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יוסף בן ישראל ע"ה
נפ' כ"ב אב תשס"ח

By

**Paul M. Hamburger
and Nancy L. Frumkin**

Chaf Av Journal

Unlocking the Code

*The Letters of
Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson*

**TRANSLATION WITH
PRACTICAL LESSONS**

Shlomo Mordechai Hamburger

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UNLOCKING THE CODE: The Letters of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson *Translation with practical lessons*

PREFACE

Several months ago, I was speaking with a Chabad shliach. I mentioned that I had been studying some of the letters of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, father of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson. I asked him whether he had studied the letters. He said that he did review them when he was in yeshivah but not recently. “They are written in code,” he explained.

Since that conversation, I decided to try to unlock the code as it were. Are the letters deep and filled with unidentified Kabbalistic and other references? Absolutely. But are they really indecipherable? In my experience, the answer is a definite “no.”

Over the past decade or so, I have spent significant time learning Chassidus with various rabbis. In my first book on Jewish philosophy and texts, I explored the use of the word *Anochi* in the Torah based on a short discourse of the Lubavitcher Rebbe on *Parshas Yisro*.¹ In researching that book, I ran across the letter from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak to the Rebbe written on *Erev Shavuot* in 5688 (1928). That was my first introduction to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s letters and I was fascinated.

I have always enjoyed intellectual challenges. That was why, after my conversation with my Chabad shliach friend, I decided to research the letters to see if there is a way to explain them to a broader audience. This series of translations and explanations of four of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s letters is the result. The series analyzes four letters written by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak in 5688/5689 (1928) to his son, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the seventh and last Lubavitcher Rebbe. The letters were written on the eve of Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, and Sukkot. In each letter, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak ties the holiday to his son’s upcoming

¹ Hamburger, Paul M. *The Anochi Project: Seeking G-d’s Identity*. Potomac, 2017. <www.theanochiproject.com>.

wedding through explaining the Kabbalistic significance of each holiday and how it relates to different aspects of marriage. In short:

- The letter from *Erev Pesach* explores the hidden meaning behind the kashrut of the *matzah* and the four cups of wine at the Passover seder. In particular, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explores the Kabbalistic understanding of how *matzah* is connected to the union of a man and woman and how the cups of wine represent true happiness.
- The letter from *Erev Shavuot* explores the meaning of holiness as achieved at Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah) and how this level of holiness is what is achieved at the time of a wedding.
- The *Erev Rosh Hashanah* letter explains the Kabbalistic meaning of the Rosh Hashanah blessing for life, goodness, and peace. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak then wishes that same blessing for the Rebbe after his wedding.
- Finally, the *Erev Sukkot* letter explores the Kabbalistic understanding of the Sukkah and how the chuppah, like the Sukkah, draws down levels of holiness from above into this world.

It is my hope that these explanations will inspire others to continue exploring Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's writings with a view to translating and explaining them (unlocking the code) so students of Chassidus can learn to appreciate their beauty, sophistication, and depth.²

I could not have completed this work on my own. I very much appreciated the review and comment from many in our community with whom I have shared ideas.

Specifically, I want to thank Rabbi Mendel Bluming of the Chabad Shul of Potomac who studied the letters with me and provided a careful review and approval of the translations. He also provided invaluable guidance and support throughout my journey.

In addition, Rabbi Chaim Dalfin, noted author, Chassidus teacher, and Chabad historian reviewed and approved the translation and the historical background. Rabbi Dalfin has also spent countless hours

² There are other books on the letters. For example, Rabbi Eli Block's book *An Inner Perspective* is an excellent summary of various of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's writings organized thematically. Block, Rabbi Eli. *An Inner Perspective*. Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 2018. His essays are not specific translations of the underlying works as much as they are extended thematic essays based on Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's teaching. Welcome additions to the literature would be more direct translations and explanations.

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That's how it can be with a personal letter. Write one; create the memories; share your stories. If you do, you can be sure that your children will have something to remember.

teaching me, coaching me, and befriending me through this deep Kabbalistic journey. Thank you for keeping me grounded in the practical while I strove for the spiritual.

Finally, my translations of the letters were also reviewed and approved by known Torah scholar Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Keller. It was an honor to receive his comments and critiques which resulted in a much improved publication.

This series of publications is dedicated to my dear mother-in-law Barbara Frumkin (*Bracha bas Berel*) who passed away this year. She enjoyed listening to my explanations of the letters and encouraged me to follow my passion for their translation. I know she would have a great deal of *nachas* knowing that this work is complete. It is also dedicated to the memory of my dear father Joel I. Hamburger (*Yosef ben Yisrael*) and dear father-in-law Jerome Frumkin (*Gedalia Meyer ben Eliyahu Mendel*). Jerry, my father-in-law, passed away on the 15th of Av 5769 (2009) and my father passed away on the 22nd of Av one year earlier. It seems appropriate that their memories are connected to this work about the letters between a father and a son.

One final thought merits mention. In her memoirs, Rebbetzin Chana, the Rebbe's mother, expressed her desperate wish that her husband's writing would be published:

Something ought to be published from such a personality, such a flowing "wellspring" of incessant Torah thought, never ceasing even a moment, who, when he had no one to address, would write down his thoughts on paper in installments.

Certainly I am entitled to hope for this, after all that I have witnessed in my life. In any event, it is something that ought to come about. I can do nothing to help it happen, but my desire for it is strong and I hope it will happen.³

My hope is that these additions to the literature helped to continue to make her dream come true.

Shlomo Mordechai Hamburger

20 Av 5779

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³ Kehot Publication Society. *Memoirs of Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson*. Brooklyn, New York: 2011, installment 35.

As he wrote in the letter, he was specifically writing it on *Erev Pesach*. But why write it then? If he wanted his son to get a *Pesach* blessing, why not write it a month before *Pesach* so he could be sure the Rebbe received it before *Pesach*? Perhaps the answer is found in Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's point that we understand the letter based on the intentions of the one writing it; it does not matter when the letter is received. In other words, there was a special spiritual energy that was available at that particular time on the eve of the holiday. This special spiritual energy opens up opportunities to send a blessing. The eve of a holiday is when a parent stops to ask "where is my child?" Use that energy as a source of inspiration to express your thoughts.

Distance does not matter. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the Rebbe were (geographically) separated by approximately 1,000 miles. At the time the *Erev Pesach* letter was written, the Rebbe was in Riga, Latvia and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. But through his letters, father and son could share a spiritual closeness. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was with his son in those few precious moments before the holiday and he needed to share his blessing at that time and in that place.⁶⁹

Sometimes, the emotional or psychological distance between parent and child can be just as daunting as a geographic distance. Regardless, a letter can close that gap.

If you write it, it will be treasured. Finally, a handwritten letter is something to treasure. The Rebbe received his father's letters in 1928 and cherished them.⁷⁰ Over forty years later, with the Rebbe's permission, the letters were published. During those 40 years, the Rebbe travelled from Riga to Berlin, France, and New York, yet he presumably kept those precious letters with him the entire time.

69 This was not unlike what Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote in a letter dated 6th Kislev 5689 (1928, soon before the Rebbe's wedding), "Do not worry that we, your parents are not with you physically in the same location for your wedding. **We are together with you in heart and soul and no physical distance can interfere at all. We are literally together with you...**". *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*, vol. 3, p. 206. (Emphasis added.)

