

# L'Chaim! Weekly



## Living with the Rebbe



פרשת כי תשא, כ"ב אדר א' תשפ"ד

PARSHAS KI SISA

1-2 March 2024 - 22 Adar I 5784

TIMES FOR SYDNEY

Candle Lighting: 7.13 pm

Shabbat Ends: 8.08 pm



In this week's Torah portion, Ki Tisa, we read about the sin of the golden calf. The sin took place just months after G-d freed us from the shackles of Egypt, just days after G-d revealed His essence to us at Mount Sinai. We betrayed Him in the most hurtful way possible. We made and served a false god, and to throw salt on the wound we gave it credit for redeeming us from Egypt.

As a nation, the sin of the Golden Calf has been our biggest regret to date. It has also been our greatest catalyst to change and get closer to G-d. It weighs heavily on our national conscience and we continually atone for this grave blunder.

Ultimately, the sin and the sincere remorse, regret and repentance that followed, is what gave us the most powerful tool for atonement, the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. It is what shaped us into the great, unwavering, G-d centered, dynamic, world affecting people that we are.

All of us have regrets, all of us have done things that go against everything that we stand for at one time or another. Embarrassed and ashamed it weighs heavy on us. It feels like a dark cloud following us around.

The question is: Do we let it bring us down into depression? Do we ignore it and become numb, cold and insensitive? Or do you allow it to affect you and become a catalyst for positive change?

Falling into depression is not the way. G-d wants us to serve Him with joy. Becoming cold and insensitive is simply not Jewish. A Jew should be kind and caring. Being cold or depressed is miserable and no way to live.

Examine the guilt. If the wrong can be righted, then by all means, do so. If you hurt someone, apologize. You will be surprised how powerful an honest "I'm sorry" can be.

If it cannot be corrected, then allow the guilt to shape you into a better person. The guilt will then be transformed into the event that shaped you into the good person you have become. You will begin to see it as a positive rather than a negative.

Confined to a bed, I have a lot of time to think. How many experiences would I like to change? How many words would I like to take back? How many hurts would I like to soothe?

I know that your lives are busy and it's hard to find the time for this kind of introspection. However, this exercise will unburden you. It will allow you to rise above the hurt, the shame, and the resentments. You will be happier and those around you will be affected by the new and improved you.

If you can, please forgive me, please forgive you and forgive each other.

*Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.*

## SLICE OF LIFE

## Merging Torah and Science

WITH RABBI DR. BINYOMIN ABRAMS

Traffic is terrible in Boston, and so is the price of gas. Therefore, not long after moving there, Professor Binyomin Abrams ditched his car and bought himself a Moped.

That summer, as he was riding his moped down Commonwealth Avenue - a large street that runs the length of Boston University Campus - one of the incoming first year students snapped a photo of him with his beard flying in the wind. The student posted it on Facebook and captioned it, 'So excited to be coming to Boston University. Where else are you going to see an Amish person riding a moped?!'

Then the comments started coming in. The first comment was, 'I don't think the Amish are allowed to ride Mopeds.' Then the second one was, 'Hey, stop telling the Amish what they are and aren't allowed to do.' And then the last comment was, 'I don't think he's Amish. I think that's a Hasidic Jewish person, and I think he's our chemistry professor.'

Binyomin Abrams grew up in Montreal. He and his family belonged to an Orthodox synagogue, but they weren't particularly observant. Abrams attended years of Jewish day school and had a bar mitzvah, but not much else. He was always fascinated by chemistry, and in 1998, he went to the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he earned a bachelor's and master's degree in chemistry.

In 2003, he moved to Manhattan to get his PhD in theoretical chemistry. His first encounter with Chabad was at a Passover Seder while living in Manhattan. Abrams was looking for somewhere to celebrate the holiday, and ended up attending a Seder led by Rabbi Korn at Chabad on the Bowery. He was extremely taken by the experience, and by Judaism in general. He began laying Tefillin and joining Chabad every week for Shabbat almost immediately.

That summer, in the middle of his PhD studies, Abrams took off and attended a two-week Yeshiva summer program. From there, he continued studying Judaism in Crown Heights and he became fully Torah observant. His

doctoral studies went on, but he split his time between his studies at NYU and learning Torah and Chassidus. During that time, Abrams was introduced to and married his wife, Liorah.

He was encouraged by the words of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to continue in chemistry after his degree, and was drawn to working as an educator.

Abrams also began to study and research the connection between Torah with science, and was fascinated by how the two merged. In 2008, Abrams earned his Ph.D. in theoretical chemistry, and was hired by Boston University as a professor and lecturer.

However, because he's a Canadian citizen, there were a few visa issues to work out at the last second. This meant that the BU course list hadn't been updated to reflect that he was teaching classes. Therefore, Abrams was listed on the student's rosters as 'professor staff' (which is what they write when they don't know who is going to teach a class).

