the world. Among his final words before being killed were, “My father’s Jewish. My mother’s Jewish. I’m Jewish.”

Ed Koch served in the House of Representatives from 1969-1977 and, most famously, as the tough, no-nonsense mayor of New York City for three terms until 1989. Before his death in 2013 at the age of 88, he requested that his tombstone bear the holy words of *Shema Yisrael* and the simple, prideful declaration: “My father was a Jew. My mother was a Jew. I am a Jew.”

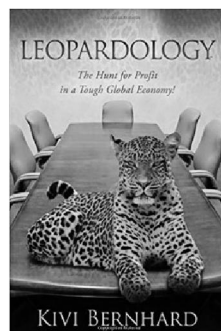
## **Keeping the Shabbos, No Matter What**

Kivi (Akiva) Bernhard, a Torah observant Jew from South Africa, authored a book in which he creatively adapts the hunting strategies of the African leopard in the wild into techniques for success in the competitive business world. “Leopardology: The Hunt for Profit in a Tough Global Economy” became an international bestseller and made Kivi a much sought after public speaker in various business forums the world over.

One day, Kivi received a phone call from a CEO of the Microsoft Corporation inviting him to deliver the opening talk at a convention for Microsoft executives which company founder Bill Gates himself would attend. Thrilled at the opportunity, Kivi readily accepted, but after hanging up the



phone, he checked the calendar and realized that the convention's opening day fell on Shabbos. He immediately called the CEO and explained that, to his dismay, he would be unable to speak on that Saturday, as he is an Orthodox Jew and does not work on the Sabbath.



When a Microsoft CEO is told, “No,” he instinctively assumes that that means, “No, not for that amount,” so he offered Kivi more money. Still, Kivi refused. He doubled that amount. Kivi wouldn’t hear of it. He tripled it. Kivi held his ground. In the end, Microsoft pushed the entire convention up a day so that Kivi could deliver the opening talk on Sunday.

Some months later, Kivi received a call from the same CEO, who wanted to relate a conversation he had had with Mr. Gates. As the two flew in Mr. Gate’s private jet, they discussed the convention’s overall success, particularly the talk given by Kivi. The executive then told his boss about Kivi’s staunch refusal to work on the Sabbath, no matter how much compensation he was offered, resulting in their having to shift the opening day to Sunday.

Bill Gates thought for a moment and then smiled. “You know, with my money,” he told his executive, “I can purchase

any plane, yacht, or real estate that I desire. I can purchase people's genius and skills. But I'll never be able to buy even a single Sabbath from a Jew."

## **Elie Wiesel – Simchas Torah in Moscow**

In 1964 and 1965, Elie Wiesel visited the former Soviet Union with the goal of meeting his fellow Jews and hearing their voices, their daily challenges and fears amidst the oppression that had overshadowed their lives behind the Iron Curtain for generations. He sought to bring the stifled cries of "The Jews of Silence" to the world.

His book by that title is his impressions of Russian Jewry's fears and, more poignantly, miraculous triumph.

Perhaps nowhere was Jewish fear more palpable than in Kiev, within which lies the site of Babi Yar. Located amidst what Wiesel calls "a splendid landscape, parks and palaces, ancient churches and museums, hotels and restaurants, green hills, mountains, and the Dnieper River – a tourist's paradise,"<sup>5</sup> Babi Yar is the place where in the year 1941 incalculable numbers of Jews were murdered between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur by the Germans and their Ukrainian collaborators. "How many Jews were killed at Babi Yar?" he asks. "Exact estimates are hard to come by. Some say seventy thousand, others a hundred and fifty thousand... Eyewitnesses say that for months after the killings the ground continued to spurt geysers of blood. One was always treading on corpses. Only recently someone dug up

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5. *The Jews of Silence*, p. 25.

a new mass grave, and it is generally held that this was not the last.”<sup>6</sup>

“I was in Kiev on the second day of Sukkot,” Wiesel writes. “The Jews I found in the synagogue differed from those in other cities. Their fear is more solid, more compact, and perhaps more justified.” Amidst the prayer service, a Jew surreptitiously provided the carefully guarded Wiesel “a detailed account of Jewish life in Kiev. Anyone who teaches his children Torah takes a dreadful risk. One who talks to a guest from abroad is reprimanded. They no longer imprison new offenders, but those incarcerated two years ago for the crime of ‘Jewish nationalism’ have yet to be released. Jews are haunted by a relentless insecurity, afraid to speak Yiddish in the street, afraid to approach the government or even their own leaders with religious requests. Anti-Semitism is common among the general populous; Jews are made to suffer from it, but it is forbidden to talk, forbidden to complain.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet days later, something unexpected happened in Moscow on Simchas Torah night, on Arkhipova Street near the Great Synagogue, which purged the mind and heart of the oppressive fear in Kiev.

Wiesel accounts how the young people “came in droves. From near and far, from downtown and the suburbs, from the university and from the factories, from school dormitories and from the Komsomol club. They came in groups; they came alone. But once here, they became a single body, voicing a song of praise to the Jewish people and its will to live.

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6. Ibid. p. 26.

7. Ibid. p. 30.

“How many were there? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand? More. About thirty thousand. The crush was worse than it had been in the synagogue. They filled the whole street, spilled over into courtyards, dancing and singing, dancing and singing... I moved among them like a sleepwalker, stunned by what I saw and heard, half disbelieving my own senses. I had known they would come, but not in such numbers; I had known they would celebrate, but not that their celebration would be so genuine and so deeply Jewish.”<sup>8</sup>



They laughed and clapped and shouted in a gleeful pattern of call-and-response:

“Who are we?”