70 In the preface to *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*, vol. 3, p. 5, the Rebbe specifically stated that he included several letters that he "merited to receive from [his father] between the years 5688 and 5699 (1928-1933)." See also, Oberlander and Shmotkin, *Early Years*, *supra*, p. 295.

Regardless of the words he used, the Rebbe clearly understood and appreciated from personal experience that the effort of writing the letter by hand humanizes the experience so that it can connect one human to another.

Although writing a letter may be hard, your children will appreciate that they will have and be able to hold a piece of paper with your handwriting, your blessing, and even maybe your tears. That letter is not just a letter; it is a part of you that you can share with your children.

What if one cannot write due to some specific disability? Does that mean that “letter-writing” is just not available? Absolutely not. The point of this discussion is that the writer and recipient (parent and child) are trying to connect as two human souls. If a parent cannot engage in the physical act of writing, find another way to focus on something that will “humanize” your communication.

In this era, we are learning more and more about “artificial intelligence.” The ability to teach a computer how to accumulate and assimilate information and then “learn” from that information is astounding and growing. Despite the advancements, it will always be “artificial” intelligence. What makes it artificial is the lack of emotions.⁶⁸ A computer cannot laugh or cry. A computer cannot express remorse or regret. Emotions are what make us *real* intelligence.

The most important thing in “letter-writing” is to find that place of emotional reality. Find that place where your love and desires for your children is found and share it with your children.

Timing is everything. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote the letter on *Erev Pesach*. At the time, he was the chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk. One can only imagine the type of questions and problems and urgent last minute requests he faced from the community. Yet he took the time to write a letter to his son.

68 A recent news report explained that artificial intelligence is a \$20 billion industry. Despite the investment in this growing industry, apparently a far-reaching review of emotion research found that the science underlying a computer’s ability to detect emotions is deeply flawed. This is science merely to *detect* emotions that cannot yet work. See Telford, Taylor. “Emotional detection AI has serious flaws, researchers say,” *The Washington Post*. Thursday, August 1, 2019: A16. Print.

HISTORY

On the 18th of Nisan in 1878 (5638), the great-great-grandson of the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Lubavitcher Rebbe) was born. His name was Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, the future father of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the seventh and last Lubavitcher Rebbe.⁴ When Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was 24 (in 1902), his wife Rebbetzin Chana gave birth to the Rebbe.⁵ For the next 25 years, the Rebbe lived, for the most part, in his parents’ home.

In his earliest years, the Rebbe was recognized as a prodigy. He quickly outgrew formal *cheder* (formal Jewish elementary school) studies as well as private tutors such that by his teens, his father was his primary teacher.⁶ Rebbetzin Chana remarked in her memoirs that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak often treated his son more like a colleague than a son and had great respect for his scholarship and abilities.⁷ Indeed, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak would remark with pride that the Rebbe, even as a child, was able to find sources for Torah thoughts that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak did not think of.⁸

The Rebbe and his father last saw each other in the fall of 1927 (29 Tishrei 5688).⁹ They spent hours together learning before the Rebbe left home to join and help with the communal activities of the sixth

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- 4 This essay is intended as a short selective historical overview and summary to put Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s four letters into context. It is not intended to be an extensive biography of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak or the Rebbe. For more on the historical background of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, the Rebbe, and their relationship, see the sources cited in the bibliography as well as the various material available at https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/4095623/jewish/11-Facts-to-Know-About-Rabbi-Levi-Yitzchak-Schneerson.htm, last viewed July 31, 2019.
 - 5 The Rebbe was born on the 11th of Nisan which meant that his bris (ritual circumcision) was on his father’s 24th birthday, symbolic of their life-long close connection.
 - 6 Miller, Chaim. *Turning Judaism Outward, A Biography of the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson*. Brooklyn, New York: Kol Menachem, 2014, p. 12; Oberlander, Boruch and Shmotkin, Elkanah. *Early Years: The Formative Years of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, as Told by Documents and Archival Data*. Brooklyn, New York: Kehot Publication Society, 2016, p. 61.
 - 7 See *Rabbi, Mystic, Leader: The Life and Times of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson*. Brooklyn, New York: Kehot Publication Society, 2008, p. 85.
 - 8 Miller, *supra* p. 14-15; *Rabbi, Mystic, Leader, supra*, p. 86.
 - 9 Miller, *supra*, p. 57.

Lubavitcher Rebbe.¹⁰ From the various descriptions of these final days together it seems that, at some level, they knew that it would not be likely they would see each other again (physically anyway).

Once the Rebbe left to join the previous Rebbe, it was known that the Rebbe and Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka would be married.¹¹ The actual wedding did not take place until 14 Kislev, November 27, 1928. Pending that wedding date, and during 1928, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote a series of four letters to his son (the Rebbe) all related to the Rebbe's upcoming wedding.¹²

During this interim period before the wedding, they still hoped to see each other again. In fact, the previous Rebbe corresponded with Rabbi Levi Yitzchak about the timing of the wedding relative to when Rabbi Levi Yitzchak would be able to secure passports for travel.¹³ More specifically, in Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's letter from *Erev Pesach*, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote: "May we merit by G-d to see each other again in life, peace, and all goodness. This is the wish of your father who loves you with a love that is endless and without limitation." Unfortunately, Rabbi

A letter is different. When you write a letter by hand, the only thing that stands between the paper and your heart and soul is a pen. If you want words to enter the heart, they must come from the heart with as little interference as possible.

A letter has another advantage. There is a true artistry in writing one's thoughts in a style where there is no doubt about the message and everything is written just as it is thought. The writer begins with an idea of simple conceptual purity. The ideas are then added layer upon layer as they happen to be developed at the moment of writing. There is no need for pretense. You can take your time and make sure that you are connecting to what you know of the recipient. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the Rebbe were completely in sync intellectually; no detailed explanation of the letter's deep Kabbalistic concepts was called for and none was needed.

Isn't a letter hard to write? Yes. It takes time and effort. Even more than that, we are seeing a generation of children grow up who cannot read or write without a computer in front of them.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, that personal act of writing is crucial to sharing a part of yourself with your child. A story is told that the Rebbe rejected the idea of using a "rubber stamp" to sign his letters and he replied that it would be impossible to send prayerful wishes to people in such an "artificial manner."⁶⁵ Similarly, the Rebbe rejected the use of an electric letter-opener apparently on the basis that it "de-humanized the correspondence which had sometimes been sealed with tears."⁶⁶ Another version of this story has the Rebbe saying "A machine does not feel what is in the soul of a person."⁶⁷

10 *Rabbi, Mystic, Leader, supra*, p. 87; Oberlander and Shmotkin, *Early Years, supra*, pp. 265, 269-270; Miller, *supra*, p. 65 and citations there in footnote 24 to Rabbi Shalom Ber Levin, *A History of Chabad in Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, 1790-1946* (Heb.), (New York: Kehot 2011), p. 51.

11 Rebbetzin Chana's memoirs recount a story from when the previous Rebbe listed those for whom an exit visa was needed to leave the Soviet Union. The previous Rebbe's reason for adding the Rebbe to the list was that he wanted him as a son-in-law to marry his daughter. "Do you really need to bring even a son-in-law from here?" they asked, to which the [previous] Rebbe replied firmly, "I won't find such a son-in-law there!" *Memoirs of Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson*. Brooklyn, New York: Kehot Publication Society, 2011, installment 34.