As a result, the students had no idea who would be teaching. Abrams walked into his first lecture of the year. It was a class of about 180 1st year students taking advanced chemistry. Most of them were pre-health students, chemistry majors, or biochemistry majors. He walked in wearing Tzitzis, a hat, a jacket, and a beard. Looking up at the students with a trace of a smile on his face, Abrams said, "Welcome to Intro. to Mystical Jewish Thought." And the room went silent. It was their first class, so a student timidly pointed out that, "Professor, I think you're in the wrong room." Abrams asked what class this was, and the students clarified that it was chemistry. "Oh, ok, I can teach you that too," replied Abrams.

Despite this humorous first encounter, Abrams teaches strictly chemistry in the classroom. However, students can, and often do, learn Torah with Professor Abrams in his office.

In 2015, Abrams received a prestigious

award for excellence in teaching. In front of an audience of 5000 people, he was up on the big screen, wearing the ceremonial gown under his black beard, and his black hat on top.

There were easily 50 other professors there, all wearing their full college regalia, but he was up on stage in his gown and Chassidic garb: Professor Abrams refuses to compromise. Abrams's mind, heart, and whole self is in Judaism now. There is an old saying: the first sip from the Chalice of Science could make someone an atheist. But if you drink all the way to the bottom, G-d is waiting. Abrams made his way to the bottom. Two years ago, Abrams studied for and earned rabbinic ordination. Now Rabbi, Doctor, Professor, Binyomin Abrams in his 16th academic year teaching at Boston University. Over the years, Professor Abrams has enjoyed a friendship with Rabbi Shmuel Posner, Chabad Emissary to Boston, who continues to serve the Jewish students at BU, always looking to help and inspire, and with Rabbi Korn who continues to direct and inspire at the Chabad House on the Bowery, together with his wife Sara.

Abrams says that without them, he wouldn't be where he is now. For those who wish to catch a glimpse of chemistry professor Binyomin Abrams on his moped, weaving through Commonwealth Ave's thicket of pedestrians, skateboarders, bicyclists, buses and automobiles: unfortunately, those days are over... Abrams switched from a moped to a bicycle. As he says, 100 miles a gallon is good, but a bicycle is better for your health and even better with gas mileage.

So students up and down Commonwealth Ave will still be able to witness his beard flapping in the breeze.

*Excerpt from the Machne Israel "Lamplighters" Podcast - for more episodes visit [Lubavitch.com/podcast](http://Lubavitch.com/podcast)*

# It Happened Once



Many, many years ago in southern Russia two families joined in the joyous celebration of the marriage of their children, Eliezer and Devorah. The moon shone down upon tables richly set with brimming platters of festive foods. People conversed happily, their gazes turning periodically to the joyous couple, and music filled the night air.

Suddenly, screams pierced the night, and dreaded words filled the air, "Cossacks, Cossacks are coming!" Pandemonium erupted and panic-stricken people ran in every direction looking for shelter from the murderous horde. But alas, men, women and children were mercilessly cut down in the quick, bloody foray. Throughout the town, Jews were robbed and murdered, captured and enslaved by the Cossack band.

When quiet finally descended upon the devastated village the young bride, Devorah, was still alive. She had no memory of her miraculous escape, but now, faced with an uncertain future, she set out for the Holy Land to the home of an uncle, her only surviving relative. Sympathetic Jews along the route helped her, and at long last she arrived in Israel where she was taken into the family and began to recover from her traumatic experiences. Since the fate of her husband was unknown she was unable to remarry, and the poor girl went to the Western Wall every day to pray that the Almighty restore her husband to her.

One day the streets of Jerusalem buzzed with excitement. Trumpets blared and crowds gathered to welcome a handsome young king who, mounted on a beautiful steed, rode through the narrow streets followed by his retainers.

Suddenly, Devorah, who had come to witness the great event with her cousins, fainted. When they brought her home their mother scolded them for taking her out on such a hot day. But Devorah, who had regained consciousness, looked up at her aunt and said, "Oh no, it wasn't the heat that caused me to faint. I saw my husband! The young king, he is my lost husband!"

The family looked at her in astonishment. Poor Devorah was suffering delusions, no doubt as a result of all she had been through. When her uncle returned that night they told him about Devorah's encounter with the

visiting king. He felt great pity for his unfortunate niece and decided to take her to a well-known tzadik to ask for a blessing for her health.

To his surprise, the tzadik advised him to take Devorah's words seriously. Since the uncle had been appointed member of the delegation which was to greet the king, the tzadik advised him to take advantage of that fortuitous situation. "Let me give you an idea," said the tzadik, "In the course of your reception for the king, engage him in a game of chess. You will play very well, but then you will make a mistake. When he asks to explain this obviously foolish move, you will tell him that you are troubled by a personal problem. And when he inquires what it is, you will mention the name 'Devorah'. By his reaction, you will know his identity."