**“Jews!”**

“What are we?”

**“Jews!”**

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8. Ibid. p. 44.

“What shall we remain?” **“Jews!”**

That the Kremlin was only ten minutes away was an exquisite irony that was hardly lost upon them. They relished it. They relished their very existence despite their fear.

“It’s too crowded here!” someone suddenly cried. “Next year we celebrate in Red Square!” Everyone burst into applause.

“Who are we?” a voice again called out. **“Jews!”**<sup>9</sup>

This was the triumph of Russian Jews, and Wiesel was shocked by the degree to which he and the entire Western world had underestimated them. That Simchas Torah night, they had given him the gift of believing in them, the cherished, enduring gift of realizing that Judaism and Jewish identity in Russia was hardly just a relic to be found amongst the aged. It was alive and burning and bursting in the hearts of the young. They had given him the gift of hope.



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9. Ibid. pp. 45-46.

## A Small Jew?!

In 5742, Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky, (vice chairman of *Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch*, who is in charge of Chabad *shluchim* around the world and runs various Chabad projects, Chabad in campus, JLI, etc.) received a directive from the Rebbe to travel to Curacao (in the Netherlands Antilles) to meet with the Jews there, speak to them, and strengthen their Jewish identity.

After Rabbi Kotlarsky met with the Jews on the island, one of the local residents asked to speak to him. He told Rabbi Kotlarsky that his son had a very serious problem. The administration of the local school wanted him to take Sunday classes in Christianity. The boy, a proud Jew, was not prepared to take the lessons under any circumstances, and was therefore thrown out of school.

Rabbi Kotlarsky immediately suggested that the boy, Eli Groisman, traveled back with him to New York, and there he would provide him with Jewish studies. The boy and his parents were delighted with the idea. As their son grew closer to Judaism, the entire family began to observe more Torah and mitzvahs.

In a thank-you letter that the father, Chaim Yosef Grossman sent to the Rebbe, he wrote, "How could a small Jew like me thank you?"

In the next page is the letter that the Rebbe sent to him in reply.

RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON

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הנהגת מנהל מנהל  
ליוואיטש

770 אסטון פארקווי  
ברוקלין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d  
3rd of Nissan, 5744  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mr. Chaim Yosef Groisman  
P. O. B. 2073  
Brederstraat 74 (o)  
Curacao, N. A.

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to receive your regards through our esteemed mutual friends.

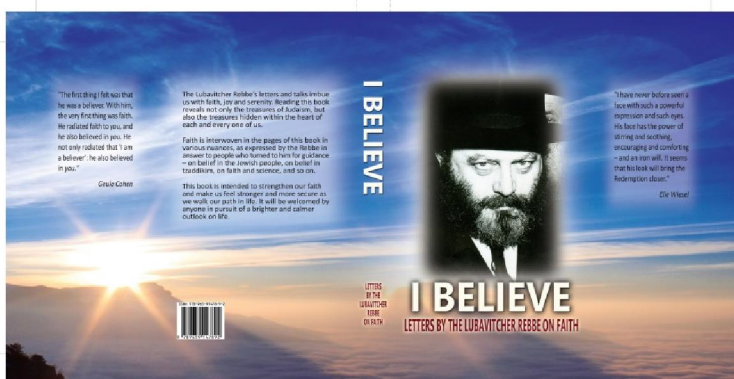
I must, however, take exception to your referring to yourself as "a small Jew from Curacao." There is surely no need to emphasize to you at length that every Jew, man or woman, has a Nefesh Eloki's, which is a "part of G-dliness Above," as explained in the Tanya, beginning of chapter two. Thus, there is no such thing as "a small Jew," and a Jew must never underestimate his or her tremendous potential.

With the approach of the Yom Tov Pesach, I take this opportunity of extending to you my prayerful wishes that the Festival of Our Freedom bring you and yours true freedom, freedom from anxiety material and spiritual, from anything which might distract from serving G-d wholeheartedly and with joy, and to carry over this freedom and joy into the whole year.

Wishing you and yours a Kosher and happy Pesach,

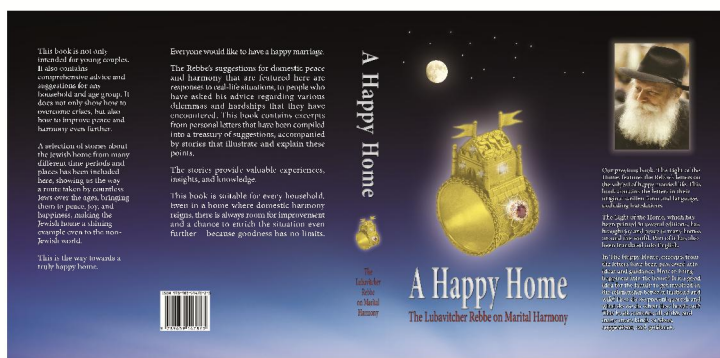
With blessing

*M. Schneerson*



## I Believe

Letters from the Rebbe on faith, classified according to subjects: Belief in G-d, faith in the Jewish nation, faith and joy, belief and science, faith in times of trouble, belief in the coming of Moshiach, and more. In his letters, the Rebbe responds to the questions, dilemmas, and musings of our generation on matters of faith, and his words fill the reader with faith and security, joy, and tranquility. 419 pages



## A Happy Home

Advice from the Lubavitcher Rebbe on happy married life, compiled and adapted from his letters and talks in contemporary language. (The book includes a special chapter on preventing assimilation and intermarriage) include stories describing life in a good Jewish home filled with light. 469 pages (These books are available in Kehot).