For a history of the relationship between the Rebbe and when and how he met Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, see Oberlander and Shmotkin, *Early Years, supra*; Miller, *Turning Judaism Outward, supra*; and Steinsaltz, Adin Even-Israel. *My Rebbe*. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd, 2014. In addition, see https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2619526/jewish/Marriage-A-Union-of-Souls-1928.htm, as well as https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/62152/jewish/1928-The-Rebbs-Marriage.htm, each last visited on July 31, 2019.

12 There were undoubtedly many letters exchanged between Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and his son during this time period. Many of these letters are accumulated and published in *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*. Others are either available elsewhere or not available at all. Oberlander and Shmotkin, *Early Years, supra*, p. 295. The focus of this discussion and these analyses are solely on the series of four letters from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak to the Rebbe during 1928 related to the actual wedding.

13 Oberlander and Shmotkin, *Early Years, supra*, p. 286.

64 That is likely a key reason for why there is a "national handwriting day" (January 23, which is the birthday of John Hancock, who arguably had the most famous handwritten signature in modern history). This "holiday" is designed to re-introduce people to the idea of a pen or pencil and a blank sheet of paper.

65 Miller, Chaim. *Turning Judaism Outward, A Biography of the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson*. Brooklyn, New York: Kol Menachem, 2014, p. 193.

66 *Ibid*, and see https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/1557498/jewish/Local-Is-Global.htm (last visited July 29, 2019).

67 In the specific context, the statement arose when his assistants wanted the Rebbe to use an electronic letter opener in order to save time. See Steinsaltz, Adin Even-Israel. *My Rebbe*. Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd, 2014, p. 76.

position of the son living 1,000 miles away from the father to whom you were so close and you can imagine how meaningful this letter was.

With this as background, we can see one important lesson to derive from the *Erev Pesach* letter – write a letter to your children!

To follow this example, a letter to your children should not just be a letter of instruction or information. Nor should it be a letter of introduction! Instead, it should be a letter of inspiration and blessing; one that allows you to share your personal aspirations. Express what you want your children to know about you and what you seek for your children’s future.

Why not just call? Today, everyone has an iPhone or similar device (or many such devices). Why write a letter when you can just talk on the phone or even talk face to face? The old saying is “talk is cheap.” In today’s day and age, talk is literally very cheap. Anyone can call anyone else anywhere in the world for literally pennies. Letters take time and effort. They are so rarely used these days that they become very dear to the sender and priceless to the recipient.⁶³

The limitation with talking as a way of giving a blessing is that our physical selves get in the way. There is a story told of a parent complaining to a friend that the parent could not communicate with a child. “Every time I try to talk,” said the parent, “my child gets historical.” “Historical?,” the friend asked. “Don’t you mean hysterical?” “No,” the parent replied. “Every time I try to talk, my child reminds me of everything I did wrong in the past.”

A letter allows us to say what we really mean fully and completely.

Write the letter by hand; not by tweet and not by email. In today’s world, we have a lot of ways to communicate. We treat the 140 (or even 280) character tweet as if it is some type of modern day haiku art form. It’s not. Email also does not work. How many times do we write the “wrong” email only to push send too quickly (or even to the wrong people)? As we all know all too well, quick form of communication is not the best way to have a deep conversation.

⁶³ As head of our law firm’s Washington, D.C. office, I regularly leave handwritten welcome notes to any visiting attorneys. Invariably, I receive a call or other response telling me how much they appreciated that personal connection.

Levi Yitzchak and his wife were not able to leave Russia and the wedding took place in Warsaw, Poland without the Rebbe’s parents physically present.¹⁴

The Rebbe certainly cherished each letter he received from his father.¹⁵ In the preface to *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*, the Rebbe indicated that he shared his father’s letters for their Torah insights, both in revealed Torah and in “hidden” Torah. But the four specific 1928 letters written in advance of Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, and Sukkot (and written with a view to the Rebbe’s upcoming wedding) show not just Torah insights but also very personal insights into the close connection between Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the Rebbe.

Consider what makes these letters so special in my opinion.

They are letters. When Torah thoughts are published through formal publication, the process lends itself to careful and painstaking research, editing, review, and comment. The material must be presented in a way that an unknown and unknowable audience will find the material accessible. A letter is different. When Rabbi Levi Yitzchak writes, you see his thoughts just as they were. Undoubtedly, these were ideas he had spent time developing. When he put pen to paper, though, he expressed himself exactly as he was feeling at that moment. More importantly, these were letters to an audience of one – his son, the future Rebbe. With his son, he knew that he could express his original ideas in their purest form and then build them out, layer upon layer to create his unique style of blessing for his son.

They are letters within letters. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was known for a writing style that relied on two seemingly contradictory approaches – (a) concise and precise wording and (b) liberal use of parenthetical concepts

¹⁴ Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and Rebbetzin Chana held a simultaneous celebration in Dnepropetrovsk at the time of the Rebbe’s wedding. There are many descriptions of this event. Perhaps the most compelling descriptions are in the memoirs of Rebbetzin Chana. *Memoirs of Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson, supra*, installment 10. Also, notwithstanding their lack of physical proximity, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote in a letter dated 6th Kislev 5689 (1928, soon before the Rebbe’s wedding), “Do not worry that we, your parents are not with you physically in the same location for your wedding. We are together with you in heart and soul and no physical distance can interfere at all. We are literally together with you...”. *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*, vol. 3, p. 206.

¹⁵ In the forward to *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*, vol. 3, p. 5, the Rebbe specifically stated that he included several letters that he “merited to receive from [his father] between the years 5688 and 5699 (1928-1933).” See also, Oberlander and Shmotkin, *Early Years, supra*, p. 295.

that allow for elaboration of deeper concepts.¹⁶ “In his writings, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak sets forth a novel manner of interpretation: the coupling of both the revealed and mystical dimensions of Torah. Though every part of Torah can be interpreted on four levels – the literal, allegoric, homiletic, and mystical – Rabbi Levi Yitzchak illustrated how all these varied layers remain, in essence, *intertwined as one*. As such, his writings blaze a unique path.”¹⁷ In other words, each letter was really a letter within a letter.

One purpose of the translation and explanation that follows is to illustrate this “letter within a letter” formulation. The presentation includes two English language versions of each letter. In the first short version of the letter, the blessing from father to son is all that appears. It is constructed by taking the longer full version of the letter and eliminating all of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s parenthetical comments and other elaborations. All that is left is simple and straightforward. It is simply the father’s blessing to his son and serves as a frame to support the picture drawn with the deep Kabbalistic insights.

They are letters from a gaon (scholar) to a gaon but also letters from a father to a son. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak knew his son’s brilliance and it shows in the letters. Looking at the text of the letters, and knowing something of the relationship of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the Rebbe (as father/son and teacher/student), a reader knows that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak did not need to add citations or explanations of his deep thoughts. He must have known that there was only one other person in the world who could understand the letters as they were written and that was his son. All of the letters from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak are written in a way that father and son could enjoy the comfort of their mutual wavelength.