Just as the tzadik said, the chess game was played, the "mistake" was made, and when her uncle mentioned Devorah's name, the young king leapt up, scattering the chess pieces. "Where is she?" he exclaimed; "Did she remarry?"

The uncle recounted the entire story of Devorah's survival and passage to the Holy Land. He told how she recognized her husband and stuck to her convictions despite everyone's disbelief. The king was very moved by the account, and begged her uncle to tell her of his own difficult and trying experiences since the night of their wedding. He had been sold into slavery, had worked on a pirate ship, and then finally, shipwrecked on an island, been chosen king of the inhabitants. He had never, however, forgotten her. "Please, tell Devorah that I am prepared to do as she wishes. If she will have me back, I am prepared to renounce my crown and resume our life together. But, if not, I am willing to give her a divorce here and now. It is hers to choose."

The uncle returned home with the astoundingly good news that Devorah had, indeed, found her husband. There was no question in Devorah's mind; her prayers had been answered, her husband had been returned to her. The young couple was reunited in great happiness. The young man formulated a plan. After transferring stewardship of his little kingdom into capable hands, he would return quietly to Jerusalem, where he and Devorah would set up their home. This is exactly what they did. Most of the inhabitants of the city never knew the real story of Devorah and her husband.

*Adapted from The Storyteller*



# Smile, it's Shabbos!

One day, a priest comes to a barber for a haircut.



When he tries to pay, the barber says, "Although I'm not Christian, I cannot take money from you." The priest thanks him, and an hour later, comes back with a cross necklace.

The next day, and Imam shows up, and the same thing happened. The Imam thanked him, and an hour later, comes back with new edition of the Quran.

The next day a rabbi comes. When he tries to pay, the barber says, "Although I'm not Jewish, I cannot take any money from you." The Rabbi thanks him, and an hour later, comes back with another rabbi.



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## Is Hebrew the Original Language?

By Rabbi Aron Moss

### Question of the Week

Is Hebrew the original language?

I was very disturbed by something one of my professors said in a lecture. Here it is:

*"There was a Hebrew King a long long time ago, who was interested in discovering the basic human language. There are over 6,000 human languages on the planet at present. He wanted to find the original language.*

*So he got a newborn, and he locked the newborn away in his castle with no human contact. The newborn developed Hebrew. So therefore Hebrew was the basic human language, of which all other human languages arose. His assumption was Hebrew was biologically defined, and everything else was a variant on that. I think that a few of the people who used to take the food to the little kid might have been talking to him or something. If it's a true story at all."*

I can't imagine a Jewish king did this. If indeed this is not the case, I would love to bring that to my professor's attention so he won't repeat this story erroneously again. Do you know of such a story?

### Answer

The idea that Hebrew is the original language is true. The idea that this was proven by a Hebrew king's cruel experiment is absolutely false.

Several stories of babies being locked away have been recorded in various times and places. An Egyptian Pharaoh did it two and a half thousand years ago, a Roman Emperor tried it in the 13th century and a Scottish King gave it a go in the late 1400's. The results varied. Some of these stories end with the babies speaking Hebrew. Others end more tragically. But none of these stories involve a Jewish king. Your professor has (innocently?) mixed up his sources.

But the conclusion remains correct: Hebrew is the original language. The world was created with the Holy Tongue. When G-d said "Let there be light" He said it in Hebrew: "Yehi Ohr". Adam was given his name because he was made from the ground (Adama), and Eve (Chava) because she was the mother of all life (Chai). These word plays only work in Hebrew.

All other languages are translations of the original, their vocabularies a series of made up words. A cow is called a cow in English because we all agree to call it a cow. But it is called a Parah in Hebrew because it really is a Parah. The Hebrew word for things is their actual name.

There could be scholarly backing for the concept that it all started with Hebrew. Linguists have been able to trace words in multiple languages back to their Hebrew roots. For example, the Hebrew word *Derech* (way/road), can be found in *Daroga* (Russian), *Derecho* (Spanish), *Durch* (German) and *Doro* (Japanese), as well as our own English word, *Direction*. Some offer this as evidence that all roads lead to Hebrew.

But whatever the scholars may say, the Torah is our ultimate source. And the Torah teaches that Hebrew is G-d's language. This is why we still pray in Hebrew. We are using the very words that G-d used to create the world. The very words have power. Even if we don't understand what we are saying, our soul does. Hebrew is the natural language, the underlying vibration of the universe, the code that G-d spoke into creation.

So would an untaught baby speak Hebrew? Maybe. Your soul definitely does.

**Good Shabbos,  
Rabbi Moss**