Those of us not so gifted have to spend hours converting a 2 page letter into an 8 page translation and explanation to have a hope of understanding what Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was writing about. Yet we do not need to be Kabbalists to appreciate the artistry displayed in these letters. With some dedicated focus, we can break down the ideas in a way that allows us to understand them. In the process, we can stand back and watch a genius at work in a natural setting. In that way, studying the

16 Mundshain, Rabbi Yehoshua. *Sefer Ha'Mafteichos L'Toras Levi Yitzchak v'Lekutei Levi Yitzchak*. Israel: Kehot Publishing Society, 1973.

17 *Rabbi, Mystic, Leader, supra*, p. 74.

PRACTICAL LESSONS WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR CHILDREN!

By Shlomo Mordechai Hamburger

Having learned Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s letter from *Erev Pesach*, what is our take-away? What is the practical lesson we can apply in our daily lives? In the introduction to *Likutei Levi Yitzchak*, the Rebbe indicated that he shared them for their Torah insights, both in revealed Torah and in “hidden” Torah. Part of that “Torah” is undoubtedly the lessons we can learn from the teachings themselves⁶⁰ as well as the examples set by the one who wrote them.⁶¹

All of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s letters to the Rebbe are filled with extraordinary Torah insights and ideas. They are letters between two gaonim (scholars) and Torah giants. But they were not written specifically for future publication. To the contrary, they are letters from a 50-year old father to a 26-year old son who is about to be married. They were written by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak as a way to send blessings to his son who was living about 1,000 miles away.

Each of the letters includes a heartfelt wish from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak to the Rebbe. Using the *Erev Pesach* letter as an example, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote: “May we merit by G-d to see each other again in life, peace, and all goodness. This is the wish of your father who loves you with a love that is endless and without limitation. I wish for your goodness and success always and for all your days.”⁶² Put yourself in the

60 The Rebbe would often say הוזהר העיקר הוא המעשה /HaMaaseh Hu Ha'ikar, paraphrasing *Pirkey Avot* (Ethics of our Fathers) 1:17, meaning that the essential thing is the deed or follow up action, not the study itself.

61 “Example is always more efficacious than precept.” Johnson, Samuel. *Rasselas, The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. Woodbury, New York: Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., 1962, p. 118.

62 This statement is particularly poignant for us, as readers. We know that they will never see each other again; but when Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote the letter, he did not know that. In fact, as explained in the Introduction, they were still hoping that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak would be able to obtain travel permits to attend the Rebbe’s wedding.

May we merit by G-d to see each other again in life, peace, and all goodness.⁵⁸ This is the wish of your father who loves you with a love that is endless and without limitation.⁵⁹ I wish for your goodness and success always and for all your days.

Levi Yitzchak Schneerson

letters affords us as readers and students the opportunity to get a glimpse of the intellectual and emotional bond between these two great men.

They are letters written on the eve of each holiday. Each letter was written on the eve of a holiday (Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, and Sukkot). As the Pesach letter explicitly acknowledges, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak knew his son would receive the letter after the holiday. Nevertheless, “we go by the intentions of the author and the writing itself” and not when the letter is received. Why didn’t Rabbi Levi Yitzchak just write the letters a little earlier so they would arrive on time before the holiday? Imagine the time pressures he faced as the chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk on the eve of a major holiday. He must have been faced with numerous questions and issues to deal with in addition to making sure to do his own personal preparation.

Despite those pressures, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak found the time to write each letter specifically on the eve of each holiday. There must have been a special spiritual energy that was available at that particular time. If he was going to send a blessing to his son, it had to be at those particular moments. Was he busy? Sure. But so what? The spiritual closeness between father and son was inversely proportional to their geographic separation.¹⁸ Yes, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was the chief rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk with all of the responsibility that entails. But he was a 50-year old father. The Rebbe was his 26-year old son who was about to be married. Nothing would or could break that bond or interfere with Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s need to bridge the physical distance between them with words of blessing and comfort before each major holiday. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was with his son in those few precious moments before the holiday¹⁹ and he needed to share his blessing at that time and in that place.

With that as background and context, turn now to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s letter to his son, the Rebbe, written on *Erev Pesach* 5688 (1928).

58 The meaning of life, and goodness, and peace is explained in the separate letter from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak from *Erev Rosh Hashanah*. This will be separately explained in a future summary.

59 In Hebrew, the word for limitations used is מצרים (*meitzarim*), which is spelled the same as and alludes to מצרים (*mitzrayim*) (Egypt), which corresponds to physical and spiritual limitations, an appropriate word choice for *Erev Pesach* when this letter was written.

18 The Rebbe was in Riga, Latvia at the time of the Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, and Sukkot letters. He was in Berlin, Germany at the time of the Shavuot letter. See Oberlander and Shmotkin, *Early Years, supra*, pp. 278-279 (Pesach), 283-284 (Shavuot), 293-294 (Rosh Hashanah), and 297-298 (Sukkot). Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wrote each letter from Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. In all events, the Rebbe was separated from his father by approximately 1,000 miles.

19 See the discussion at footnote 14.

the union of *Za* and *Nukva* {eating the *matzah* is how the message is drawn down to this world} and has to be preceded by the *matzah* being set up on the seder plate and together with the four cups it reflects the unity of *Chochma* and *Bina*. Eating the *matzah* is the unity of *Za* and *Nukva*, when the union {of *Za* and *Nukva*} takes place at the time that it is taken from the house of the father {the union of *Chochma* and *Bina*}, as is written in the Zohar on *Parshas Emor*⁵⁶ and *Parshas Vayeira* and as is known.

And thus, my dear son, fulfill literally the commandment of eating the *matzah* and drinking the four cups of wine, with *kashrus* and with *simcha* (joy).

{The conclusion – connecting the spiritual with the personal}

This {i.e., eating the *matzah* and drinking the wine with *kashrus* and joy} should be a sign for you that after you eat the *matzah* and drink the wine the mystical allusions explained above will be established. Moreover, G-d will establish for you a faithful home with the full meaning and understanding of that word, because you will have a wise wife (אשה משכלת/*Isha Maskalet*)⁵⁷ and you will rejoice in your share of life, your physical life together with your spiritual life. You will be satisfied with everything and you will find tranquility, repose, and calm forever. We should see all of this with our eyes, speedily in our days, for your house will be built and established as a faithful home and an everlasting edifice for praise, renown, and beauty. And the eyes of your fathers will sing and be merry from great joy and gladness from your everlasting goodness and happiness. And you should have peace and all good things forever.

corresponding *middos* (*Za* and *Nukva*) can be united and pass on a unified single message through *malchus*.

⁵⁶ Vol. III 100b.

⁵⁷ This alludes to the truly wise woman who comes from *Havayah* as explained above at footnote 40. It also alludes to the fact that אשה משכלת (*Isha Maskalet*) is only found through faith (*emunah*) and not logic (*sechel enushi*).

This is the meaning of eating *matzah* “*b’kashrus*” (in a kosher way). *כשר/Kasher* {*kaf*, *shin*, *reish*} is actually an acronym for מוצא רב *“k’motzei shallal rav”* (“like one who finds great treasure”).⁵² This alludes to the refined sparks that B’nai Yisrael took out of Egypt, as is written: “After that they will go out with great treasure/possessions,”⁵³ alluding to the *matzah* {which we took with us out of Egypt}.

{Having expressed his deep wish for his son to celebrate the *Pesach* holiday in a “kosher” way (and explaining its meaning in depth according to Kabbalah), Rabbi Levi Yitzchak now continues his wish that his son should celebrate with *simcha* – happiness.}

{*Pesach* and Happiness}

And with happiness, this refers to the four cups of wine on the night of *Pesach*. *Kashrus* is from *matzah* and happiness or joy is from the wine in the four cups. Their source {i.e., the source of *matzah* and the four cups of wine} are from the “*Mochin*” (intellectual attributes) of *Chochma* and *Bina*. *Matzah* is the *Mochin* of *Abba*, and the cups are the *Mochin* of *Imma*, as is written in *Pri Eitz Chaim*.⁵⁴ For in order that there should be the union of *Za* and *Nukva* (the masculine and feminine emotional attributes), there first needs to be a unity of *Chochma* and *Bina*, as is known.⁵⁵ And the eating of the *matzah* is

EREV PESACH LETTER, 1928²⁰

ב"ה, ערב פסח אחר חצות היום, תפר"ח.
דנירפאפטראווסק.

אוהבי בני שיחי'.

אם כי מכתבי יגיע אליך לסוף הפסח, עכ"ז הולכין אחר דעת הכותב, והכתיבה עצמה, שהוא ביום הראשון לפסח. ולזאת קבל את ברכתי היוצאת מקירות לבי, כי תחוג את חג המצות הבעל"ט בכשרות, פשוטן של דברים והוא העיקר, שתאכל את המצה בכשרות המצה עצמה, ובכשרות הגוף והנפש, שהמה יהיו כשרים לאכילת מצה.

מיכלא דמהימנותא, והיינו שהמצה תהי' ראוי' להאוכל והאוכל להמצה, שאז הוא זיווג שלם כדבעי למהוי. והיינו כי מצה נמשלה לאשה כמארז"ל כל האוכל מצה בע"פ כאלו בא על ארוסתו כו', הרי שנמשלה לאשה. ומצה היא רק קמח ומים, קמח מים גמט' רחל, שהיא הנוקבה העיקרית כידוע. ועיקר המצה הוא הפרוסה, והחלק הגדול של אפיקומן, שהוא המצה האמצעית דלוי, כי בנין המל' (הן הפרוסה החלק הקטן, רחל, והן החלק הגדול, האפיקומן, צפון, עלמא דאתכסיא, לאה) הוא מהגבורות דוקא, דהיינו לוי. ולכן צריכים לשמור את המצה כמ"ש ושמתם את המצות, כי מאחר שהיא בחי' גבורות צריכים לשמרה. ואכילת המצה הוא בחי' זיווג כמ"ש כי אם הלחם אשר הוא אוכל, והוא מאכל אמונה, היינו לרמז, כי כל ענין הזיווגים הוא רק בדרך אמונה, ולא בשכל אנושי, וכמארז"ל אמונת זה סדר זרעים. פירוש לקיים מצות זרעים שהו"ע זיווג כדרז"ל ע"פ בבקר זרע זרעך כו', הוא בדרך אמונה. כי שכל אנושי אין תופס זה, שלכאורה עפ"י שכל די לו להפקיע א"ע ולפרנס א"ע, ולמה לו ליקח רחים על צוארו, רק הוא מפני אמונת אמן בה' אמת שלמעלה מן השכל לגמרי, וכמ"ש בית והון נחלת אבות, שבית והון יכול להיות מאבות מוחין, משא"כ הזיווג ליקח אשה משכלת מה', שם הוי' דלעילא, שלמעלה ממוחין, ועיין במד"ר ר"פ ויצא. (והמטרונא דלעו"ז רצתה לעשות כאלה, שהכניסה אלף עבדים ואלף שפחות לזווגם ולא עלתה בידה כלל. ומה שהכניסה במספר אלף דוקא, היינו כי יניקת הלעו"ז הוא מהגבורות, ששרשם אלף, כידוע בענין אחוריים דאלקים שעולה אלף אל שדי במלואו, אלף, ושרשם מהמלך בלע דדעת דתהו שנפל לבריאה,

52 Psalms 119:162. The full sentence is “I rejoice over Your word like one who finds great treasure.”

53 *Bereishit* 15:14. Commentary on Psalms 119:162 does not refer to the “great treasure” as *matzah*. Instead commentary on Psalms refers to *bris milah* (ritual circumcision) or even Torah study itself as the great treasure. Here, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak clarifies that for purposes of his points in the letter, the “great treasure” refers to *matzah*. Interestingly, the entire sentence from Psalms 119:162 refers to the happiness experienced by one who has studied Torah; it is as if one found a great treasure. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak uses this quote (referring to happiness) as a transition from a discussion of kashrut to a discussion of happiness.

54 *Pri Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Chag HaMatzos, Perek 2*.

55 *Chochma* and *Bina* are the “higher” source of the emotive attributes *Za* and *Nukva*. As such, they represent the father (*Abba*) and mother (*Imma*) to the children represented by *Za* and *Nukva*. By way of analogy, if the children know that the parents are united, the children will unite behind the parents. If the children know that the parents are divided, they can “take sides” as it were and not be united. *Chochma* (representing the *matzah*) and *Bina* (represented by the four cups) are like the parents and if they are in sync, then the

ששם הוא המספר אלף, והאלף עבדים הוא גבורות דוכרין, והאלף שפחות הוא גבורות נוקבין. (עדמ"ש במ"א בענין נערי ונערות בלעו"ז) והיחוד הוא ע"י גבורות, איש אש י' אשה אש ה'. ועפ"ז א"ש מה שבאש יש אות א', שלכאורה הי' צ"ל רק ש' לפי המבואר בל"ת להאריז"ל פ' וירא בפ' אש יצאה מחשבן, אך האות א' רומז על מספר אלף, ואכמ"ל. וכשתצרף מלת אשה למלת מצה יעלה מספר אמת, לרמז שהשרש הוא מאמת, שאמת הוא למעלה מהשכל, כי אמת הוא בעתיקא כידוע. וזהו וארשתין לי באמונה שקאי על פסח, ועי"ז זוכים להסדר האחרון סדר טהורות, שהוא נרמז במלת ודעת בדרז"ל, היינו שזוכים למ"ת שבשבועות, וידעת את הוי". וזהו"ע אכילת מצה בכשרות, וכשר ר"ת כמוצא שלל רב, לרמז על בירור הניצוצין שהוציאו ישראל ממצרים כמ"ש ואחרי כן יצאו ברכוש גדול, ע"י המצה. -- ובשמחה הו"ע הד' כוסות דליל פסח. כשרות מצד מצה, ושמחה שביין מצד הכוסות. ושרשם הוא המוחין דחו"ב, מצה מוחין דאבא, וכוסות מוחין דאימא, כמ"ש בפע"ח. והיינו כי כדי שיהי' יחוד ז"נ צ"ל מקודם יחוד חו"ב כידוע. ואכילת מצה הוא יחוד ז"נ וצ"ל מקודם הקערה דהמצות והכוסות יחוד חו"ב. ואוכלים המצה שהוא היחוד ז"נ, כי אימתי הוא היחוד בזמנא דנטלא מבי אבא כמ"ש בזהר פ' אמור ופ' וירא וכידוע. ולזאת בני מחמדי קיים בפשוטו וכמשמעו מצות אכילת מצה וכוסות, בכשרות ובשמחה. וזה יהי' לך לאות כי אחר זה תקיים גם מה שרומז הענין הזה וכנ"ל. כי יקים לך ה' בית נאמן במלא מושג המלה, כי יהי' לך אשה משכלת ותשמח בחלקך בחיים, חיים גופנים ורוחניים גם יחד. תהי' מאושר בכל ותהי' בשלוח ומנוחה והשקט עד העולם. ועינינו תחזינה כל זה במהרה בימינו, כי יתבנה ויתכונן ביתך, בית נאמן, בנין עדי עד, לתהלה ולשם ולתפארת. ועיני אבותיך ירוננו וישמחו מרוב חדוה וגיל, מטובך ואשרך תכה"י, והי' שלום וכל טוב סלה.

והשי"ת יזכנו להתראות בחיים ושלום וכל הטוב, כחפץ אביך אוהבך אהבה בלי מצרים, חפץ בטובך והצלחתך תמיד כה"י.

לוי יצחק ש"ס.

Cheshbon,⁴⁷ at first glance, it would seem that we only really need a *shin* for fire,⁴⁸ but according to what was mentioned above, the letter aleph actually hints at the number 1,000 (*elefin* in Hebrew).

{Up to this point, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak has associated *Gevurah* with fire, the number 1,000, *matzah*, and female qualities. From here, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak connects the source of this to a higher source of truth and faith (above intellect) in order to connect the pairing of *matzah* with the one who eats it and then to a wedding and the faith that is needed to make the wedding “work.”}

When you connect the word *ishah* to the word *matzah*, it comes to the same numeric equivalent of the word truth (*emes*).⁴⁹ This tells us that the source {of the connection of *matzah* to a woman} is from truth. Truth is higher than intellect {as truth transcends logic} because truth is in *atik* {the inner aspect of *Keser* which is higher than intellect} as is known.

This is also seen in the phrase “you are betrothed to me in faith (*emunah*)”⁵⁰ which is connected to *Pesach* {as explained above with respect to *matzah* being the bread of faith}. On account of this, we can merit to participate in the final “Seder” which is *Seder Taharos* {the last tractate of the Mishnah} which hints at “*da’as*” {as stated in the Talmud}.⁵¹ In turn we then merit *Matan Torah* which happens at *Shavuot*, “and you will know *Havaya*.”

47 *Bamidbar* 21:28.

48 The Arizal explains in *Likutei Torah* on *Parshas Vayeira* (which is cited by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak in the letter) that the *shin* refers to the 30 *gevuros* each one of which consists of 10 *sefiros* (for a total of 300). Fire is associated with *gevuros* and, therefore, the *shin* (ש) by itself refers to fire. {Also, *Sefer Yetzirah*, chapter 3, verses 4-8, explains that the letter *shin* (ש) is associated with fire. The letter *aleph* is associated with air and the letter *mem* is associated with water.}

49 The numeric equivalent of *ishah* in Hebrew is 306 and the numeric equivalent of *matzah* in Hebrew is 135. The numeric equivalent of *emes* in Hebrew is 441 (sum of 306 plus 135).

50 Hosea 2:22. The full phrase is “You are betrothed to me in faith and you will know *Havayah*.” In the letter, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak splits up the phrase in his explanation in a similar stylistic manner to what he did in using the phrase from *Mishlei* above (see text at footnotes 38 and 39).

51 *Shabbos* 31a.

1,000 by gematria using the principles of filling in the letters (“*milui*”);⁴³ {(c)}the source {of the *Gevuros*} which is from King Bela {the first of the Edomite kings} who corresponds to *da’as* {the attribute of knowledge} from *Tohu* that descended to the world of בריאה (creation),⁴⁴ which corresponds to the number 1,000;⁴⁵ {and (d)} the 1,000 male slaves {that} correspond to the male source of *Gevurah* (strength) and the 1,000 female slaves {that} correspond to the female source of *Gevurah* (similar to what is explained elsewhere about male and female youths in the other side.)

{Connecting union of male and female with 1,000 and, thus, with *Gevuros*}

The union {of male and female} is by the attribute of *Gevurah* (strength). The word אִישׁ (man) is אֵשׁ (fire) with a ך {in the middle} and the word אִשָּׁה (woman) is אֵשׁ (fire) with a ה {at the end}. According to this, it would be understood why the aleph in אֵשׁ is necessary; although according to the explanation in the *Likutei Torah* of the Arizal, on *Parshas Vayeira*⁴⁶ in the meaning of the verse “Fire was brought out of

SYNOPSIS

(Free translation of shorter version of the letter without parenthetical commentary. This is the “simple” version of the letter which is only fully understood when one studies the more in depth ideas that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak conveys in the longer version. Emendations and/or comments by editor are indicated by braces { }.)

{The purpose of reproducing this shorter version of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s letter is for the reader to appreciate the overall structure of the letter. This shorter version is the frame that supports and surrounds the deeper Kabbalistic and Torah insights and, as such, helps the reader understand the high-level point being explored in more depth. It was created by eliminating what appear to be Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s elaborations and reading what is left.}

B”H

Erev Pesach after mid-day, 5688 (1928)

Dnepetrovsk

My beloved son,

Even though this letter will not reach you until the end of *Pesach*, we follow the intentions of the author and when he is writing, which is on the “first day of *Pesach*” {i.e., the day that precedes *Pesach*}. Thus, accept these blessings which emanate from the depths of my heart that you celebrate the upcoming holiday (which comes upon us for good) in a kosher way. In the literal sense, and that is the main thing, when you eat the *matzah*, both the *matzah* itself should be kosher and your body and soul should be “kosher” to eat *matzah*, which is bread of faith (מִיכְלֵא דְמִוֵּה־מִנּוֹתָא /literally, food of faith).

This {i.e., eating the *matzah* and drinking the wine with *kashrus* and joy} should be a sign for you that after you eat the *matzah* and drink the wine the mystical allusions explained above will be established. Moreover, G-d will establish for you a faithful home with the full

If, through using *achorayim* principles, the word Elokim adds up to 1,001, a question arises as to why Rabbi Levi Yitzchak states that it “corresponds with” 1,000. Perhaps the reason is based on what he wrote separately in another context (see *Likutei Levi Yitzchak* vol. 2 p. 358-359). There, he explained that if one counts E-I Sha-ddai by *miluim* it adds up to 999 and if you count Elokim by *achorayim* it adds up to 1,001. When you add the two of them together, it comes to 2,000 for the two concepts, which is twice 1,000. In that way, both of the words “correspond with” 1,000.

43 When the same principles of *milui* described in the previous footnote are applied to the name אֵל שַׁדַּי (E-I Sha-ddai), the numbers add up to 999. There is a principle of counting known as “im hakollel” whereby the name that is the subject of study can count for an additional 1, adding up to 1,000. When Rabbi Levi Yitzchak writes that אֵל שַׁדַּי adds up to 1,000 with the filling in concept of *milui*, this is what he means.

44 *Bela ben Be’or* was the first of the eight kings of Edom referred to in *Bereishit* 36:31-39. Each of the eight kings died before the other took over. As such, they refer to the process of descent of the 8 *sefiro*s of *Tohu* (chaos) into the world of *Beriah*. Bela is the king associated with *da’as*, as *da’as* is the first *sefira* affected by *shvirath ha-keilim* (the “breaking of the vessels”).

45 *Da’as* (which is knowledge), in Kabbalistic thought, is located between the “two shoulders.” The Hebrew name for shoulder is כַּתֵּף (*katef*) whose numerical value is 500. Thus, *da’as* of *Tohu* located between the two shoulders has numerical value of 1,000 (500 times two). See *Likutei Levi Yitzchak* vol. 2 p. 358.

46 On Amon and Moav (*Breishit* 19:37-38).

meaning and understanding of that word, because you will have a wise wife (אשה משכלת/*Isha Maskalet*) and you will rejoice in your share of life, your physical life together with your spiritual life. You will be satisfied with everything and you will find tranquility, repose, and calm forever. We should see all of this with our eyes, speedily in our days, for your house will be built and established as a faithful home and an everlasting edifice for praise, renown, and beauty. And the eyes of your fathers will sing and be merry from great joy and gladness from your everlasting goodness and happiness. And you should have peace and all good things forever.

May we merit by G-d to see each other again in life, peace, and all goodness. This is the wish of your father who loves you with a love that is endless and without limitation. I wish for your goodness and success always and for all your days.

Levi Yitzchak Schneerson

G-d,³⁹ referring to the name of G-d represented by *Havayah* which is above intellect and logic.⁴⁰

{Connection of 1,000 to Gevuros}

To further understand this idea, see the Midrash Rabbah on *Parshas Vayetze*.⁴¹ (The Roman Matron wanted to make matches, so she brought 1,000 male slaves and 1,000 female slaves and married them to each other. It did not work out well at all. But why did she bring 1,000 slaves specifically {why not 100? 500? 10?}? This is because the weaning of the world is from *Gevuros* (strength) and the source of strength is from “*elef*” {the Hebrew word for 1,000}; as is known regarding {(a)} the “*achorayim/backside*” of *Elokim* which corresponds to 1,000;⁴² {(b)} *E-l Sha-ddai* which corresponds to

39 The full phrase from *Mishlei* (Proverbs) 19:14 is “Property and wealth are an inheritance from fathers; but a wise woman is from G-d.” In the letter, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak interprets “fathers” as a reference to intellect and logic (which is a father to emotions), from which property and riches are bequeathed; but the true treasure, a wise woman, is only from G-d.

40 There are a number of different names of G-d reflecting different attributes. In short, *Elokim* is the name of G-d reflecting the finite qualities of G-d as manifested in finite existence. (*Elokim* has the numerologic correlation (gematria) of “*Hateva*” or nature.) The name of G-d referred to as *Havayah* (the *Yud* and *Hei* and *Vov* and *Hei*) refers to the higher infinite level of G-dliness.

41 The Midrash Rabbah (*Parshas Vayetze*) 68:3 quotes the verse from *Mishlei* (Proverbs) 19:14, “Property and wealth are an inheritance from fathers; but a wise woman is from G-d.” and (*ibid* 68:4) then tells the story of a Roman Matron who asked Rabbi Yossi, “In how many days did G-d create the world?” He told her that G-d created the world in six days. “What has G-d been doing since then?” she asked. Rabbi Yossi explained that G-d has been busy making matches. The Roman Matron was astounded. She thought it would be easy and logical to make matches. “Even I can do this,” she argued. She then took 1,000 male slaves and 1,000 female slaves and married them off one to the other. The next day, they came back to Matron and one’s head was cracked, another lost an eye, and another broke his leg. The matches did not work out as each one rejected the other. At that point, the Roman Matron admitted to Rabbi Yossi that G-d and His Torah are true and praiseworthy.

42 In gematria, the letters each correspond to numbers; aleph represents 1, bet represents 2, etc. The principles of filling in the letters with *milui* is a way of counting whereby each letter is in turn spelled out and then each of those letters are added up. For example, applying the basic gematria principle of *milui*, the word “aleph” אֵלֶף is spelled “aleph” א (1), “lamed” ל (30), “pey” פ (80), and the word corresponds to 111 (1+30+80). The principle of counting by “*achorayim*” is a type of counting via cumulative *miluim*. One applies *milui* to each letter and then adds each successive letter (applying *milui*) to the prior letter of the word. For example, when these principles are applied to the word אלהים (*Elokim*), the numbers add up to 1,001:

1,001 = (295) אלהים + (215) אלהים + (195) אלהים + (185) אלהים + (111) אלהים

because all matters of “pairs”³³ are through faith, not through human intellect.³⁴ As our sages say, faith is in *Seder Zeraim*.³⁵ This means fulfilling the mitzvah of seeds {children} which comes through the union {of the masculine and feminine}, as our sages of blessed memory said on the verse “In the morning you plant seeds,”³⁶ which is through faith.³⁷ Human intellect or logic cannot really grasp this. According to human intellect or logic, it seems like it is hard enough for someone to take care of himself and earn a living; why should he take the millstone upon his neck? {Why does he need all of these financial obligations imposed on him through having children and earning what he needs to sustain them?} Instead, the decision to “pair” is through a true faith in the G-d of truth that is completely above the level of intellect. As is written,³⁸ “property and wealth are an inheritance from fathers;” one can acquire the property and wealth by applying his intellect which is considered a father {to emotions}. On the other hand, making a match with a “truly wise woman אשה משכלת (*Isha Maskalet*) is from

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

(Free translation of longer version of the letter without parenthetical commentary. Emendations and/or comments by editor are indicated by braces { }.) Subtitles are included in braces and bold to help the reader through the text.

B”H

Erev Pesach after mid-day, 5688 (1928)

Dnepropetrovsk

My beloved son,

Even though this letter will not reach you until the end of *Pesach*, we follow the intentions of the author and when he is writing, which is on the “first day of *Pesach*” {i.e., the day that precedes *Pesach*}.²¹ Thus, accept these blessings which emanate from the depths of my heart that you celebrate the upcoming holiday (which comes upon us for good) in a kosher way. In the literal sense, and that is the main thing, when you eat the *matzah*, both the *matzah* itself should be kosher and your body and soul should be “kosher” to eat *matzah*, which is bread of faith (מיכלא דמהימנותא/literally, food of faith).

The *matzah* (bread of faith) should be proper for the one who eats the *matzah* and the one who eats it should be “proper” for the *matzah*. {It is not enough for the *matzah* to be guarded and certified as kosher; the person who eats the *matzah* also needs to be properly prepared for its consumption.} Then it will have a proper and complete combination {literally pairing or coupling between the *matzah* and the person}.

21 As indicated in the letter’s heading, it was written on *Erev Pesach*, the day before *Pesach*. Therefore, it seems curious (at a cursory level) that, in the body of the letter, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak would refer to the letter being written on “the first day of *Pesach* (ביום הראשון /*bayom ha’rishon*)” However, the Talmud states in *Pesachim* (5a) that the phrase “ביום הראשון תשביתו שאור מבתיכם” (Exodus 12:15) refers to the day preceding *Pesach*, so that the *bayom ha’rishon* is translated as “on the preceding day you shall clear away all leaven from your houses.” {See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 431:1.}

33 Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is continuing with the theme that “*matzah*” inherently refers to pairing (the one eating and the thing being eaten) and it also refers to a woman. Moreover, because it is the bread of faith, the pairing of a man and woman depends on faith, not intellect.

34 Here Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is alluding to coupling as through marriage, which is based on faith as described below.

35 *Zeraim* is the first chapter of the Mishnah. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is using a play on words here as the word *zeraim* (in Hebrew) means seeds and he is also referring to children as the “seeds” of the father.

36 *Koheles* 11:6. The complete verse is “In the morning, you plant seeds and in the evening do not withhold your hand, for you do not know which will succeed, this one or that one, or whether both of them will be equally good.” As such, it is an expression of faith – just do what you need to do and have faith that the outcome will be good. Rashi on this verse also indicates that it alludes to childbearing.

37 Planting seeds and having things grow is based on faith. So too, having children, as Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is going to explain, is a matter of faith and not a matter of human intellect or logic.

38 *Mishlei* (Proverbs) 19:14.

{*Matzah* is analogized to female qualities represented by *Gevuros*}

Matzah is compared to a woman {particularly to a wife}.²² {Here are three examples of that analogy.} As our rabbis stated {in the Talmud²³}, one who eats *matzah* on *Erev Pesach* is like one who has had inappropriately approached his fiancé {at a time when she is still in her father's house};²⁴ thus, *matzah* is compared to a woman. Also, *matzah* is made up solely of flour (*kemach*) and water (*mayim*). *Kemach* {148} and *mayim* {90} have the gematria of רחל (*Rachel*) {238}. *Rachel* is a primary feminine representative of the *Shechina* (*Nukva*) as is known. {So, again, *matzah* (made from *kemach* (flour) and *mayim* (water)) is analogized to feminine qualities.}

The primary *matzah* is the “*perusah*,” the smaller part of the broken *matzah*, the bigger portion of which is the *afikoman*. This *matzah* is the middle *matzah* associated with the levi,²⁵ for the building of royalty/*malchus* (both the smaller portion of *matzah* which corresponds to *Rachel*, and the larger portion, the *afikoman*, *Tzafun*²⁶ (hidden), which alludes to the concealed world and corresponds to *Leah*) is specifically through *Gevurah* (strength),²⁷

represented by the levi.²⁸ Therefore, one must guard or watch over the *matzah*, as it is written²⁹ “you should guard the *matzos*.” Because it refers to *Gevurah* specifically, it requires guarding.³⁰

{Eating the *matzah* is a “pairing” between the *matzah* and the one who eats}

Eating *matzah* also has the characteristic of “pairing” or coupling {using the word זיווג/*zivug*}, as is written,³¹ “except for the bread that he ate.” *Matzah* is also the bread of faith.³² This hints at a deeper idea

as fire) in order to draw down Divine blessing. The Kohanim are associated with the attribute of *Chesed* (kindness and love).

- 28 From one perspective, as explained in the previous footnote, *Levi* is associated with *Gevurah* on account of the service of the *Levi'im* in the Temple. From another perspective, and as a general matter, *Levi* was the third son of *Jacob*. Just as *Jacob*, as the third patriarch, represents *Tiferes* (the combination of *Chesed* (*Avraham*) and *Gevurah* (*Yitzchak*)), so does *Levi* (as in the tribe of *Levi*) represent *Tiferes*. (Also note that the gematria for *Tiferes* is 1,081 which is the sum of all numbers from 1 to 46 and the gematria of *Levi* is 46.) How can we reconcile the connection of *Levi* and *Tiferes* with *Levi* and *Gevurah* in the letter's context? In the letter, *Rabbi Levi Yitzchak* is referring to “*Levi*” in the context of the three *matzos*. At the seder, the three *matzos* on the seder plate correspond to the *Kohen* (the top *matzah*), *Levi* (the middle broken *matzah*), and *Yisrael* (the bottom *matzah*). The tribe of *Levi* (which is associated with *Tiferes*), is divided between the *Kohanim* and the *Levi'im*. *Tiferes* (*Levi*) then reflects a combination of *Chesed* (the *Kohanim*) which inclines toward the right side of *Tiferes* (*Levi*) and *Gevurah* (the *Levi'im*) which inclines to the left side of *Tiferes* (*Levi*). According to Kabbalistic interpretation, we have seven honors (*aliyot*) for people called up to the Torah to correspond to the seven emotional attributes (*sefiros*). They are *Chesed* (*Kohen*), *Gevurah* (*Levi*), *Tiferes* (*Yisrael*), *Netzach*, *Hod*, *Yesod* and *Malchus*. See *Sha'ar HaKavanot, Derushei Krias Sefer Torah, Drush 2*. This shows that the same “*Levi*” who represents *Tiferes* can also represent *Gevurah*.
- 29 *Shemot* 12:17.
- 30 *Gevurah* can be emotional and severe without some constraint imposed to channel the energy. *Matzah*, representing *Gevurah* in this analysis, must be watched because *Gevurah* must be watched.
- 31 *Bereishit* 39:6. *Potiphar* left all his affairs in *Joseph's* hands “except for the bread that he ate.” *Rashi* explains that the “bread that he ate” is a euphemism for *Potiphar's* wife. This is why *Rabbi Levi Yitzchak* calls out this quote to support an allusion that eating *matzah* (like eating bread) has to pairing or coupling between a man and a woman.
- 32 Literally, *Rabbi Levi Yitzchak* refers to the “food” of faith (מאכל אמונה/“*ma'achal emunah*”), as at the outset of the letter (where he used the Aramaic term דמהימנותא). Today, *matzah* is more typically referred to as the “bread of faith.” Also, in the context of the quote concerning *Potiphar* and *Joseph* (“except for the bread that he ate”), “bread of faith” is a more accurate translation.

- 22 This letter is written in anticipation of the *Rebbe's* upcoming wedding. Therefore, the allusions in the letter are to the connection between *Pesach*, *matzah*, and a wedding between man and woman. *Rabbi Levi Yitzchak* will now present three separate analogies or examples illustrating how *matzah* is associated with a woman. The first is a reference in the Talmud to someone who eats *matzah* on *Erev Pesach*. The second is based on gematria and Kabbalistic connections to *Rachel*. The third is based on the nature of the middle *matzah* which is: (a) associated with the Kabbalistic *sefira* of *Gevurah* (which is associated with females as opposed to *Chesed* which is associated with males); and (b) broken in two pieces corresponding to *Rachel* and *Leah*.
- 23 *Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim* chapter 10.
- 24 The point of this analogy is to explain that there is something holy about eating *matzah* at the right time. Everything has its right time. Just as one must not approach one's fiancé until the proper holy time; one must eat the *matzah* at the right and holy time. It is not appropriate to indulge in order simply to satisfy one's emotional or physical desires.
- 25 The three *matzos* on the seder plate are known as symbolic of the three divisions of the Jewish people: *Kohen*, *Levi*, and *Yisrael*.
- 26 *Tzafun* is the part of the Passover seder where the *afikoman* is distributed and eaten.
- 27 *Gevurah* is the attribute of judgment and restraint. Here the connection to *Levi* is not as much to the “tribe of *Levi*,” which is associated with *Tiferes*, as it is to the *Levi'im* whose Temple service is associated with *Gevurah*. In Kabbalah, the *Levites* who perform the Temple service are associated with *Gevurah* based on their music and singing which helped to elevate the worshippers and the sacrifices to their Divine source (much the same